

# **Crisis Management of European Football Clubs**

– Master Thesis

University	ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences
School	School of Management and Law
Program	Master of Science in International Business
Student	<b>Simon Walser</b>
Student Number	██████████
Supervisor	Christian Olivier Graf
Co-Supervisor	Selina Guhl
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## Management Summary

Given the unique field of sports management concerning the interplay of economic and sporting success, football clubs are generally considered to have a certain level of exposure to financial risks.

In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic started to sweep over on a global scale. As a result, infection numbers rose and death tolls did too. Consequently, governments across the world were forced to take measures to limit further spread. In doing so, European football was almost completely brought to a halt for several weeks. Thus, revenue streams of football clubs were affected and the clubs had to ensure economic viability.

The main objective of the thesis was to explore the crisis management measures employed by European football clubs in the context of the COVID-19. In doing so, best practices were established that could be used for football clubs' crisis management efforts in the future.

The research was conducted employing primary and secondary data collection processes. The former was carried out by means of ten interviews with club representatives of football clubs from various countries, three expert interviews in the fields of sports management, as well as crisis management and communication, and through a survey. The survey was primarily utilized to underline the findings of secondary data in describing the general situation, while the interviews were used to examine the measures employed by football clubs across Europe to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic. Thereby, the Business Model Canvas was used to display the implications of the crisis, and the three phases of crisis management were employed to outline the measures taken in the respective stage. In doing so, various best practices were mentioned that can be useful when being faced with a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results showed that football clubs should identify, assess and possibly mitigate the risk. Furthermore, scenario planning shall be performed to recognize possible scenarios while constantly extending and adapting them throughout the crisis phase. With business continuity plans, football clubs can ensure the continuous operation of a football club despite certain threats. In the pre-crisis phase, football clubs should establish or revitalize a crisis management team in charge of coordinating and communicating through the crisis. The importance of internal communication emerged from the research

as well. Thus, direct and regular contact can help prevent uncertainty amongst employees. Given a health-related crisis, like the COVID-19 pandemic, football clubs need to implement and communicate the guidelines issued by the public health authorities.

In the crisis phase, the continuation of particular previously introduced is advised, such as all health-related measures, the steering by the crisis response team, and the continuous scenario planning. If available, football clubs should request financial support from the government. Further, conducting an investment stop is advised. When performing the cost analysis, football clubs should be aware of possible new costs due to the given crisis while being on the lookout to identify cost drivers that can be neutralized. When it is concluded that personnel-related expenses need to be lowered, the results of this paper indicated that reviewing the bonus system and introducing temporary pay cuts are preferred to layoffs, which would likely lead to uncertainty and the loss of know-how for the recovery phase. Especially if personnel costs are targeted, active internal communication should explain the situation and update with new information. Given the importance of sponsorship revenue for football clubs, it was found that a strategy is needed for sponsors. Thereby, communication, compensation, and commitment shall be at the center of attention. Since the uniqueness of the connection between fans and football clubs, a similar strategy is strongly recommended. Thus, football clubs should communicate, find ways to compensate, and help the community. Lastly, every crisis also entails its opportunities. For this reason, football clubs should start looking for opportunities in the crisis phase – either within the field of football or outside it.

In a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which lasts for an extended period of time, football clubs should review and implement the relevant lessons learned after each pandemic wave. Also, it is advised to evaluate the crisis response and change projects. Active internal communication is also of vital importance in the last of the three phases.

Through examining the measures employed by football clubs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic's implications, and suggested by experts, the overview of best practices for each of the three phases was summarized. Due to the wide geographical range of the football clubs, various insights could be gained. Yet, comparability was only limited because of different contexts. For this reason, it was suggested that future research should increase comparability through allocating football clubs in groups according to specific factors, such as country. Further limitations and future research suggestions were described.

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**List of Abbreviations**

BMC	Business Model Canvas
CCC (for fans)	Communication, Compensation, Community
CCC (for sponsors)	Communication, Compensation, Commitment
CHF	Confoederatio Helvetica Franc (Swiss Franc)
CM	Crisis Management
CMMEFC	Crisis Management Model for European Football Clubs
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
EUR	Euro
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
FC	Football Club
GBP	British Pound Sterling
IHIP	Intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, perishability
MCM	Media, Commercial, Matchday
SARS-CoV-2	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2
SATEMMI	Spectateurs, Actionnaires, Télévision, Enterprise, Marchés Merchandising, International
SDL	Service-Dominant Logic
SFV	Sport Value Framework
UEFA	Union of European Football Associations
WHO	World Health Organization



**Definition**

European Football Clubs include the men's professional football clubs from Albania (2019-20 Kategoria Superiore), Armenia (2019-20 Armenian Premier League), Austria (2019–20 Austrian Football Bundesliga), Azerbaijan (2019-20 Azerbaijan Premier League), Belarus (2020 Belarusian Premier League), Belgium (2019–20 Belgian First Division A), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2019–20 Premier League of Bosnia and Herzegovina), Bulgaria (2019-20 First Professional Football League), Croatia (2019–20 Croatian First Football League), Czech Republic (2019-20 Czech First League), Denmark (2019–20 Danish Superliga), England (2019-20 Premier League, 2019–20 EFL Championship, 2019–20 EFL League One, 2019-20 EFL League Two), Estonia (2020 Meistriliiga), Finland (2020 Veikkausliiga), France (2019-20 Ligue 1 2019–20 Ligue 2), Georgia (2020 Erovnuli Liga), Germany (2019-20 Bundesliga, 2019–20 2. Bundesliga, 2019-20 3. Liga), Greece (2019–20 Super League Greece), Hungary (2019-20 2019–20 Nemzeti Bajnokság I), Israel (2019-20 Israeli Premier League), Italy (2019-20 Serie A, 2019-20 Serie B), Kosovo (2019-20 Football Superleague of Kosovo), Latvia (2020 Latvian Higher League), Lithuania (2020 A Lyga), Montenegro (2019-20 Montenegrin First League), Netherlands (2019–20 Eredivisie), Norway (2020 Eliteserien), Poland (2019-20 Ekstraklasa), Portugal (2019–20 Primeira Liga), Republic of Ireland (2020 League of Ireland Premier Division), Romania (2019-20 Liga I), Russia (2019–20 Russian Premier League), Scotland (2019-20 Scottish Premiership), Slovakia (2019–20 Slovak First Football League), Slovenia (2019-20 Slovenian PrvaLiga), Spain (2019-20 La Liga, 2019–20 Segunda División), Sweden (2020 Allsvenskan), Switzerland (2019-20 Swiss Super League, 2019–20 Swiss Challenge League) and Turkey (2019–20 Süper Lig), Ukraine (2019-20 Ukrainian Premier League).

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## 1 Introduction

In late December 2019, a new coronavirus was discovered (World Health Organization, 2020). The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), which is an infectious respiratory disease, is caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Dos Santos, 2020; Liu, Kuo, & Shih, 2020). There is a wide range of the progress of the disease (FOPH, 2021). For instance, the Federal Office of Public Health FOPH of Switzerland (2021) identifies four categories: No symptoms, mild cases, severe cases, critical cases. Most of infected people develop mild or moderate symptoms, while a particular group of people is at greater risk (CDC, 2021), namely elderly patients or those with pre-existing medical conditions (World Health Organization, 2021). On 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) (World Health Organization, 2020). Consequently, various measures were implemented as responses by governments to the pandemic on a global scale (Hale, et al., 2021). Amongst others, examples include stay-at-home orders, the cancellation of events, mask mandates, as well as vaccinations (Hale, et al., 2021).

In the face of the current COVID-19 pandemic, the phrase about ‘football being more important than life and death’ by former manager Liverpool Football Club Bill Shankly is often misquoted (Jones, 2020). Underlining his very personal devotion to football in an interview, he in fact stated the following (Moore, 2021): “Somebody said that football’s a matter of life and death to you, I said ‘listen, it’s more important than that’.” The generalizability of this statement in its true sense of the meaning can be doubted. However, the love for the game of football is undoubtedly evident. The fanbase of the sport (which is referred to as soccer in the United States of America) is expected to amount to approximately 5 billion people around the world (FIFA, 2021). Data regarding the viewership of the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia indicates that more than 3.5 billion people watched the World Cup, and just above 1.1 billion people viewed the live broadcast of the tournament’s final (FIFA, 2018).

Even though the largest fan bases of football are outside of Europe, all of the 30 clubs with the highest levels of turnover are located on the European continent (FIFA, 2021). Specifically, the 2019 revenue growth of Europe’s top-division football clubs in absolute figures amounted to EUR 1.885 billion (UEFA, 2021). The revenue growth between 1999 and 2019 was at 8.2 percentage per annum on average (UEFA, 2021).

Yet, the football industry of Europe has not been an exception when enumerating the sectors affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Drewes, Daumann, & Follert, 2021; Reade & Singleton, 2020). In a UEFA report, the respective organization's President, Aleksander Čeferin, stated that "(...) not even the most popular sport in the world is immune" (UEFA, 2021). From amateur to professional – no level of football has been left untouched by the pandemic (UEFA, 2021). As previously mentioned, the pandemic forced governments to take action. Concerning European football, the respective top-division leagues were affected accordingly (UEFA, 2021). The football-related responses to the initial outbreak in early 2020 varied amongst countries (UEFA, 2021). Some decided to abandon the season, while Belarus was the only country to continue without changes or interruptions (UEFA, 2021). Most of them, however, postponed the season with or without format changes (UEFA, 2021). Once the period of disruption was over, most of the remaining matches of the 2019-20 season were played behind closed doors (Drewes et al., 2021). These so-called ghost games (i.e., the absence of fans and matchday revenue) have contributed to decreasing revenue figures (Hammerschmidt, Durst, Kraus, & Puumalainen, 2021). After the above-stated years of continuous turnover growth, it is expected that within two seasons (2019-20, 2020-21), Europe's football clubs have lost between EUR 7.2 and 8.1 billion worth of revenue (UEFA, 2021). Approximately half of it can be attributed to the loss of gate receipts on matchdays, another 33% to sponsorships revenue and the remaining share to the loss of broadcasting income (UEFA, 2021). Due to these negative implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, football clubs were forced to implement crisis management strategies to ensure the club's viability. Additionally, given the fans importance in football and their contribution (Follert, Daumann, & Passon, 2020), the clubs had also responsibility to keep in touch with them.

## 1.1 Research Gaps

Due to the nature of football clubs of being more focused on maximizing winning than on sole profit maximization (Garcia-del-Barrio & Szymanski, 2006), solid financial fundamentals are often not prevalent (Hammerschmidt et al., 2021). As a consequence, the economic situation of football clubs leads to an increased exposure to unexpected events that in turn can result in liquidity shortage (Hammerschmidt et al., 2021; Drewes et al., 2021). Bond et al. (2020) indicate the importance of fans (rather than referring to customers), whose loyalty ensures financial flows to the respective clubs. The paper by

Hammerschmidt et al. (2021) states that the research participants assume of a change in the business of football as a consequence of the pandemic. Additionally, it is suggested to evaluate a broad range of effects (financial, non-financial aspects) on football clubs by the COVID-19 crisis (Hammerschmidt et al., 2021). Given the nine building blocks of the Business Model Canvas (BMC), its holistic view, and the wide range of possible applications (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010), Mogalle & Kluth (2020), for example, adapted the BMC by creating the Corona Canvas to assess the new state of business. Yet, only a few previous studies have applied the BMC to analyze football clubs (Firildak & Akin, 2020; Prats, 2017). For instance, Kalathil Puthiyapurayil (2020) compared football clubs of the first and second Lithuanian division concerning their business models, while Bolas (2012) examined the business models used in Portuguese football. However, no previous research papers have been found which apply the respective framework with its nine blocks to explore the implications for football clubs facing a global pandemic.

In the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic, the findings of football clubs disregarding proactive planning for crisis preparedness to a large extent by Manoli (2016), has become more critical. Additionally, besides the call for increased levels of sports entrepreneurship by Hammerschmidt et al. (2021) and Ratten (2020), meaning to be opportunity-driven to ensure an adequate degree of competitiveness, literature on crisis management by professional football clubs is scarce. Also, the authors suggest diving into the strategic ways football clubs responded to the pandemics and crisis management (Hammerschmidt et al., 2021).

## **1.2 Research Objectives and Relevance**

Given the two above-stated research gaps, this research paper aims to fill both by focusing on the business of club football in Europe. The analysis of the impacts can be regarded as the supportive role to explore the actual crisis management, which is at the center of this thesis' attention. The research paper serves the management of football clubs by providing the best crisis management practices amongst European football clubs. In addition to that, executives of football clubs can investigate how other clubs managed through the crisis, by looking at measures during the pre-crisis phase, the actual crisis period and the post-crisis stage.

### 1.3 Research Question

The main focus of this paper is to close the previously-stated research gap by examining European football clubs' crisis management strategies related to the COVID-19 pandemic. For this purpose, the main research question of this thesis is the following:

Research Question	What crisis management measures have been employed by European football clubs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
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*Table 1: Research Question (Own Illustration)*

### 1.4 Structure of the Paper

The thesis is structured the following way: Firstly, explanations on the background literature are given to provide relevant insights into the topics. After that, the design of the research, the methodology, and the theoretical concept are elaborated upon. Thirdly, the results of the data collection process are outlined. The subsequent section contains the chapter of discussion, where the results are discussed and also interpreted. Finally, the fundamental conclusion is drawn in the last part of this thesis by answering the thesis' research questions. In addition, limitations of the study are described and areas of future research are identified.

## 2 Background

This chapter is concerned with providing the reader with the essential knowledge on various topics. The first sub-chapter describes existing literature on business models, by looking at different definitions, concepts and components. Secondly, an overview of crisis management research is presented. Thereafter, the world of sports and football business are introduced. The final part briefly assesses the literature and provides a summary of the before-listed sub-chapters.

### 2.1 Business Model

Pursuing *business* is about exchanging a commercial activity for objects of value (Jensen, 2013). On the other side, a *model* reflects reality, and can do so in various degrees of accuracy (Jensen, 2013). According to Stähler (2002), a model simplifies the complexity of the before-mentioned reality. Despite some existing academic work, research on business models, as the construct combined of the two terms as mentioned earlier, started to increase in the late 1990s (Alibage & Ahn, 2018; Osterwalder, 2004; Zott, Amit, & Massa, 2011), and has continued to do so (Massa, Tucci, & Afuah, 2017). The initial interest of research can be linked to the emergence of information technology and the internet (Magretta, 2002; Stähler, 2002). Magretta (2002) even assesses the term business model as a vogue expression emerged from the dot-com boom.

Table 2 provides a selective overview of various authors and their definitions of the term *business model* in a chronological order.

Author(s), Year	Definition of <i>Business Model</i>
(Timmers, 1998)	“An architecture for the product, service and information flows, including a description of the various business actors and their roles; and a description of the potential benefits for the various business actors; and a description of the sources of revenues.”
(Linder & Cantrell, 2000)	“A business model, strictly speaking, is the organization's core logic for creating value.”
(Afuah & Tucci, 2001)	“...the method by which a firm builds and uses its resources to offer its customers better value than its competitors and to make money doing so.”

(Amit & Zott, 2001)	“A business model depicts the design of transaction content, structure, and governance so as to create value through the exploitation of business opportunities.”
(Petrovic, Kittl, & Teksten, 2001)	“A business model is not a description of a complex social system itself with all its actors, relations and processes. Rather, it describes the logic of a ‘business system’ for creating value that lies behind the actual processes.”
(Magretta, 2002)	“Business models, though, are anything but arcane. They are, at heart, stories – stories that explain how enterprises work.”
(Rappa, 2004)	“A business model is a method of doing business.”
(Shafer, Smith, & Linder, 2005)	“...we define a business model as a representation of a firm’s underlying core logic and strategic choices for creating and capturing value within a value network.”
(Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010)	“A business model describes the rationale of how an organization creates, delivers, and captures value.”
(Baden-Fuller & Haefliger, 2013)	“We define the business model as a system that solves the problem of identifying who is (or are) the customer(s), engaging with their needs, delivering satisfaction, and monetizing the value.”
(Upward & Jones, 2015)	“We define a business model as a description of how a business defines and achieves success over time.”

Table 2: Selection of Business Model Definitions (Own Illustration, Content From Various Authors)

As the table above shows, there is a certain difference in specificity of the respective definitions. There is no generally approved definition of the term in literature (Wirtz, Pistoia, Ullrich, & Göttel, 2016). Likewise, Alibage & Ahn (2018) indicate that the definitions vary depending on the context, ranging from a simple statement to a storyline. However, its core is often concerned with creating, delivering, and capturing value (Jensen, 2013). This assertion is reflected in the authors’ definitions, as a slight majority of them defines business model around the concept of value, or at least mention it to some extent (Afuah & Tucci, 2001; Amit & Zott, 2001; Baden-Fuller & Haefliger, 2013; Linder & Cantrell, 2000; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010; Petrovic et al., 2001; Shafer et al., 2005).



For the scope of this thesis, the definition proposed by Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010) is adopted (see the third last definition in Table 2). The reason for this is that the given definition is simply formulated and, at the same time, covers the essential activities for organizations along a value chain (Jensen, 2013).

### 2.1.1 Purpose of Business Models

According to Eriksson & Penker (2000), a business model fulfills various purposes. For instance, it fosters comprehension of a firm's core operation (Eriksson & Penker, 2000). Additionally, it serves managers in developing new business ideas (Eriksson & Penker, 2000). Both opinions are also shared by Stähler (2002) and Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010), as they believe that business models give insights how a business functions, and they can be helpful when designing the corporate future. However, Wirtz et al. (2016) suggest that a business model should not be viewed as a static reality. Instead, it should be dynamic, since it is prone to change triggered by internal and external forces (Wirtz et al., 2016). In a similar vein, by especially considering the external environment of constant developments concerning competitors, market and technological progress, Linder & Cantrell (2000) urge firms to continuous business model evaluation and potential adaptation to ensure a firm's economic viability. Hence, the authors also used the term *change models* (Linder & Cantrell, 2000). Speaking of the need for continuous alteration, Zott et al. (2011) identify two ways the drive for innovation can be characterized in business models. Firstly, organizations innovate within the conditions of a given business model (Zott et al., 2011). Secondly, an organization's business model is subject to innovation itself (Zott et al., 2011).

To assess the feasibility of a business model, Magretta (2002) makes use of two tests. The first one, *narrative test*, defines the customer, the value (proposition), and how revenue is generated (Magretta, 2002). The second one is called *numbers test*, as it requires the profit and loss statement to add up (Magretta, 2002). Implementing a given business model only makes sense if the two tests are passed (Magretta, 2002; Stähler, 2002).

### 2.1.2 Components and Concepts

There is no consensus in literature regarding the components of a business model (Osterwalder, 2004; Wirtz et al., 2016). A few perspectives are as a result of this

mentioned (see below). Concerning the discrepancy, Osterwalder (2004) recognizes that there are also differences in the number and type of components in literature (see Appendix A). Appendix B visualizes a similar overview by Wirtz et al. (2016) with more recent business model concepts.

According to Stähler (2002), a business model incorporates four components: (1) *value proposition*, (2) *product or service*, (3) *value architecture*, (4) *revenue model*. The first element considers clients and partners as stakeholders (Stähler, 2002). To be able to provide the client with benefits, a firm also needs to convince the partner with benefits to participate in the value creation process (Stähler, 2002). The second component satisfies the value proposition (Stähler, 2002). Thirdly, the value architecture is concerned with the efficiency level in bringing the value to the client (Stähler, 2002). Finally, Stähler's (2002) last component depicts how revenue is generated.

Likewise, Baden-Fuller & Haefliger (2013) identify the following four key components as part of a business model: (1) *customers*, (2) *customer engagement*, (3) *value delivery and linkages*, (4) *monetization*. The first component concerns who is using and who is paying, and whether there is an evident discrepancy (Baden-Fuller & Haefliger, 2013). Secondly, Baden-Fuller & Haefliger (2013) differ between customization for a specific customer group or standardization. The third component deals with the way the value chain is linked (e.g., supplier network) (Baden-Fuller & Haefliger, 2013). Simply put, Baden-Fuller & Haefliger (2013) regard monetization (fourth component) to be about how money is earned.

Yet again, *the magic triangle* by Gassmann, Frankenberger & Csik (2013) is divided into four components, with some resembling the ones presented in the previous paragraphs. Their concept can be seen in Figure 1. In order to ensure viability, it is of crucial importance to define the customer segment (*Who?*) (Gassmann et al., 2013). Next, *What?* describes the value proposition to the first dimension (Gassmann et al., 2013). The third dimension (*How?*) deals with the inputs for the value creation (Gassmann et al., 2013). The factor *Value?* specifies the revenue streams (Gassmann et al., 2013).

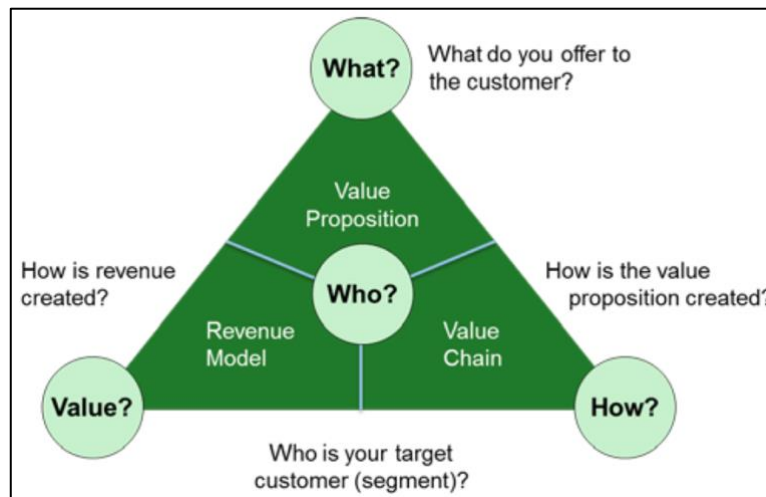


Figure 1: The Magic Triangle (Gassmann et al., 2013)

A further approach to conceptualize a business model stems from Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010). However, Van den Berg & Pietersma (2015) raised criticism as they appraise the model for being rather assumptive than factual. Yet, the so-called Business Model Canvas (BMC, see Figure 9 on page 27) is implemented by multiple corporations across the globe (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010), making it a pretty central concept. Farther, the BMC and its *nine building blocks* (see below) is easy-to-use and can be used to boost creativity (Van den Berg & Pietersma, 2015).

1. *Customer Segments*: The first component specifies the customer segments (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Having a customer base is crucial for a firm's viability, which is why it is at the core of any business model (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). There is also the possibility of a model with several segments based on common characteristics, such as a similar behavioral pattern (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010) list five possible examples of such customer segments ((1) *mass market*, (2) *niche market*, (3) *segmented*, (4) *diversified*, (5) *multi-sided platforms or markets*). Amongst others, this building block can be linked to the dimensions of *Who?* by Gassmann et al. (2013) or *customer engagement* by Baden-Fuller & Haefliger (2013).
2. *Value Propositions*: This factor can be viewed as why the customer base chooses a given organization (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). The organization fulfills the segment's desires by offering value (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). According to Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010), a value proposition often incorporates multiple quantitative and qualitative factors. As for the former, a competitive price is an

example, while experience can be regarded as a possible qualitative value for a given customer segment (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). To connect it to one of the previously introduced concepts, the exact wording of value proposition is suggested by Gassmann et al. (2013) when they pose the question “*What?*”.

3. *Channels*: This building block includes the interactions between the customer segment and the organization (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Examples include the communicative part, as well as value delivery (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010) identify five channel phases (see Figure 2). Stähler (2002) would allocate this component to his *value architecture*, Baden-Fuller & Haefliger (2013), on the other hand, would assign the channels to their *value delivery and linkages*.

Channel Types		Channel Phases				
Own	Direct					
	Sales force					
	Web sales					
Partner	Indirect					
	Own stores					
	Partner stores					
	Wholesaler					
		<b>1. Awareness</b> How do we raise awareness about our company's products and services?	<b>2. Evaluation</b> How do we help customers evaluate our organization's Value Proposition?	<b>3. Purchase</b> How do we allow customers to purchase specific products and services?	<b>4. Delivery</b> How do we deliver a Value Proposition to customers?	<b>5. After sales</b> How do we provide post-purchase customer support?

Figure 2: Channel Phases (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010)

4. *Customer Relationships*: The fourth building block is concerned about how the relationship between the customer segment and the organization is managed (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Examples for this dimension are, amongst others, the following: *Self-service*, *personal assistance* and *co-creation* (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010).
5. *Revenue Streams*: This dimension depicts how an organization generates revenue (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010) state two different revenue streams: Firstly, one stream is based on a one-time transaction (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). The second way how income can be generated is regularly (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). For reasons of financial sustainability, revenue should be higher than the ninth building block of *Cost Structure* (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010), which is also the core of the Magretta's (2002) *numbers test*, which was previously elaborated on. For the apparent reason of profitability, besides the value proposition and the consideration of the customers,

this dimension is a widely recognized one (Baden-Fuller & Haefliger, 2013; Gassmann et al., 2013; Stähler, 2002).

6. *Key Resources*: This building block gives insights into the resources or assets necessary to conduct business (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010) have listed the following four *Key Resources* in their work: (1)

<b>Key Resources</b>	<i>Physical assets</i>	<i>Intellectual assets</i>	<i>Human assets</i>	<i>Financial assets</i>
<b>Examples</b>	Infrastructure, machines, etc.	Intellectual property, brand, software, etc.	Workforce	Financial resources

Table 3: Four Key Resources (Own Illustration, Content From Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010))

7. *Key Activities*: The *Key Activities* are required for the business to be operable (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010) divide them into three categories: (1) *Production*, (2) *Problem solving*, (3) *Platform/network*. The first category is essential for manufacturers (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Typically, organizations which offer a service belong to the second category (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). The third and last category are platforms or networks where an interaction takes place (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010).
8. *Key Partnerships*: The eighth building block deals with a network of supplying and partner firms (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010) segment partnerships into the following four types:
- *Strategic alliances between non-competitors*
  - *Coopetition: strategic partnerships between competitors*
  - *Joint ventures to develop new businesses*
  - *Buyer-supplier relationships to assure reliable supplies*

Furthermore, the authors also identify three main motives why one of the four partnership types are established (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). The first is that organizations aim to increase efficiency through economies of scale (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). The second reason is the will to lower the level of uncertainty or risk (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). The last motive describes an organization's intent to purchase certain assets or operations (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010).

9. *Cost Structure*: The last building block incorporates all costs arising within an organization's business model (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Osterwalder &

Pigneur (2010) differentiate between *cost-driven* and *value-driven* organizations. The former ones are constantly concerned with reducing cost levels, while the latter ones put the second building block of value proposition into the center of focus (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Furthermore Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010) recognize the following four elements of a cost structure: (1) *Fixed costs*, (2) *Variable costs*, (3) *Economies of scale*, (4) *Economies of scope*.

Besides the previously introduced concepts or research papers indicating what components a business model consists of, the following Table 4 provides a brief overview of further authors and their views on the concept of business model and the respective components.

Author(s)	(Linder & Cantrell, 2000)	(Petrovic et al., 2001)	(Shafer et al., 2005)	(Wirtz et al., 2016)
<b>Components</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pricing model</li> <li>- Revenue model</li> <li>- Channel model</li> <li>- Commerce process model</li> <li>- Internet-enabled commerce relationship</li> <li>- Organizational form</li> <li>- Value proposition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Value Model</li> <li>- Resource Model</li> <li>- Production Model</li> <li>- Customer Relations Model</li> <li>- Revenue Model</li> <li>- Capital Model</li> <li>- Market Model</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strategic Choices</li> <li>- Creating Value</li> <li>- Value Network</li> <li>- Capture Value</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strategic components                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Strategy model</li> <li>o Resources model</li> <li>o Network model</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Customer &amp; market components                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Customer model</li> <li>o Market offer model</li> <li>o Revenue model</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Value creation components                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Manufacturing model</li> <li>o Procurement model</li> <li>o Financial model</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Table 4: Selection of Business Model Components by Various Authors (Own Illustration)

It is essential to mention that Table 4 is not to be regarded as exhaustive or finite.

## 2.2 Crisis Management

The word crisis is of Greek origin, as *krisis* means “decision” (Lexico, n.d.). Generally speaking, a *crisis* is a condition or an unexpected situation and was not be foreseen (Connaughton, 2011; Hermann, 1963; Laws & Prideaux, 2006). Yet, Santana (1998) and Smart & Vertinsky (1977) agree on the inevitability of crisis occurrence. Besides, the specific outcome of such an event is not known (Al-Dabbagh, 2020), however, crises are generally characterized as being negative (Connaughton, 2011). Unlike Connaughton (2011), Laws & Prideaux (2006) recognize the possibility of disruptions on more than just the level of a given organization. If the crisis is on an organizational level it is sometimes referred to as a *corporate crisis* (Mitroff, Shrivastava, & Udvardia, 1987), while others make us of the term *organizational crisis* (Bundy,

(Pfarrer, Short, & Coombs, 2017). Furthermore, despite the low probability of a crisis, the high impact can threaten an organization's survival (Pearson & Clair, Reframing Crisis Management, 1998). For specification, Mitroff et al. (1987) identify two different axes to describe the type of a crisis (see Figure 3). On one side, the cause of a crisis can either be of technical/economic nature, or it can be attributed to people/social/organization (Mitroff et al., 1987). On the other side, the causes might arise inside or outside the corporation (Mitroff et al., 1987).

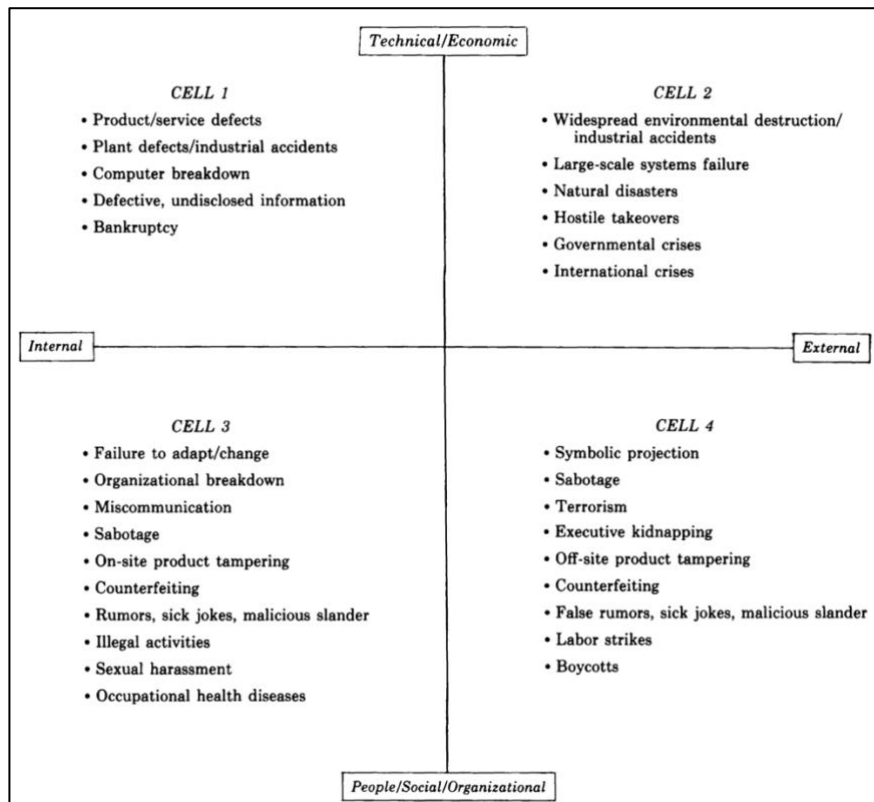


Figure 3: Types of Corporate Crises (Mitroff et al., 1987)

For the purpose of categorization, the current COVID-19 pandemic would be attributed to *CELL 2* (top right corner) in the above-stated figure by Mitroff et al. (1987).

As Coombs & Laufer (2017) and Firouzi Jahantigh, Khanmohammadi & Sarafrazi (2018) indicate, there is a broad consensus in the literature that there are the following three stages or phases to a crisis:

1. Pre-crisis phase
2. Crisis phase
3. Post-crisis phase

The pre-crisis phase is the time period before a triggering event (Crandall, Parnell, & Spillan, 2013). The second phase is sometimes also referred to as the acute crisis stage

(Crandall et al., 2013). After the actual crisis, in the post-crisis phase, companies usually recover and learn from the crisis (Crandall et al., 2013).

### 2.2.1 Overview of Crisis Management

Laws & Prideaux (2006) and Sahin, Ulubeyli & Kazaza (2015) define *crisis management* as the approaches of planning and implementing activities, which contribute to the crisis recovery. Additionally, Vondruška (2020) defines crisis management as the activity of detecting and assessing early warning signals, followed by employing strategies to master and mitigate the crisis and its impacts. Generally speaking, the concept of crisis management is linked to the three phases introduced above (Bundy et al., 2017; Coombs & Laufer, 2017; Firouzi Jahantigh et al., 2018). Appendix C shows an overview of different approaches, of whom all can be connected to phases 1-3 (Crandall et al., 2013). One example is visible in Figure 4. *The Five Phases of Crisis Management* by Pearson & Mitroff (1993) can be attributed to the three phases as follows: pre-crisis phase of *Signal Detection & Preparation/Prevention*, crisis phase of *Containment/Damage Limitation* and post-crisis phase of *Recovery & Learning* (Crandall et al., 2013).

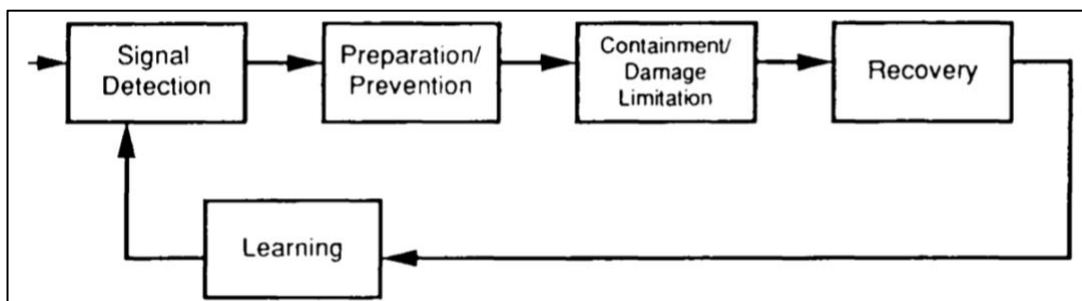


Figure 4: *The Five Phases of Crisis Management* (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993)

A further example of a framework integrates four activities ((1) *landscape survey*, (2) *strategic planning*, (3) *crisis management*, (4) *organizational learning*) along the internal and external perspective (Crandall et al., 2013). The first stage of landscape survey analyzes the corporate culture and preparedness (internal consideration), and evaluates the vulnerability of a given industry (external consideration) (Crandall et al., 2013). Forming a team for managing crises can be attributed to the second activity of strategic planning (Crandall et al., 2013). The internal consideration of crisis management (stage three) is about resuming business operations while handling the most critical stakeholders. At the same time, the external perspective entails managing reactions by further stakeholders, including media (Crandall et al., 2013). Lastly, organizational



learning is about the evaluating the crisis management efforts, while being ready for a change in the external landscape through new legislation (Crandall et al., 2013).

### 2.2.2 Three Phases of Crisis Management

Regarding the pre-crisis phase, Coombs & Laufer (2017) link it to risk evaluation followed by the consequencing planning process. Before the risk assessment is possible utilizing a risk matrix, identifying threats and risks is necessary (Elliott, 2013). A different approach is taken by Bundy et al. (2017) as they emphasize the internal preparedness and highlight the importance of positive relationships with stakeholders. Other authors suggest that the first phase is about detecting signals and preventive or preparatory activities, such as forming a team responsible for managing crises or training (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993; Santana, 1998; Sahin et al., 2015). All of the measures employed before the actual crisis event can be determined as being of proactive nature (Mitroff et al., 1987; Sahin et al., 2015). Further measures include the use of scenario planning which is a method that helps to predict certain outcomes depending on the input data (Firouzi Jahantigh et al., 2018; Laws & Prideaux, 2006; Vondruška, 2020).

The second phase of the crisis process is the actual occurrence. Since not all crises can be prevented in the first step, crisis management of step two is concerned with limiting and minimizing the damage caused by the crisis (Firouzi Jahantigh et al., 2018). Mitroff et al. (1987) identify the responsive strategies as being of reactive nature. Pearson & Mitroff (1993) suggest that there is not enough time to create suitable mechanisms that help contain the damage at a moment's notice, again emphasizing the preparatory actions of the first phase.

The post-crisis phase (third and last phase) is about recovery, crisis assessment and learning (Firouzi Jahantigh et al., 2018). The part of recovery is about getting the business back to normal (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). Le & Phi (2020) associate the recovery phase as proactive crisis management, while Sahin et al. (2015) see it as reactive activities. Then, evaluating how the crisis was managed contributes to the learning process (Crandall et al., 2013). For crisis management to be assessed as a success, the organization should be able to continue performing its core operations (Pearson & Clair, Reframing Crisis Management, 1998). Also, Pearson & Clair (1998) suggest positively assessing crisis management if damage was minimized and lessons are learned for crises

to come. As visualized in Figure 4, the learning process restarts the cycle of crisis management (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993).

A further approach, next to the practices which are aligned with the three main phases, suggests to subdivide crisis management activities into five categories, the so-called *Five Families of Crisis Management of (1) strategic, (2) technical and structural, (3) evaluation and diagnosis, (4) communicational and (5) psychological and cultural efforts* (Pauchant et al, 1991). The list, which is not definitive according to the authors, can be found in Appendix D. Besides integrating crisis management into strategic planning, a further example for the first category is training sessions that focus on crisis management (Pauchant et al, 1991). As elaborated above the suggestion of creating a team responsible for crisis management by multiple authors, Pauchant et al. (1991) categorize it into the second group of technical and structural efforts. Adapting insurance coverage is an example of the third family (Pauchant et al, 1991). The fourth category is about how communication is managed, with media training as an example (Pauchant et al, 1991). Finally, the last efforts include, amongst others, top level recognition of crisis management by conviction (Pauchant et al, 1991).

### 2.2.3 Crisis Communication

According to Crandall et al. (2013) and Vondruška (2020), the management of communicating internally and externally is of great relevance. It is about stakeholder engagement and controlling how one is perceived (Björck, 2018). Thereby, many internal and external stakeholders are considered, such as employees, customers, the state, and the media (Cornish, 2007).

Björck & Barthelmess (2020) suggest that internal communication can benefit crisis management if it is built on a foundation of trust and understanding. Concerning internal communication, the same authors identify various levels closely linked to the culture within an organization (Björck & Barthelmess, 2020). For example, the means used to communicate and the respective direction of communication flow (Björck & Barthelmess, 2020). Moreover, the authors refer to emotions that can help to convey the message (Björck & Barthelmess, 2020). Besides visible levels, invisible ones should also be considered, such as expectation management (Björck & Barthelmess, 2020).

	PRECRISIS STAGE	CRISIS EVENT	POSTCRISIS STAGE
Focal point	<i>To prevent</i> <i>To prepare</i>	<i>To handle the crisis</i> <i>To make sense</i>	<i>To learn</i> <i>To change</i>
(1) Employees as receivers  Management or crisis management team as senders  Other types of senders outside the organization	Communication of risks, issues and stakes  Communication that strengthens the psychological crisis-preparedness  Communication of the crisis management plan (policies and guidelines)	Communication of relevant instructions and information  Handling of reactions to the crisis and sense making  Protection/restoration of the trust and confidence among employees  Crisis auto-communication	Communication of new knowledge (organizational learning and memory)  Communication of post-crisis changes  Discourse of renewal  Memorials
(3) Horizontal communication among managers and among employees			
(2) Employees as senders  Management or crisis management team as receivers  Other types of receivers outside the organization	Negative upward communication through the line (whistle blowers, dissenters)	Communication of reactions to the crisis  Positive and/or negative organizational "ambassadors"	Organizational storytelling
Organizational factors having a positive or negative influence	Crisis type (content, intensity, dynamics and interpretation)  Cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions to a crisis (such as anger, stress, grief, and betrayal)  Crisis culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety and error culture</li> <li>• Psychological defense mechanisms</li> <li>• Crisis perception</li> <li>• Crisis memory</li> <li>• Collective mindfulness</li> </ul> Communication culture or climate  Communication strategy		

Figure 5: Internal Crisis Communication (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011)

As it is displayed in Figure 5, Frandsen & Johansen (2011) do also employ the three before-mentioned stages of (1) *precrisis stage*, (2) *crisis event*, (3) *postcrisis stage*. Same as Björck & Barthelmess (2020), the authors also considered the direction of communication (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). Besides communicating on the same level with managers, employees can be both the receivers and the senders of communication (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). Additionally, the authors list various aspects that can be beneficial throughout the three stages, but can also negatively impact (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). One of the examples mentioned is the communication culture. Frandsen & Johansen (2011) indicate that these additional factors' ability to positively or negatively

influence internal communication depends on, for example, the organization type or the kind of crisis it is.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Argenti (2020) suggests a 5-step-strategy framework to manage communication through the crisis successfully. The first suggestion is to establish a crisis response team in charge of communication (Argenti, 2020). It is essential to hold meetings on a periodical basis, issue updates, and transparently explain the situation – even the things one does not know at present (Argenti, 2020). The second step is about the communication towards the employees (Argenti, 2020). In this phase, it is crucial to acknowledge that the employees are the company's face to the outside world (Argenti, 2020). For that reason, it is important to communicate often, even if one does not have all the necessary answers yet (Argenti, 2020). Step 3 incorporates the communication towards one's customers (Argenti, 2020). The communication strategy towards customer needs to be adapted and cannot be just copied from the internal approach (Argenti, 2020). In doing so, companies should think about consumers' priorities, show empathy and help wherever possible (Argenti, 2020). The fourth step is about shareholder reassurance (Argenti, 2020). Finally, the last step is concerned with helping the community by providing goods, for example (Argenti, 2020).

A similar, 5-rules approach, is recommended by Germelmann (2020), which is closely linked to brand management. Thereby, the author highlights topics, such as leading authentically and also admit if one does not know something (Germelmann, 2020). The second rule is to “be relevant, or be silent” – which contradicts the views by Argenti (2020) to some extent. Thirdly, it is crucial to focus on your employees and look after them (Germelmann, 2020). Finally, rule number four advises to be close to the customers and their possibly changing needs in a crisis (Germelmann, 2020). In short, the fifth rule recommends to be generous and honest about it (Germelmann, 2020).

### **2.3 Sport Management and Football Business**

This sub-chapter is concerned with the world of sports. On the one hand, the intentions and the uniqueness of sport are dealt with. On the other hand, it describes different approaches of creating value in sport. The last part of the chapter explains through which revenue streams football clubs typically generate income.

### 2.3.1 Intentions for Success

As indicated in the Introduction, Bühler (2006) and Garcia-del-Barrio & Szymanski (2006) state that most football clubs tend to focus more on win maximization, rather than maximizing financial profit – in both, the short-term perspective, as well as the long-term one. This wide-spread behavior of pursuing sporting success often leads to disregarding the costs, which in turn increase in the areas of payroll and transfer expenses (Rikardsson & Rikardsson, 2013). As a consequence, the exposure to financial risks increases (Hammerschmidt et al., 2021).

### 2.3.2 Uniqueness of Sport

One of the significant characteristics of sports, or a sport product, and the respective attendance at an event is the *uncertainty of outcome*, which was first mentioned by Rottenberg (1956) and Neale (1964). The unpredictable nature of sports is evaluated by Dobson & Goddard (2001) to be at the very heart of the fundamentals of a sport event. Ultimately, it is the motive force for fans' buying behavior (Dobson & Goddard, 2001). In his work, Szymanski (2003) further divides this phenomenon into the following three categories: (1) *match uncertainty*, (2) *seasonal uncertainty*, (3) *championship uncertainty*. The first dimension refers to the unpredictability of an individual sport event, or match. The second level concerns a head-to-head race throughout a season – meaning that the competition is fierce (Szymanski, 2003). The last dimension of *championship uncertainty* considers a more prolonged period over multiple seasons, which can be characterized by several different champions – with the absence of a single or dual domination (Szymanski, 2003). Besides the just-described unpredictability of outcomes, the concept of *co-opetition* also finds recognition by Woratschek & Griebel (2020). This term depicts the interplay of competition and cooperation taking place simultaneously (Woratschek, Horbel, & Popp, 2014; Robert, Marques, & Le Roy, 2009). On the one hand, Shilbury (2012) suggests that competition is “the heart and soul of sport management”. Yet, cooperation in sports is needed and essential to agree on a framework of regulations, which apply to all competitors within the race for the championship (Robert et al., 2009). This is necessary because otherwise an adequate competitive balance would not be ensured (Bühler, 2006; Hassan & Hamil, 2010). Woratschek & Griebel (2020) denote the competitive balance as the link between the concept of *co-opetition* and the *uncertainty of outcome*. The predefined list of regulations serves as a

platform for competitive balance, which in turn results in the unpredictability of sport events (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020).

Besides the fundamentals, elaborated on above, there are further unique factors that describe a sport product. Figure 6 provides an overview of them. Woratschek & Griebel (2020) state that sport events can be allocated to the service sector and be described by the *IHIP Characteristics* by Edgett & Parkinson, (1993), namely *intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability* and *perishability*. The before-explained concept of *uncertainty of outcome* – intangible and heterogeneous – is bought by the fans, who act as consumers at a sport event (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020). Furthermore, the sport event is produced by the players on the pitch, and Woratschek & Griebel (2020) argue that it cannot be separated from the consumers in the stands and their excitement. Lastly, the authors suggest that the sport product (a sport event) is perishable since tickets are sold before a game, and the whole experience of a sport event cannot be saved (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020).

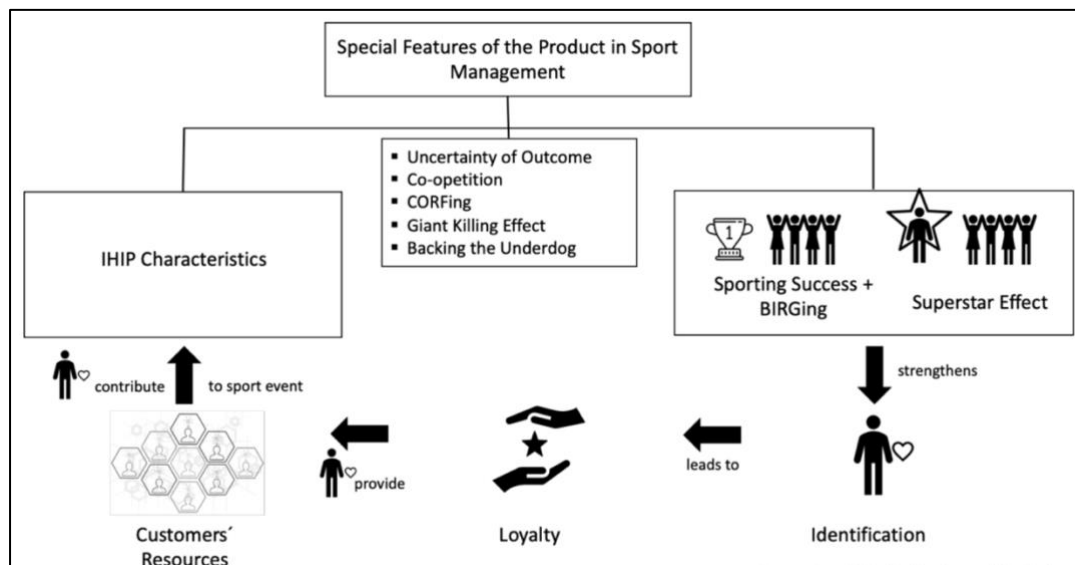


Figure 6: Special Features of Sport Products (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020)

A further unique feature of a sport product is the *BIRGing* effect, i.e., *basking in reflected glory* (Cialdini, et al., 1976). This phenomenon explains the tendency of individuals desiring to associate themselves to a team experiencing success (Cialdini, et al., 1976). The *Superstar Effect* describes another identity-establishing and -enhancing phenomenon besides *BIRGing*. Exceptional players in a team can lead to higher levels of spectators (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020). Both (*BIRGing* and *Superstar Effect*) result in higher levels of identification amongst spectators with a team, which fosters loyalty and

devotes more resources at a sport event (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020). Furthermore, the effect of *CORFing* (*cutting-off reflected failure*) depicts how individuals' levels of identification tend to lower due to failure or losses (Wann & Branscombe, 1990). They would say “they lost” (*CORFing*), instead of “we won” (*BIRGing*) (Wann & Branscombe, 1990). Nevertheless, Wann & Branscombe, (1990) mention that it differs depending on the intensity levels of already-established identification. Lastly *giant-killing effect* and *backing the underdogs* are closely interlinked. The *giant-killing effect* comes into play as excitement amongst spectators increases when a team viewed as the favorites loses to a “smaller” team (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020). Conversely, when there is a competitive imbalance between two teams, some people experience increasing excitement when *backing the underdogs* (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020).

### 2.3.3 Value Creation in Sport Management

According to Woratschek & Griebel (2020), the traditional approach of sport management is conceptualized around the sport event product. As visualized in Figure 7, the value creation process is described by multiple firms combining their assets (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020). In exchange, the consumers buy the respective product (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020).

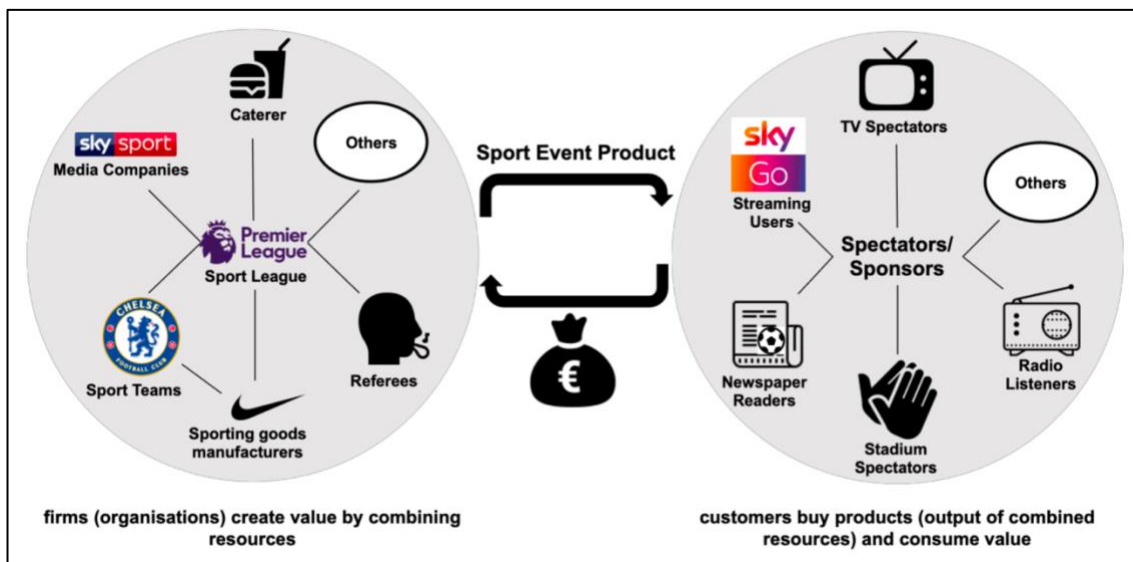


Figure 7: Logic of Sport Products - Traditional Approach (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020)

The authors felt that the *Logic of Sport Products* paints somewhat a false picture of sport management, since many stakeholders along the way take an active part in the value creation process. For instance, Woratschek, Horbel & Popp (2014) assess the

spectators as one of the most important actors before, during and after a sport event. Therefore, to reflect all the stakeholders' involvements in the value creation, Woratschek et al. (2014) created the *Sport Value Framework (SFV)*, a concept fundamentally grounded in the *service-dominant logic (SDL)*, which was first elaborated on by Vargo & Lusch (2004). The core of the SDL is that the customers and the firms integrate resources for value co-creation as a result (Woratschek et al., 2014). In contrast to the previous approach in which the value was consumed and used up, the SFV and the SDL consider that the co-created value is still “in use” (Woratschek et al., 2014). Additionally, the value co-creation occurs before, during and after a given sport event (Woratschek, 2020). Table 5 illustrates the differences between the previous approach of the *Logic of Sport Products* and the new *Logic of Value Co-Creation*.

Differences	Logic of Sport Products	Logic of Value Co-Creation
Core / pivot	<b>Sport Products</b> are at the core of sport management going along with other products and services.	<b>Sporting activities</b> are the core of sport management and build the pivot for actor engagement and resource integration.
Creation	Value is <b>produced by organisations</b> and embedded in sport products and services.	Value is <b>co-created by all actors</b> on an engagement platform. All of them provide resources.
Usage	Value is <b>used up</b> by consumers.	Value is not consumed at all. Value <b>emerges from social interaction</b> and unique reciprocal links of different actors on an engagement platform.
Context	Value is derived from product characteristics and reflected by market prices <b>independent</b> from the context.	Value is <b>context-dependent</b> . Context is determined by actors' social interaction which is enabled and facilitated by engagement platforms.
Resource Exchange	Sport Products are exchanged for money between sport firms and sport consumers. Analyses of resource exchange are <b>mainly bilateral</b> .	Actors provide resources on an engagement platform without a direct return from others. Therefore, resource exchange is <b>multilateral</b> .
Stability	Value is embedded in a product, and the value is reflected in market prices. Therefore, value is <b>stable</b> until consumption.	Experience with sporting activities can last very long and is co-created at any time. Actors perceive value before, during and after the sport event. Hence, value is <b>dynamic</b> .
Focus of analyses	Analyses mainly focus on a bilateral exchange which is fixed in <b>contracts</b> (value-in-exchange).	Analyses go beyond the contract because many actors provide <b>voluntary services</b> beyond the contract (value-in-use).

Table 5: Differences between the Logic of Sport Products and Value Co-Creation (Woratschek, 2020)

Figure 8 is a visualized version of the *Logic of Value Co-Creation*. The sporting activities are at the very center of the concept. Moreover, the sport event serves as a platform for resource integration, as all actors co-create value employing their competencies (Woratschek, 2020). Due to the nature of sport clubs, they play a facilitating



role and provide the platform for the stakeholders to interact and collaboratively create value (Woratschek, 2020).

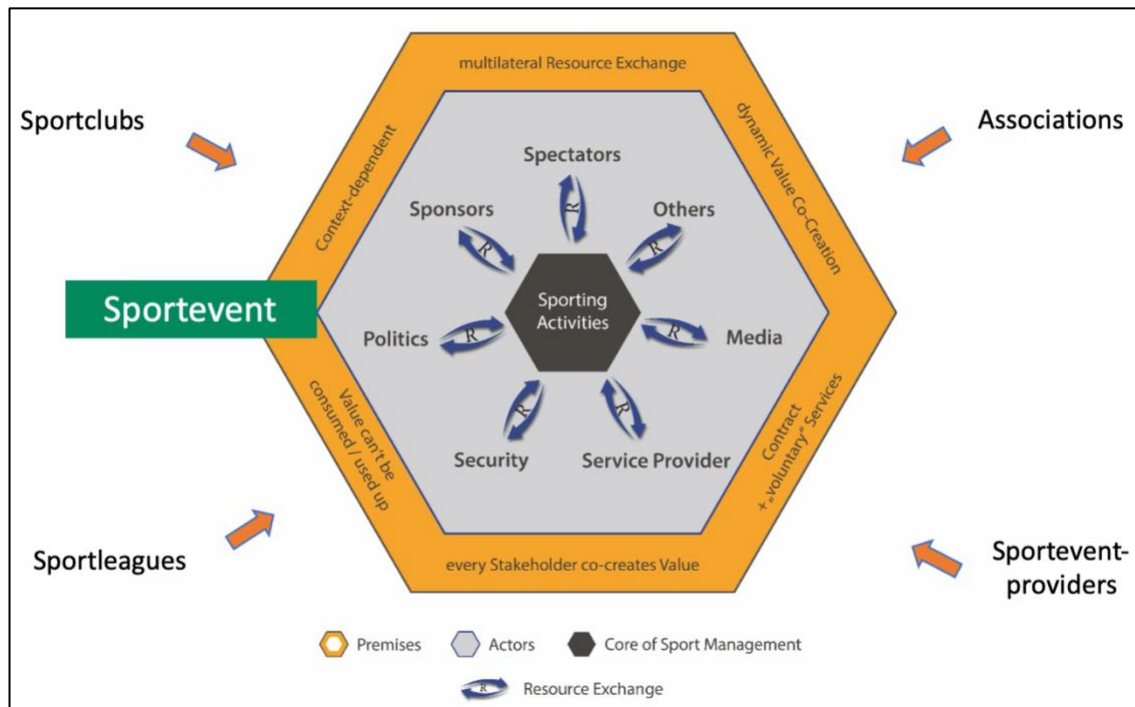


Figure 8: Visualized Logic of Value Co-Creation (Woratschek, 2020)

As it is visible in the figure above, the sport event provides as an engagement platform for interaction (Woratschek, 2020). Thereby, interactions of various actors are evident (Woratschek, 2020). As a result, through each actors' participation with their respective resources, value is consequently co-created (Woratschek, 2020).

### 2.3.4 Revenue Generation in Football

Often, the part about the income structure of a football organization is only considered when speaking of *business models* in football. For instance, Bastien's (2013) *SATEMMI model* lists the following seven components in his French publication: *Spectateurs, Actionnaires, Télévision, Entreprise, Marchés Merchandising, International*. The first source of income relates to the tickets bought by spectators on matchdays (Bastien, 2013). The second one refers to the shareholders, while the third source is concerned with the revenues from television broadcasting (Bastien, 2013). According to Bastien's (2013), the *Entreprise* refers to the income generated through sponsorships. The fifth dimension consists of the transfer market revenues and the financing through the market of securities (Bastien, 2013). A further source of income is

the merchandising part of the organization (Bastien, 2013). Finally, all international revenues are included in the last category, such as global sponsors, or television rights (Bastien, 2013). There are further examples of such revenue models (such as the *MCMMG* model by Andreff (2000), however, the most widely accepted model to depict the football business on the European continent is the *MCM* model (Sarkar & Nimkar, 2020). *MCM* stands for *media* (also *broadcasting*), *commercial* and *matchday* (Kalathil Puthiyapurayil, 2020; Maguire, 2021; Sarkar & Nimkar, 2020). The first dimension includes broadcasting rights, while the second incorporates all commercial income (e.g., through sponsorships). The third is the revenue generated on a given matchday (Kalathil Puthiyapurayil, 2020). Various authors consider the same three components (Drewes et al., 2021; Horky, 2021; Rikardsson & Rikardsson, 2013; Şener & Karapolatgil, 2015; UEFA, 2021).

## 2.4 Background Summary

The background chapter examined several approaches when defining the term *business model* (see Table 2 on pages 5 and 6). It was noticeable that many of the listed authors referred to a value creation process – in some shape or form. Its applicability can be diverse – from displaying how a company functions to employing it for innovation intentions. Likewise, there are many authors with lists of similar or sometimes varying components. However, the fundamental value proposition, the customer dimension, the value chain, and the financial considerations are often vital elements.

The second part of the chapter was concerned with crisis management. Thereby, the Greek origin and definition of a crisis were given. It was discernible that crises are generally unexpected and unforeseeable. After that, the three stages of a crisis (pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis) were explained, built upon a significant number of authors. As it was seen, the three stages are also present in crisis management and crisis communication literature, both of which were also elaborated on. The pre-crisis stage is the period before the outbreak of a crisis situation and is concerned with preparation and possible prevention. Followed by the stage of the actual crisis, during which crisis management is about containing the damage. Finally, the last phase occurs after the acute crisis has ended and offers opportunities for organizational learning.

The third and last part of this chapter covered the essential knowledge on sport management, focusing on the world of football. Thereby, the special relationship between

sporting and economic success was described. This was then followed by an explanation of why sport is unique. The subsequent section showed that all involved parties of sporting events contribute to the value creation process. Hereby, the traditional approach regards a sport event as a transaction between the consumer and the producer. Alternatively, the new logic puts the engagement of various actors in the center of attention. Lastly, the commonly referred revenue silos of football clubs were specified.

### 3 Research Design & Methodology

For the purpose described in the Introduction, it was found that the approach of a multiple case study would be most suitable. Moreover, design of this research paper is of exploratory and comparative nature. Case studies help understand a phenomenon or a case that is currently relevant and its context in more detail (Yin, 1981; Rowley, 2002). In the process of looking for evidence, such a research design consults various sources (Yin, 1994; Rowley, 2002). These sources can be of qualitative as well as quantitative nature (Rowley, 2002). According to Yin (1981), a multiple case study is suitable to replicate or confirm the findings across several cases. In case studies, defining the case is of crucial importance (Yin, 2012). Through the comparative approach (Agranoff & Radin, 1991), the study at hand explores the crisis management strategies employed by European football clubs in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

#### 3.1 Theoretical Concept

As for the research of this study, the following two concepts were considered as the theoretical framework.

##### 3.1.1 Business Model Canvas

To assess and evaluate the impacts the football clubs faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Business Model Canvas by Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010) was employed (see Figure 9). As previously described in 2.1.2 Components and Concepts, the BMC allows a holistic perspective of a given business by examining the nine different building blocks of (1) *Customer Segments*, (2) *Value Propositions*, (3) *Channels*, (4) *Customer Relationships*, (5) *Revenue Streams*, (6) *Key Resources*, (7) *Key Activities*, (8) *Key Partnerships*, (9) *Cost Structure* (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010).

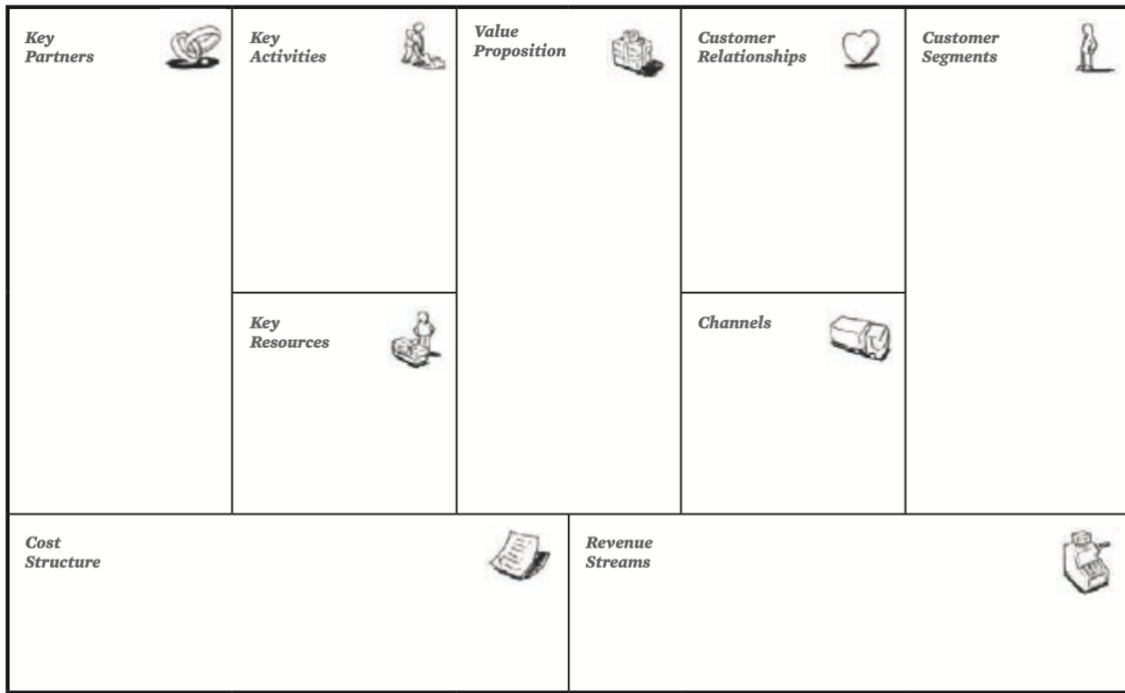


Figure 9: Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010)

Given the unique connection between the football clubs and their fans and the absence and the consequent financial exposure, the study mainly addressed building blocks 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 9. A further reason for this form of prioritization was the limited scope of the study at hand. However, it is essential to mention that neither the *Key Activities*, nor the *Key Resources* were completely disregarded throughout the paper’s research and its data collection and analysis period.

### 3.1.2 Crisis Management Concept

Given the broad consensus in the literature mentioned by Coombs & Laufer (2017) and Firouzi Jahantigh et al. (2018), this paper used the three phases of crisis management. By applying such a universal approach, the coverage of all crisis management strategies employed by the respective football clubs was ensured. Table 6 displays the definitions of the three crisis phases, which were put into the context of football for this the purpose of this research.

Pre-crisis phase	The period between the first news about a new virus until the first significant restrictions (i.e., halt of the season) in the respective country.
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Crisis phase	The period of significant restrictions in football (i.e., halt of the season, ghost games).
Post-crisis phase	The period since the significant restrictions have been abolished.

Table 6: Definition of Crisis Phases in the Football Context (Own Illustration)

To provide an overview of the football clubs’ strategies and measures employed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the self-created model in Figure 10 was used.

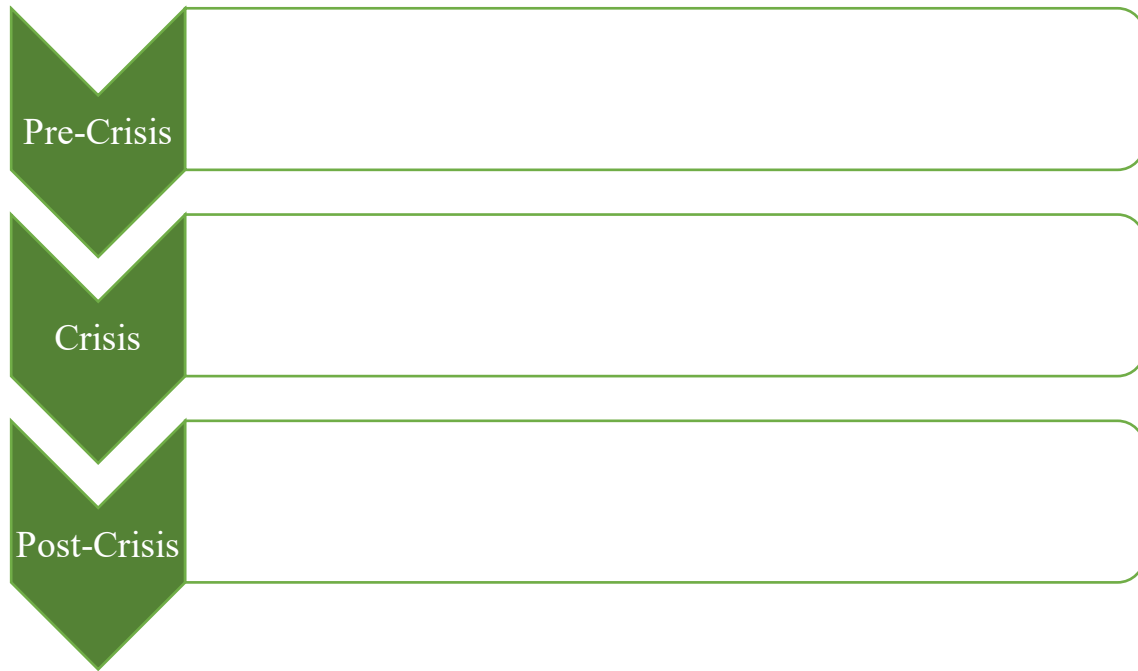


Figure 10: Three Phases of Crisis Management of European Football Clubs (Own Illustration)

As a result of this study, the model (Figure 10) was supplemented with the respective findings. This will enable managers of European football clubs to utilize the model for crisis management in the future.

### 3.2 Data Collection

The collection of data was performed in a two-way process. The first was primary data through interviews and a questionnaire, while literature was part of the secondary data collection process.

#### 3.2.1 Primary Data

The focal point of this study is the qualitative approach of interviews. As the second method of primary data collection, the survey was mainly regarded as supporting and additional data that contributed to describing further the football clubs’ overall

situation caused by the pandemic, including the impacts faced by football clubs and a brief depiction on crisis management.

Overall, 711 professional football clubs from 41 countries and 49 leagues were targeted and contacted. The author of the study considered Table 9 (see page 35) when contacting clubs with the intention to cover countries from all four groups. With 10 interviews (with football club representatives) and 52 survey answers, a response rate of 8.72% was evident. A precondition to count as a European football club was to be part of one of the UEFA member associations (UEFA, 2021). Moreover, depending on the format of the particular league, either the 2019-20 or the 2020 season were employed as the reference season. The reason for this was because during these seasons (2019-20 or 2020), the COVID-19 pandemic emerged and hit Europe for the first time. To collect data, the clubs or specific club representatives were contacted through LinkedIn connection requests, LinkedIn messaging function, Xing connection requests, direct emails (to club representatives' email addresses), "indirect" emails (to a general club email address), or through contact forms. Thereof, the connection requests on LinkedIn and both direct and indirect emails were used most often. The vast majority of the messages were written in the English language. Only those to club representatives or clubs from the Austrian, German and Swiss leagues were in German. Due to certain word limits, the messages slightly varied depending on the means used. The core of every message entailed the salutation, the topic of the thesis and the options of being interviewed for 30 to 45 minutes or to participate in an online survey, which took less than five minutes to complete. An example of such a message is in Appendix E (see Appendix F for the same communication in German).

### *3.2.1.1 Qualitative Data Collection*

Qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews to gain an in-depth understanding of European football clubs and their perspective concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, its impacts, and crisis management strategies. The main reason the method of semi-structured interviews was chosen is the allowed flexibility described by Adams (2015) and Luo & Wildemuth (2017) to follow up on topics with additional questions. 13 interviews formed the basis for this paper. All interviews lasted between 20 and 55 minutes. The interviews were held in English, German or Swiss German.

Regarding the context of football, Table 7 lists the ten interviewees. Additionally, it indicates the country they are located in and the corresponding league's tier. The latter indicates what level of the country's football pyramid the club plays on. The interviewees were from eight different countries and nine different leagues. 50% were first league clubs, with another four clubs from the respective countries' second divisions and fourth league club from England. As indicated below, the interviews were held throughout four weeks because many were busy with season preparations. Various tools and platforms were used to conduct the interviews. Two interviews were held in person because both clubs are located in Switzerland.

<b>Club No.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Channel</b>	<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>League</b>	<b>Level</b>
Club 1	16th July 2021	Microsoft Teams	Interviewee 1	Germany	2. Bundesliga	L2
Club 2	16th July 2021	WhatsApp Call	Interviewee 2	Greece	Super League Greece 1	L1
Club 3	19 <sup>th</sup> July 2021	Zoom	Interviewee 3	England	EFL League Two	L4
Club 4	19th July 2021	WhatsApp Video Call	Interviewee 4	Italy	Serie B	L2
Club 5	22nd July	Microsoft Teams	Interviewee 5	Scotland	Scottish Premiership	L1
Club 6	29 <sup>th</sup> July 2021	Zoom, WhatsApp Call	Interviewee 6	Turkey	Süper Lig	L1
Club 7	3 <sup>rd</sup> August 2021	Telephone Call	Interviewee 7	Switzerland	Challenge League	L2
Club 8	9 <sup>th</sup> August 2021	Microsoft Teams	Interviewee 8	Finland	Veikkausliiga	L1
Club 9	10 <sup>th</sup> August 2021	Face-to-face	Interviewee 9	Switzerland	Super League	L1



Club 10	12 <sup>th</sup> August 2021	Face-to- face	Interviewee 10	Switzerland	Challenge League	L2
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Table 7: Overview of Conducted Interviews (Own Illustration)

Given the explorative nature of the research, the method of semi-structured interviews was employed, which also allowed posing follow-up questions on an ad-hoc basis. Most of the questions were grounded in theory. The questions relate to the building blocks of the Business Model Canvas by Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010), the three phases of crisis management (Coombs & Laufer, 2017; Firouzi Jahantigh et al., 2018). The rest of the questions were self-developed by the author of this study. A holistic view of the football clubs was ensured by posing broadly formulated questions. This way also contributed to gaining insights from a wide variety of different European clubs and offered the researcher to pose more in-depth follow-up questions, which proved helpful when investigating a club's situation in the course of a global pandemic.

The first block of questions dealt with the pandemic's impacts. The first question was about the most significant challenge the club faced in the last two seasons. It intended to get a sense of how different European clubs experienced the issues brought along by the COVID-19 pandemic. As indicated in the previous chapters of this thesis, fans play a crucial role in football. Therefore, the second question was on the value co-creation of fans and the impact of their absence. The following two questions covered the pandemic-related financial implications on the revenue streams and the cost structure.

The second block of questions, as the central part of the interview, was focused on crisis management. Thereby, questions related to the pre-crisis, the actual crisis, and the post-crisis phase were posed. The questions aimed to explore the various measures employed by the football clubs. In the same block, the interviewees were asked to describe the football clubs' communicative efforts in maintaining the before-mentioned special bond to their fans. Additionally, the club representatives were asked whether they had the chance to act entrepreneurially during the crisis. At this point in writing the thesis, the pandemic is not yet over. For that reason, the club representatives were asked how they assess the numbers of fans returning to the stadium. The whole question guideline can be found in Appendix G.

To broaden the paper's horizon and not solely focus on the viewpoint of the football clubs, three expert interviews were conducted. The semi-structured method was also chosen here in order to pose follow-up questions. An expert interview allows access to theoretical knowledge on a given matter (Bogner, Littig, & Menz, 2009). In addition to that, the intention of consulting know-how from specialists in a given field was to incorporate theoretical inputs into the practical outputs of the study. Furthermore, all experts (see Table 8) worked at different tertiary education institutions in the German-speaking part of Europe. 28<sup>th</sup>

No.	Date	Channel	Expert	Country	Focus Area
1	20 <sup>th</sup> July 2021	Telephone Call	Expert 1	Switzerland	Sport Management
2	28 <sup>th</sup> July 2021	Microsoft Teams	Expert 2	Switzerland	Crisis Management & Communication
3	29 <sup>th</sup> July 2021	Zoom	Expert 3	Germany	Sport Management

Table 8: Overview of Expert Interviews (Own Illustration)

The question catalog for the expert interviews with Experts 1 and 3 can be found in Appendix H. Since both of the expert interviews were conducted in German, the translation of the question is visible in Appendix H. Due to the academic proximity to the situation of football clubs, the related questions were similar to those asked of the football clubs.

The question catalog for the expert interview with Expert 2 is in Appendix I. These questions reflected both crisis management and crisis communication subjects. First, the interview started with a question regarding the possible preparation in the pre-crisis phase. The two following questions were concerned with internal and external communication. Fourthly, it was asked about the difference between the current pandemic crisis and an organizational crisis with respect to crisis management. After that, the fifth question was about the possibility of being opportunity-seeking while also ensuring the viability of an organization. Lastly, Expert 2 was asked about the best way to incorporate the gathered knowledge for organizational learning.

### 3.2.1.2 *Quantitative Data Collection*

As before-mentioned, the quantitative method of data collection (questionnaire) contributed with supplementary data to the core of the study (i.e., the interviews). The main focus was to use the survey results to display the situation and implications the COVID-19 pandemic had on European football clubs. Quantitative data was collected in the period between 13<sup>th</sup> July and 12<sup>th</sup> August 2021. As previously explained, this time span of just above four weeks was that many clubs were concerned with season preparation. Before sending out the first survey links in mid-July 2021, pretesting of the online survey was conducted. The football clubs involved in the interviews did not take part in the quantitative part of the study.

When creating the list of questions, the aim was that the survey would not take too long to attract as many football clubs, respectively their representatives, to participate. For this purpose, no open answers were posed. The entire list of questions is in Appendix J.

The first two questions were to specify what country they are from and the league they played in during the reference season of 2019-20 or 2020 (depending on the league's format). After that, the representatives were asked to rate two statements about fans and the impact of their absence. Because fans are widely considered essential to football clubs, these statements were to be evaluated. Next, questions 4, 5, and 6 were about the financial implications and measures resulting from the pandemic. Thereby, it was intended to learn how the club's financial situation changed. Finally, questions 7 to 10 were about crisis management measures. The purpose of the questions was to find out if the football clubs prepared for the crisis, how they would evaluate their active role during the crisis and if they plan to utilize organizational learning.

### 3.2.2 *Secondary Data*

A variety of literature sources were consulted in the writing process of this master thesis. Books, handbooks, journals, reports, studies, and selected news articles were consulted and considered. This wide range of literature allowed to gain insights from multiple angles. The following factors characterized the selection procedure of the literature:

- Suitability & relevance: Only literature assessed to be valuable and relevant to the paper was considered and utilized.
- Quality: To ensure the truthfulness of the information, quality was also taken into consideration. Thereby, if possible and available, peer-reviewed publications were prioritized.
- Recency: If the context required recent information, recent literature was selected. Otherwise, the two above-stated factors were evaluated to be more critical.

While multiple platforms, such as Taylor & Francis Online, were employed for the literature search, Google Scholar was the most frequently used data source. Using a device with an internet connection, the respective website could be accessed and used freely.

### **3.3 Analytical Approach**

The analytical approach was executed in a two-fold strategy. In this section, both qualitative and quantitative data analyses are depicted.

#### **3.3.1 Qualitative Data Analysis**

To analyze the semi-structured interviews, the interviews were recorded by two separate devices. First, all 13 interviews were transcribed, six of which were transcribed in German and seven in English, given the respective interview language. Second, for the subsequent analytical process, the paper employed a summative content analysis. The reason for this decision is the method's flexibility in use with respect to comparative and interpretative nature when analyzing and summarizing the contents (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Rapport, 2010).

#### **3.3.2 Quantitative Data Analysis**

As stated before, the main focus of the study is on the interviews. It is for that reason that descriptive statistics were used for the analytical approach of the questionnaire. As Wildemuth (2017) specifies, descriptive statistics were used for summarizing the overview of the findings. As Appendix J (Table 14) shows, only closed-ended questions were posed, making comparisons more suitable.

### 3.4 Cases (European Football Clubs)

As previously described in the Introduction, the countries of the 54 UEFA member associations (without Liechtenstein) reacted differently to the pandemic. Their responses to the initial outbreak in early 2020 of the top-divisions can be categorized into the following four different groups according to the season of 2019-2020 or the 2020 season (UEFA, 2021), which were chosen to be the reference seasons depending on the given country's format:

Group	Response	Number of Leagues	Countries
1	Season continued without an interruption	1	Belarus
2	Postponed/interrupted, but the format remained unchanged	25	Albania, Armenia, Austria, Croatia, Denmark, England, Faroe Islands, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Kosovo, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine
3	Postponed/interrupted, and the format was changed	12	Andorra, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Moldova, Republic of Ireland, Serbia, Slovakia
4	Season was abandoned	16	Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, France, Gibraltar, Iceland, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Northern Ireland, San Marino, Scotland, Wales

Table 9: Overview of Responses to Initial Outbreak in Spring 2020 (UEFA, 2021)

The ten interviewed clubs according Table 7 (see page 30) are the cases of this study.

Club 1 was a German second-division club during the 2019-20 season. On 13<sup>th</sup> March 2020, it was decided by the Deutsche Fussball Liga (DFL) that the 2. Bundesliga season will be interrupted (DFL, 2020). However, after the decision by the federal government and the federal states to allow the seasons to continue in mid-May (DFB, 2020), the 26<sup>th</sup> matchday was set on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2020, and the last matches were played on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2020 (DFL, 2020).

Club 2 was a Greek first-division club during the 2019-20 season. The season of the Super League Greece was interrupted on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2020 (Super League Greece, 2020). The return of professional football was on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2020 (Super League Greece, 2020).

Club 3 was an English fourth-division club (EFL League Two) during the 2019-20 season. On 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2020, the English Football League (EFL) decided to postpone the leagues until further notice (EFL, 2020). On 15<sup>th</sup> May 2020, the clubs of EFL League Two voted to end the 2019-20 season except for the playoff phase (BBC Sport, 2020). Unlike the fourth division, the season of the top tier of English football (Premier League) returned on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020 (Sky Sports, 2020), which is the reason for England to be allocated to group 2 in Table 9 (UEFA, 2021).

Club 4 was an Italian second-division club during the 2019-20 season. On 9<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the government's decision halted sports in Italy (BBC Sport, 2020). However, the season resumed on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2020 (NBC Sports, 2020).

Club 5 was a Scottish first-division club during the 2019-20 season. The Scottish Premiership was interrupted on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2020 (SPFL, 2020). In mid-May, it was decided that the season would end based on average points per match (BBC Sport, 2020).

Club 6 was a Turkish first-division club during the 2019-20 season. The Süper Lig was suspended on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2020 (transfermarkt.de, 2020). The season was resumed on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2020, with the last matchday on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2020 (TheStar, 2020).

Clubs 7 and 10 were Swiss second-division clubs during the 2019-20 season, while Club 9 was a Swiss first division club during the corresponding season. On 13<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the decision was taken to suspend the Super League (first division), as well as the Challenge League (second division), at least until the end of April 2020 (Bluewin, 2020). Eventually, the Challenge League was restarted on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2020 and the Super League the following day (SRF, 2020).

Club 8 was a Finnish first division-club during the 2020 season. In mid-March, the season start was delayed until at least the end of June (Veikkausliiga, 2020). Ultimately, the first matchday was on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 (SOCCERWAY, 2020). At the end of October 2020, it was decided that the planned format of playoff games would be canceled (Yle.fi, 2020).

## 4 Results

Firstly, This chapter deals with the qualitative findings of the interviews with football clubs. Secondly, the results of the expert interviews are outlined. The last part includes the quantitative findings of the survey.

### 4.1 Interviews (Football Clubs)

The results of the interviewed football clubs are divided into the challenges they faced, impact on value co-creation process, financial implications, as well as the three phases of crisis management.

#### 4.1.1 Challenges

The first question regarding the biggest challenges they faced was reasonably broad to get a sense of what football clubs had to deal with since the pandemic. The most reoccurring keywords were related to the unexpectedness of the COVID-19 pandemic, the constant uncertainty, the fans, and the financial dimension to it.

According to Interviewee 5, the primary issue was the absence of their supporters and community, which are at the very heart of the Scottish football club. Because Club 5 is a community- and people-oriented club, engaging and communicating with fans and sponsors posed the biggest challenge for them. Interviewees 2 and 3 also consider the absent fans as concerning from an emotional viewpoint, but also from a financial one – regarding matchday income. In answering the question, Interviewees 4 and 6 focused solely on financial implications. Due to decreasing matchday income and revenue from broadcasting, Club 6 was mainly concerned with cash flow management. As Interviewee 10 explained, there were multiple levels of challenges – with the financial concerns to be able to settle invoices including wages was the most immediate worry. However, through swift governmental support, the Swiss club's concerns shifted more onto a psychological level because of the insecurity of how long the pandemic will last and the certainty that it could not last forever from a pure business perspective. A similar view is shared by Interviewees 8 and 9 as it was unknown what was ahead of them. Additionally, Interviewee 9 suggested that football clubs have a certain level of economic and societal responsibility. Interviewees 7, 8, and 9 also suggested that the pandemic had also brought forward challenges related to leadership. Interviewee 7 said that there had been clear procedures in place on how to run a football club before the pandemic and that the

situation required leadership to deal with entirely new matters. In addition, this new situation forced Club 7 to constantly display a very high degree of flexibility, for example, to continuously update and adapt protection concepts. Interviewees 7 and 9, furthermore, addressed the challenges for their employees since they had to come to terms with the situation. As for Interviewee 1, it was challenging that the problems the German club faced had been, on the one hand, previously unthinkable, and on the other hand, inexistent. For that reason, there were no best practices for them to incorporate and implement.

#### 4.1.2 Impact on Value Co-Creation

Generally speaking, when the club representatives were asked about the impact of fans, their ability to co-create value, and the implications of their absence, many agreed that they play a significant role and football without them is not the same – from an emotional, motivational point of view, as well as from their financial contribution.

Despite having a relatively low level of fans, Interviewee 1 agreed that fans have a relevant role at football matches while – at the same time – not excluding the importance of partners and sponsors. Interestingly, Interviewee 2 and 9 employed the word “salt” when describing the situation of empty stadiums. Interviewee 9 used a German idiom meaning “something” was missing without fans. Interviewee 2 compared the situation at football venues to food on the table by stating: “Football without fans is [like] food without [...] salt.” (Interviewee 2, personal communication, July 16, 2021). From the point of view of Interviewees 7 and 10, emotions are a crucial factor in football, suggesting that it was not the same without the supporters and that there is an interplay between the players and the club’s fans. Following up on that point, Interviewee 2 claimed that fans positively impact the motivation of the players and the respective result of the game. Interviewee 7 also shared the opinion with Interviewee 4, as both of them claim that stadiums without the fans result in decreasing value. Interviewee 4 also considered the commercial aspect and the importance of a full stadium for broadcasting companies. Another approach to classifying the previous two seasons was from the perspective of the Turkish club. As stated by Interviewee 6, the impact of the pandemic was two-fold. On the one hand, the engagement levels with the club’s fans decreased as, especially in the early months of the pandemic, football was losing priority for the vast majority of the people, while health became much more important. Nevertheless, on the other hand, the



bond between the club and some of the fans got stronger through increased social media engagement. Besides the emotional importance of fans, Interviewee 10 also indicated the financial implications fans have through their attendance. Similarly, Interviewee 8 agreed that fans create value when considering their 25% revenue share. Nevertheless, it was more important for Club 8 to play the entire season in order not to renegotiate sponsorship deals.

#### 4.1.3 Financial Implications

The first question on the financial implications of the COVID-19 pandemic referred to how the clubs' revenue streams were impacted. Given the absence of the fans, the respective drop in matchday-related income was apparent. However, some of them experienced a great degree of solidarity from their season ticket holders. At the same time, a decent number of clubs managed to keep most of their sponsors on board during the pandemic.

Interviewee 1 affirmed that matchday income fell while they managed to contain the damage as 96% of the sponsors maintained their financial commitment. A somewhat similar situation was evident at Club 3, where the support from sponsors led to a high retention rate. Due to the local anchoring of Club 5, they were able to keep 100% of the sponsors. On the downside, the Scottish club is heavily dependent on matchday-related income, including hospitality lounges. As a result, according to Interviewee 5, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the overall revenue is between minus 30% and minus 40%. Likewise, the overall revenue loss for Club 6 is 30% to 35%. The Turkish club experienced negative revenue development on all fronts. In other words, some of the sponsors left or reduced their commitment, while broadcasting income also decreased. In addition, a new stadium was opened with a lot of retail spaces. For that reason, the initial income projections did not hold. Compared to other clubs in Italy with 40% to 50% share, Club 4 is not as dependent on matchday income (20%). Albeit, due to the insolvency of an essential sponsor, another 20% of revenue was lost for the Italian club. Besides revenue generated on matchdays, sponsoring, or broadcasting, Club 7 also considers transfer revenues a vital source of income. Generally speaking, most of the sponsors stayed on board. Nevertheless, it had been challenging to conclude new sponsorship contracts during the period of the pandemic. Just a few days before the start of the 2021-22 season, Club 7 was able to find a new primary sponsor. As for the just-mentioned transfer

revenue, the 2020 summer had been much better than the 2021 summer. According to Interviewee 7, Swiss football clubs' willingness to spend on the transfer market decreased heavily. Despite more people watching the games on TV, the respective broadcasting income did not increase for Club 9. Between 93% and 95% of sponsors and season card holders showed solidarity and did not request refunds. Just as Club 9, Interviewee 10 also indicated that practically all fans and sponsors retained their commitment. Yet, much income is generated through catering, which negatively impacted the revenue development. Lastly, the overall income of Club 8 decreased by 20% as a consequence of the pandemic. Most of it was caused by lower matchday revenue, while income from broadcasting and sponsorship stayed the same. In the current 2021 season, the Finnish club was even able to attract new sponsors.

The second question on finances was about the impact on the clubs' cost structures. Given the lower revenues, many clubs had to lower their cost level. It is worth noting that because of the pandemic and its consequences, certain costs decreased by themselves, while also other new costs arose.

As Interviewee 1 stated, the club received financial support from the German government. Slight cost reductions were made in the administrative area, as well as the playing squad. Due to the pandemic, costs related to testing amounted to EUR 160,000. Into the bargain, costs when travelling and staying in hotels for away games also increased. On the other side, match-day related costs decreased, for example, security expenditures. Interviewee 10 also reported that this cost driver decreased because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Compared to the seasons before the pandemic outbreak, the club's security-related expenditure decreased by CHF 350,000. Club 10 made use of the short-time working compensation scheme. The same was done in another Swiss club. For those at Club 9, who would not be qualified for this compensation, a pay cut of 20% was present. Interviewee 9 stated that the club did not want to lay off any people by hinting that the loss of know-how would have been damaging. A very similar situation was given at the third Swiss club (Club 7), which benefitted from the short-time working compensation and the lower costs at matchdays. Additionally, players waived money during the first so-called lockdown. Because Club 6 could not to impose any pay cuts, circa 60% or 70% of the players did so voluntarily. Furthermore, there were also pay cuts for the employees at the Turkish club, whereby the extent depended on the wages, meaning that the highest earners took greater pay cuts than the lowest earners. Still, the

club had to make a few administrative personnel redundant. On top of that, costs increased because of PCR testing and more elaborate travel situation to away games. Unlike Clubs 1 and 6, the Finnish club of Interviewee 8 did not have increased costs because of transportation or accommodation. However, the club also introduced pay cuts. This meant that a pay cut of 40% was evident for two months. Since it was allowed to have 500-people segments during the 2020 season, certain matchday-related expenses decreased, while the cost level for establishing these segments increased. Because multiple players' contracts expired, Club 5 from Scotland could save the money as they had not extended the respective contracts. Besides cutting costs here and there, the club did not fire any people. Testing costs also arose, which amounted to GBP 200,000. Likewise, Club 3 from England did not lay off any people and experienced PCR testing-related costs of circa GBP 3,000 per round. They also benefitted from the government's job retention scheme, saving personnel expenditures as the government paid 80% of the employees' wages. Yet, the players' salaries were not included. Because of the backing of the owners, the budget for players was still very competitive in comparison to other clubs from the fourth tier. For that reason, it was possible to attract players who possibly would not have into a contract with Club 3. Similar to Club 5 and Club 3, Club 4 also restructured their playing squad. Interviewee 5 depicted that they decided on a new sporting strategy by focusing on younger players who should pay off in the medium term.

#### 4.1.4 Pre-Crisis Phase

In the course of the interviews, four clubs were asked whether there had been a crisis management team or respective knowledge in place. There had been nothing like this at Club 2 in Greece. Interviewee 6 stated that some staff had been responsible for other emergencies, like first aid. Additionally, there had been specific evacuation plans for the case of fire or earthquakes. However, the club representative said that there had not been any plans in place that would help to navigate through a pandemic, as the club representative stated: "We weren't prepared for a pandemic." (Interviewee 6, personal communication, July 29, 2021). The viewpoint of Interviewee 8 goes in the same direction, as he suggested that it is impossible to be ready for such a global pandemic. Yet, he claimed that if one had already experienced a crisis, certain strategies might have helped. From the German perspective of Interviewee 1, board meetings had been held

that covered topics and threats with the potential to influence the club. Amongst others, sporting crises had been talked about.

As it can be seen from the period before the pre-crisis phase, the answers varied greatly. The same was the case when the club representatives were asked about the measures during the pre-crisis phase. Some did not do anything, while others already employed health-related, organizational measures (e.g., crisis management team) or economic measures (e.g., scenario planning).

Finland's Club 8 indicated that there was a board meeting where the whole situation was discussed. Because the 2020 season start was postponed, the football squad had to take the three weeks compulsory holidays before the season (instead of after the last game of the season). Besides, the measure of the 40% pay cut for two months was decided on. Furthermore, scenario planning was conducted by considering if the season could be played and if fans could attend the matches, and if so, how many. The crisis management team at Club 8 consisted of the CEO (Interviewee 8) and the board. When asked about the pre-crisis phase, Club 6 enacted once Turkey had its first positive COVID-19 cases. Entry restrictions to the club's facilities were introduced, at the same time, testing was booted. Additionally, wearing masks in buildings was compulsory. Generally speaking, Club 6 was concerned with implementing all the measures recommended by the respective authorities. The club's crisis management group consisted of the heads of departments, as well as the CEO. A resembling strategy was followed by Club 2 from Greece, as they implemented the corresponding instructions. Access to training was restricted, no visitors were allowed. Other than wearing masks and social distancing, PCR testing was conducted on a weekly basis. In the event of a positive COVID-19 case, the respective person was quarantined, and another test session was scheduled three days later. For the sake of players' health, they were ordered only to make the basic movements, i.e., to commute between their flats and the training ground. Interviewee 10 recalled a friendly match on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2020 in another Swiss city when answering the question. Already at the respective stadium, no spectators were allowed to attend. On the way back home, the clubs were informed that the season would be interrupted. All the players were then directly sent home into isolation because it was not clear whether there was the potential that someone already got infected. However, no other measures had been employed before that. The same holds true for another Challenge League club, as Interviewee 7 indicated nothing was done because everything was

uncertain. Both Clubs 7 and 10 did not have a formal crisis management team because of the relatively small size of the clubs. The first action by Club 4 was to conduct a sensitivity analysis and scenario planning for forecasting potential losses. Additionally, the players were asked to take pay cuts. The third measure mentioned by Interviewee 4 was that the club requested all the financial support from the government available at that time. Moreover, each department was asked to give their forecasts with justifications. Interviewee 9 stated that they enacted an immediate halt to any investments. Also, cost drivers were identified and neutralized. A crisis management team was created in February 2020, consisting of the CEO (Interviewee 9), the president of the board of directors, two heads of departments, and the financial officer. Due to the international business conduct of the chairman and the respectively early knowledge on the pandemic and its implications, Club 5 reacted swiftly and sent the football players home as one of the first clubs in Scotland to do so. The “Covid Police” was also introduced, a crisis management team consisting of the chairman, the board of directors, the CEO (Interviewee 5), and the first team manager. Interviewee 1 explained that the measures taken initially were primarily health-related, for example, providing sanitizers, home office for employees, keeping players in a bubble, and testing. Specific economic measures were not taken in the pre-crisis phase.

#### 4.1.5 Crisis Phase

As previously seen, practically all clubs experienced a decrease in their revenue figures, leading to pressures to reduce costs wherever possible. At the same time, many clubs received governmental support. In this time, internal and external communication proved essential to keeping all stakeholders informed and involved.

Once it was clear that the season was interrupted for some time, Club 1 started to perform scenario planning for the upcoming season. Examples for such scenarios included no fans at all, a proportion of fans in the stadium, and a specific capacity. Because evidently no fans were allowed, the club was absorbed by financial support from the government, its sponsors, including the main sponsor. When asked about the sponsorship strategy after the before-mentioned retention rate of 96%, Interviewee 1 indicated that a particular contract period is essential. Additionally, close communication played a crucial role by explaining the club’s current situation to them. Thereby, also

looking for other ways to compensate the purchased advertising services. In doing so, digital products became increasingly important. On the topic of proactive measures, Interviewee 1 continued the point of transparent communication to the sponsors and the club's players and employees. Regarding the communication with fans, the use of social media was intensified. Moreover, contact was also maintained with the fan spokesperson and fan groups.

Certain measures explained by Interviewee 1 were also evident at Club 9. For example, scenario planning was employed as well and constantly updated. In view of the 2020-21 season, for example, various scenarios were incorporated, such as no fans would be allowed during the preliminary round, or an empty stadium for the entire season. Various scenarios with specific numbers of spectators were also considered (1,000, 5,000, or 10,000 fans). In comparison to Club 1, Club 9 integrated a wider range of factors, such as the club's two-phase strategy. This strategy entailed the situations of the 2019-20 and 2020-21 seasons. The first phase had been the six games of the 2019-20 season played without fans in the stadium. As a consequence, Club 9 asked season card holders and sponsors for their solidarity. Only very few refund requests were made. As a sign of appreciation for the loyalty shown, the club installed a wall of solidarity, on which all the names of people and sponsors, who did not want their money back, are listed. The second phase of the club's strategy considers the 17 matches of the 2020-21 season, which could not be attended. Interviewee 9 suggested that the club could not ask for any solidarity anymore. Hence, the club implemented compensation models. For season card holders, a respective service value of a specific amount was owed from Club 9. Examples to settle this included that a season card holding fan was given two match tickets, a merchandising product, or the respective cashless card was credited with a specific amount. The same approach was applied for business seats and boxes. These people, for example, were invited to an away game or received a regular season card for free. The thought behind the second service was future-oriented because out of the new season card holders, 50% would potentially renew their season ticket in the upcoming seasons. Regarding the sponsors, the respective advertising service was divided into two categories. The first one was service provisions still possible to be fulfilled, while the second one contained services not fulfillable anymore. Hence, the club decided to offer the respective amount of advertising service in digital products for the 2021-22 season. In conclusion, in the first phase (2019-20 season), the solidarity level was around 93% to 95%, while in the second phase (2020-21 season), the approval of compensations was still above 90%. For the

sponsoring companies, who had to lay off people, Interviewee 9 proactively approached them to suggest a pause of sponsorship until further notice. When talking about governmental support, credits were requested. However, the club did not have to use them and pay them back – except for the *à-fonds-perdu* contribution of CHF 3 million. At large, Interviewee 9 stated that the club would break even. When asked about internal communication during the first period of the pandemic, the club representative stated that it was a priority to avoid that internal information becomes external – especially because the football club is in the spotlight. Therefore, despite not knowing how Microsoft Teams works in the early stages of the crisis, the club started with weekly team events. In addition, direct communication was also maintained. Thus, Interviewee 9 telephoned with all of the direct employees twice a week. In turn, they were asked to do so as well with their employees. Whenever restrictions were lifted, the employees met under the given guidelines to do various things, such as strolls. Through this, it was possible for Club 9 to feel the employees. Interviewee 9 referred to the before-mentioned retention rates of fans and sponsors to the question about proactive opportunity-seeking. Thereby, the club representative emphasized constant communication with the sponsors, as he actively wanted to know about the situation of the given company and what issues they were faced with. This served as supportive phone calls and as a piece of information for Club 9 about the future development of the specific sponsorship. According to Interviewee 9, long-term contracts with sponsors are important. However, he also mentioned that the world of sponsorship had changed so that the club's active involvement was needed and the responsibility to provide a valuable service for the received amount of money. On this point, Interviewee 9 referred to digital products as an example which need to be acquired strategically, not just on a one-time basis. As a result, once again attaching importance to the price-performance ratio of services that help the sponsors. Within the same answer to the question about opportunity-seeking, Interviewee 9 voiced the significance of keeping the fans in the loop by providing them updates about the current situation of the club, as well as what is happening. A further project was to increase a matchday from 90 minutes to 180 minutes, meaning that there should already be something happening at the stadium before and after the match. For example, the front yard of the stadium was changed into a fan village by using the colors of the club, by installing street food containers and a wider assortment (including vegetarian options), by providing the possibility for musicians to perform after the match. A few minutes later during the interview, the topic of community was touched upon. Thereby, Interviewee 9 stated that the club has a strong

local anchoring. At the same time, Club 9 also looked after the community. Besides doing the groceries for elderly people, the club representative also talked about the rather ample number of football shirts. Consequently, the club decided to offer them to ten different houses for disabled people.

The importance of the local community was also visible when talking to Club 5 from Scotland. The club's employees and players supported the community in various ways. For example, a campaign was introduced to incentivize the supporters to keep fit by counting steps. Another example mentioned was shopping rounds for vulnerable people. Another example was that one could inform the club about a close relative or a friend going through a hard time because, for example, if someone had died. After that, someone from the club would get back to the respective person to help in one way or another. Because of the number of fans above 65 years of age and their absence on social media, Club 5 made regular phone call rounds. The elderly people could indicate what frequency they would like to be contacted by phone. A further example was that fans could request a video message for someone's birthday or for a similar even. The football club also realized that in order to engage with fans and sponsors, digital means were to be used during this time. Further discussions were held, and decisions were made in the "Covid Police", a six people crisis management team. They analyzed all areas to cut overhead costs wherever possible. As previously elaborated, by not-renewing several contracts with players, the respective wage level decreased. Further costs could be saved through the furlough scheme. Still, the club decided to pay the 20% on top of the 80% covered by the government. However, Interviewee 5 stated that they did not want to change anything about their base salary. Instead, the players' bonus system was reviewed, and performance bonuses were taken away. The team also made the decision to update the communication contact databases to be able to inform the relevant people. When talking about informing employees, the crisis management team had some difficulties with internal communication. Since the COVID-19 situation and the consequent decisions by the government and the football association changed rapidly, the team had to make sure to communicate only still relevant information. When asked whether they looked at the crisis as an opportunity for increased entrepreneurial actions, Interviewee 5 referred to the community work mentioned above, to an app for the academy kids, and to their TV project. As also previously indicated, Club 5 was well aware of utilizing digital means more often. Thereby, they created an app for the academy. On this app, the kids could access various functionalities – from topics related to mental health, nutrition, or



exercise. Several gaming functions were also programmed onto the app. The pay-per-view project was another example of opportunity-seeking by the Scottish club. In consultation with the broadcasters, the club was allowed to show any game unless one of the two broadcasters had it on their channels. When deciding which way to go, Club 5 specifically decided against the cheaper production. Instead, the ambition was to provide the fans at home with professional TV coverage. Due to the more expensive production, the income from paying spectators had offset the corresponding investments. A given matchday entailed a show before and after the match, as well as at halftime. Additionally, well-known people from Scottish football were the guests in these shows. As Interviewee 5 stated, the season card holder had the chance to watch all games without buying a subscription for every single match. One of the last questions asked in the interviews was how the club could keep practically all sponsorships during the crisis. The club representative replied that it was all about loyalty. However, according to Interviewee 5, the club can no longer rely on the sponsors' goodwill in the following year.

Club 3 also introduced a live coverage of the matches through an online digital channel called iFollow used by many football clubs in England, as initiated by the English Football League. From a payment point of view, the system at Club 3 worked similarly to the one of Club 5, where season card holders did not have to pay for individual games. For others, to watch a single match amounted to GBP 10. The revenue generated through iFollow was around GBP 250,000, which reflected about a quarter of the usual ticketing revenue of the club. Another measure that supported the club's financial situation was the furlough system (see Club 5), through which the government covered 80% of the employees' wages. Additionally, the EFL League Two clubs received direct payments from the Premier League. What else helped the club through the first two seasons during the pandemic were the previously-mentioned backing of the owners and the loyalty of sponsors, despite usually only entering into 1-year contracts. Another similarity to Club 5 is the activities for the local community, such as telephone calls with older people. Some of the club's players also made donations to the local hospital. The same hospital was given the profits from selling a unique charity shirt that only was played in once. Furthermore, the club organized that the two players would bring breakfast to pupils of a local school in a deprived area of the town. Additionally, the club donated to a local food bank.

Donations were also necessary from Club 6. On the one hand, money was given to some donation schemes organized by the government. Health-protective equipment

was also donated to another governmental program, while at the same time, the club gave away masks and sanitizers through private channels. During the pandemic, the region of Club 6 was hit by an earthquake, and as a consequence, the club's involvement in helping and donating was even intensified. The club staff volunteered to distribute various things, such as tents, food, or goods. In order to maintain the bond to the fans, various video campaigns were carried out on social media. Additionally, Club 6 introduced a special project. The club collected the fans' most beloved club item, then placed it on the stadium seats. Interviewee 6 stated that players and employees were regularly informed about the new measures and the information received through constant contact with the authorities when asked about the internal communication. The tools used were WhatsApp groups, emails, as well as Zoom calls. The club representative was then asked whether there was any resistance regarding the before-stated pay cuts. According to Interviewee 6, there was some resistance due to the uncertainty of the situation. However, the staff was more cooperative than the players in taking pay cuts, for which the foreign players showed greater resistance. Eventually, the pay cuts were only implemented for two months. The club's crisis management team regularly met to discuss the situation from an economic, legal, and health perspective and decided how to move forward. The club's top priorities were health-related and economic viability. When talking about the economics of Club 6, the club representative also referred to the issuance of club tokens which lead to extra income. Additionally, digital traffic increased revenue through e-commerce and social media advertisements.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and the ghost games, Club 10 also introduced digital projects. As part of the Swiss Football League (first and second division), the clubs supported the idea of livestreams on the clubs' websites because there was a broadcaster's camera at every match either way for highlights. This allowed the fans to watch their team's matches online. Another digital project was to offer virtual tickets and virtual beers. Even though the income generated through this virtual campaign had not been significant, the fans could still feel the bond to the football club. Another way to ensure the connection between Club 10 and its fans was that the club representative regularly met with fans and fan groups in the empty stadium. Thereby, both parties shared their thoughts. When asked about the crisis management measures employed, Interviewee 10 emphasized the short-time working compensation scheme, which was a one of the main benefits for the club. Club 10 used video conferencing to keep the players in the loop and do the respective exercise sessions as examples of internal communication. However, at

the same time, a lot more self-responsibility was demanded from the players' side. As for the internal communication with employees, it can be said that during the first wave of the pandemic in Switzerland, there was not much communication within the football club. Generally speaking, Club 10 had a pretty uncomplicated, pragmatic, and direct communication strategy. There was no fixed communication approach like at Club 9. As aforementioned, Club 10 enjoyed a great degree of loyalty from fans and sponsors. For both of them, the club decided to wait until the end of the 2019-20, as well as the 2020-21 season to assess the damage caused by the pandemic (i.e., number of ghost games). To thank the fans who remained loyal to the club, existing season card holders received a free 2021-22 season card. This action was well received. Yet, many fans decided to still pay the regular price. During the first wave of the pandemic, the sponsors were informed that there will not be any advertising service from the club and that the non-performed advertisement service would be assessed at the end of the season. On the upside, certain advertisement services could be provided through the livestream. Interviewee 10 also suggested that many smaller sponsorships would not be dependent on the respective service. However, Club 10 decided to place a double-page newspaper advertisement, where all sponsors were listed, to thank them for their loyalty. Once it was possible again, a few sponsor events at the stadium were also organized, to which the sponsors were invited to see one another again. As seen here, the communication approach can be described as pragmatic – be it in person, via telephone, or mail. When asked about the sponsorship strategy concerning the duration, Interviewee 10 stated that it is always the intention to enter 3-year deals – especially with more significant sponsors. The club was even able to attract a new sponsorship deal worth a six-figure sum during the pandemic. A further financial injection amounted to CHF 350,000 from the so-called *à-fonds-perdu* contributions from the government. This amount was based on a percental share of previous spectator income. Regarding whether Club 10 employed scenario planning, the club representative stated that scenarios are used during the budgeting process. Due to conservative budgeting, no extensive adaptations were needed throughout the pandemic.

As described in the previous chapter, Club 4 implemented pay cuts and used sensitivity analysis and scenario planning in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, constant communication with all heads of departments was evident. Besides that, the club was concerned with effective cost management. From the example of Club 4, it can be seen that the club's strategy was reviewed as a whole. In the crisis phase, the club started by specifying a mission statement. Thereafter, investments were made in the

facilities (i.e., an extension of the stadium), the playing squad and the management level. The focus on younger players in the team was described as a medium-term investment by Interviewee 4, which is also reflected in the club's sponsorship strategy. Because of this ongoing adjustment of the sporting strategy and the consequent conviction that there is much potential to be exploited in the upcoming years, the club only enters into sponsorship agreements on a year-to-year basis to not sell itself at a too low price. For the club's viability, it also received governmental support. When asked about lobbying activities from the club, Interviewee 4 stated that both Serie A and Serie B (first and second division) clubs engaged in lobbying activities, one example, he mentioned, was a letter had been sent to Mr. Draghi (Prime Minister of Italy) 10 days prior the interview. On the subject of communication with fans, Interviewee 4 mentioned social media as the primary tool for that.

Likewise, Club 2 utilized social media to interact and stay in contact with the fans and ensure a certain degree of proximity to the club and the players. At various conferences, which Interviewee 2 attended, it was always suggested to do more in the digital world. For that reason, the club intensified the digitalization efforts (e.g., online ticket purchase). From the economic perspective, Interviewee 2 stated that besides the governmental support of EUR 1.5 million, it was also crucial that practically all sponsors stayed on board. Because of these measures, the club did not have to reduce the cost level. The club representative emphasized that the connection and communication were of even greater importance in the crisis phase. Moreover, due to the pandemic and the just-mentioned digitalization strategy, Club 4 was in active contact with its sponsors to compensate the advertising services through online channels.

The importance of a good relationship with sponsors is also apparent at Club 8. Interviewee 8 suggested that the communication approach with sponsors is a similar one as with the employees. There is not much bureaucracy. Direct communication is appreciated and a part of the organizational culture. This way of communicating also resulted in the understanding of employees and sponsors. On the one hand, through that understanding and flexibility, employees saw that the reason was outside the club and that the pay cuts were necessary. On the other hand, transparent communication led the sponsors to show understanding. Additionally, long-term sponsorship contracts also contributed to loyalty. Only a few sponsors requested some form of compensation. From a bird's eye view, it can be said that Clubs 6 and 8 explicitly stated their two major priorities during the pandemic. On one side, the intention was to ensure the club's

viability from an economic standpoint. On the other side, the players' health was of key importance because this allowed them to play the whole season. Otherwise, there would have been pressure from sponsors to renegotiate. When asked about the call for more sports entrepreneurship, Interviewee 8 was only able to announce that there will be a new project. However, further details could not be revealed during the interview. Besides the governmental support due to imposed restrictions related to the 500-people segments, Club 8 also received direct payments from the Finnish football association.

Club 7 received governmental support as well. For example, short-time working compensation like multiple other clubs from Switzerland, England, or Scotland was one form of financial support. Another form was the replacement money which was based on previous figures of spectator income (see Clubs 9 and 10). Requesting public support was amongst the first measures employed by Club 7. Additionally, the club representative contacted the creditors in order to ask for a deferment of payment. Further requests were sent in order not to pay any more rents. From a communicative point of view, regular contact was ensured to keep the employees updated with new regulations and information. In doing so, uncertainties were taken away to some degree. As for the communication with the players, they were informed and briefed about the situation on a two-week basis. Interviewee 7 believed that because of longstanding and good relationships with their sponsors, the club did not receive refund requests. Once it was allowed to have people attending the matches, sponsors and season card holders were the first ones to be considered. As for the communication towards the fans, Club 7 used social media to inform the fans about the current situation at the club – be it about home workouts of the players or the training start. Interviewee 7 also suggested that the fans had not been concerned with football during the first wave of the pandemic since it was also a totally new situation for them. When asked about the possibility of acting in a more entrepreneurial way during the crisis, Interviewee 7 claimed that due to constant changes in regulations and the subsequent adaptations of protection concepts, there was no actual room to proactively look for new projects – also given the small number of employees.

#### 4.1.6 Post-Crisis Phase

The opinions on the question about a possible change in consumer behavior were divided. Some club representatives stated that the fans could not wait, while others sensed a certain hesitancy to return to a packed stadium. Some had the opinion that priorities

might have shifted. The importance of fans, teamwork, and communication was regarded as some of the significant learnings. Additionally, the push for digitalization, as well, which would be here to stay.

Interviewee 4 expected that more people would want to the stadium. One reason the Italian club representative mentioned was also touched upon by the English club representative of Club 3 – namely the excitement after the two countries' national teams were in the final of the UEFA European Championship in 2021. Furthermore, Interviewee 3 added some people could not wait to return to the stadium after 18 months. Despite expecting a bit more fans in the ground of Club 3, it was also expounded that there will also be a group of people who might not feel safe to expose themselves in the crowds due to health-related risks. For that reason, Club 3 advised the fans to wear masks in the stadium. Interviewee 6 expected that the beginning would be hesitant due to the same risks as just mentioned. Generally, the club representative's viewpoint was that the return of the fans would happen in a gradual manner. In Switzerland, Club 9 already experienced two games at the time of the interview. According to Interviewee 9, the urge was noticeable that the fans would want to return. The previously-described project by Club 9 with 180 minutes of entertainment and the fan village was very well received, also from a catering point of view with an increase of CHF 4.50 in consumption to pre-pandemic times, from CHF 9.50 to CHF 15.00. Due to pressure from fans, the club has also worked with a local pharmacy to provide a testing center due the current policy to enter a stadium either vaccinated, recovered, or tested. Also, the discussion in Switzerland about personalized tickets clouded the whole excitement a little - despite a new record in season tickets sold. Interviewee 7 had a similar view, saying that while people would be excited about football and the social exchange, the COVID certificates had caused negative feedback. Club 10, the third club from Switzerland, also recognized some hesitation due to the certificate. Therefore, Club 10 established the possibility to get tested on site as well. One home match was played so far at the time of the interview, where fewer people showed up than prior to the pandemic. Besides the reason of the certificates, school holidays and a potential shift in priorities were suggested by Interviewee 10. Additionally, the club representative was wondering whether younger people, who had not attended any matches before the pandemic, would find their way into football stadiums – as it used to be. Overall, Interviewee 10 could not give a conclusive expectation. There was also a level of uncertainty at Club 1 concerning the consequences of personalized tickets on the active fan scene. Interviewee 1 added that these fan scenes would have a significant

impact on the general public's appetite. Moreover, the club representative continued: "I hope that love for football will remain untouched - both from an economic and emotional point of view." (Interviewee 1, personal communication, July 16, 2021). Then, Interviewee 1 emphasized that football would thrive on the emotions of the fans. Club 8 already had this point of view on the day of the interview because the Finnish season started in spring. According to Interviewee 8, about 60% to 70% of the fans returned to the stadium. The only reason given was the incomplete vaccination campaign in Finland, but apart from that, the club representative did not know how to interpret the development. When asked the question about the potential shift in consumer behavior, Interviewee 5 voiced concerns. The club representative stated that they would expect a drop in spectators of 20% to 30%, yet hoping that some of them will gradually return. With this, Interviewee 5 touched upon the point, mentioned by Interviewee 10, of priorities. A change in priorities and subsequent routines would be possible, as the people got used to the situation and found other ways to spend money. Nevertheless, the club representative also reckoned that there will still be many fans who want to come back to the stadium.

When asked about the learnings and how they will incorporate them for the future benefit of the club, Interviewee 8 stated that scenario planning would be continued beyond the crisis. However, the club representative also stated that with the massive magnitude of the current pandemic, scenario planning could only be a small part of the solution because one could not prepare for something like the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviewee 1 also emphasized that scenario planning would be supplemented by economic key figures, such as stadium utilization, in addition to the sporting situation. Furthermore, the club could benefit a lot in communicating with all kinds of stakeholders for the future. From a strategic perspective, Interviewee 1 stressed that digitalization and sustainability would be of great importance for the club's future. Lastly, the club representative stated that teamwork proved to be the critical success factor during the pandemic. Likewise, Interviewee 7 put the employees, their flexibility, and teamwork as a whole in the center of attention as he looked back on the previous months. As Club 7 is rather small and their subsequent focus would be on everyday business, strategic changes would not be feasible. Yet, Interviewee 7 was sure that with the support of the employees, they would find a way no matter the challenge. Interviewee 9 also praised the teamwork and the overall structure of the club with a sporting side and an economic side. Additionally, he said that the employees themselves had acted more entrepreneurial than

before the pandemic. Despite the likely increase of videoconferencing tools, Interviewee 10 attached importance to the personal contact with the employees and people in general. The pandemic also showed the importance of fans at the stadiums. However, with no fans at the stadiums, engagement with them online through social media proved to be essential for Club 2. A similar viewpoint was shared by Interviewee 3 as he specified that communication and community work had been success factors. Interviewee 3 also referred to the idiom: “You cross that bridge when you come to it.” (Interviewee 3, personal communication, July 19, 2021), indicating the unpredictability of such events. Interviewee 6 went in a somewhat related direction, as he stated that once the situation is back to normal, priorities would shift again, thereby suggesting that the world of football is dynamic. As an outlook, Club 6 would also continue with its strict budgeting approach. Due to problems with the broadcaster, Club 6 potentially will look for own solutions for the fans to watch games. Another meaningful learning was the club’s digitalization efforts (e.g., digital communication).

## **4.2 Interviews (Experts)**

The results of the expert interviews are divided into two parts. Firstly, the insights from sport management experts are outlined. Secondly, the inputs from the interview with a crisis management and communication expert are presented.

### **4.2.1 Expert Interviews (Sport Management)**

Expert 1 divided the challenges into two categories. Firstly, due to the absence of fans, emotions had been missing, which are crucial in football. Secondly, this also impacted the financial statements of the football clubs. With this, the expert also pointed out the differences in revenue stream dependencies amongst European leagues. Expert 3 also suggested that a challenge was the absence of fans in the stadiums. Additionally, he stated that crises could also be regarded as opportunities. Furthermore, he claimed that there had been an underlying crisis in football already before the COVID-19 pandemic. Therewith, hinting to a lack of active and meaningful stakeholder involvement.

Expert 3 specified that the value co-creation process was disrupted due to the absence of the fans, whereby the match event as an engagement platform was missing social interactions. While connecting the dots to the first question, Expert 1 stated that there would be no stadium atmosphere without fans. When referring to the survey results



of the statements on value co-creation, Expert 3 suggested that there would be a gap between what the clubs say and what the clubs actually do. As an example, he mentioned the discussions about the so-called Super League, a European-wide league project with top clubs only. Thereby, Expert 3 claimed a lack of fan involvement from the football clubs. A short while after, he referred to a German second division club, which lives both value co-creation and active fan involvement. At the same time, as suggested by the expert, the club sees itself as part of the local community.

When asked about how football clubs can prepare for an impending crisis, Expert 3 referred to an article. The respective article by Germelmann (2020) had been incorporated into the literature of this thesis. On the other side, Expert 1 asserted that the time horizon of the question of (December 2019/January 2020 until March 2020) would be too narrow. Instead, he recommended having a long-term perspective on that. Football clubs should also work with scenario planning by including sporting and economic eventualities. Additionally, football clubs should contractually secure themselves to some degree.

When asked about the connection between economic and sporting success during the crisis, Expert 1 replied that there had been a change because clubs were forced to focus on survival and remain liquid. According to Expert 1, football clubs could learn from the business world how to run a club in a financially sustainable fashion. Expert 3 criticized that this consideration is not wide enough. He recommended football clubs to orient themselves according to the Tripe Bottom Line System, where economic, social, and environmental values are considered. The sole focus on economic and financial success would lead to a crisis by itself, and the club's fans would consequently leave.

Expert 1 primarily focused on social media-related content when answering how the football clubs could maintain a special bond with their fans. Another insight he mentioned was that clubs could allow a specific number of fans to watch the training sessions, for example, while still complying with the guidelines given by the authorities. Expert 3, on the other hand, took up the example of the German club again that focused on the wider community. One example Expert 3 mentioned was that the club provided a local school with computers so that the pupils could attend class virtually. Thus, especially those activities entirely unrelated to sports would function as boosts for fan loyalty and club identification. Then, Expert 3 continued to talk about another example from a local basketball club, whose season card holders, as a result, did not request any money back. The same had been evident with the basketball club's sponsors, who

remained their financial contribution untouched. Moreover, Expert 3 specified that sponsors could be fans themselves as well. Expert 1 cited a similar example when talking about Club 9, which had been able to keep the season card holders on board through direct and transparent communication. When asking Expert 1 a follow-up question about sponsorship strategies of football clubs during the pandemic, he stated that attracting new sponsors had hardly been possible because of investment stops of companies. Hence, clubs had to ensure that the existing ones would remain. In doing so, communication was a critical success factor in finding a suitable solution for the sponsor. Often, as Expert 1 specified, it had been about looking for new compensation models to still provide the respective advertisement service. For this, football clubs had to find new ways through social media or further matchday-unrelated compensation opportunities.

Expert 1 was asked what he would regard as crucial measures once the football seasons were interrupted in a separate question. To which he replied that clubs' primary focus should be to remain financially above water. Further, Expert 1 emphasized the significance of external and internal communication. During the interview with Expert 3, internal communication was also touched upon. Thereby, Expert 3 stated that communication should always be authentic and credible. On internal communication, Expert 1 said that it would be necessary to explain the situation and the bigger picture behind pay cuts so that players would understand. In another follow-up question on that topic, despite having leverage with personnel costs, Expert 1 stated that layoffs would lead to uncertainty and a bad mood in the club. If possible, a solution like a wage cut would be much better, thus mastering the challenge together. Besides examining the cost structure, the football clubs should also look at the revenue side to either ensure the corresponding income or find new sources of income. Another important aspect, Expert 1 mentioned, is to deal with a crisis in a team and to be able to work across functions.

When posing the call for more sports entrepreneurship, Expert 3 stressed the importance of entrepreneurship alone being narrow-minded and too focused on financial intentions. Instead, he suggested using the Triple Bottom Line System once again, thus adopting a broader view. Thereby, he did not deny the importance of entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship – yet, football clubs should aim for the triad for the good of the greater society. While answering, Expert 3 also referred to the concept of the uncertainty of outcome, which he suggested would not display the whole reason why sports events attract audiences. According to him, much more focus should be paid to the value co-creation potential of such an event. Expert 1 took another approach when answering the

respective question. He advised that football clubs should not be entirely dependent on matchday revenue. One example he mentioned was that clubs could establish an e-sports team. Nevertheless, he also provided an example that was detached from the core business of football, leading to a lower degree of dependence on football-related income. He stated that he would know football clubs that established programs where start-ups could pitch, and the club would consequently decide whether to participate and invest financially. At this moment, Expert 1 stressed that respective ethical and moral standards need be present for such investments. Also, carefully examining trends could also help football clubs to find new paths.

According to Expert 1, a potential shift in consumer behavior could be the case as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic because many people had experienced how their lives were without football – money and time could be saved. An additional reason for potentially lower stadium attendance, noticed by Expert 1, was the COVID certificate in Switzerland. According to him, especially the fan curves would value anonymity. At the same time, these fans would co-create the most value with their chants during 90 minutes. Therefore, viewed as a whole, Expert 1 expected that fewer people would attend matches in the stadiums. A similar opinion was shared by Expert 3, as he stated that fans had rethought their value system priorities of consuming behavior. As a result, potential adaptations could become evident.

The last question was about the potential ways football clubs can incorporate the learnings for the club's future. In his answer, Expert 3 talked again about the underlying crisis of the football business. Thereby, he recommended that clubs should promote active stakeholder involvement. Expert 1, on the other hand, voiced the possibility that it could be the case that all is forgotten when football is back to normal. Besides that, he advised that the clubs to recap what had helped and what would need improvements to optimal preparation for new challenges. He claimed that the learnings during a crisis would also be of great benefit in normal times. Digitalization was the significant learning concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, which would have already helped clubs find new income sources before the pandemic.

#### 4.2.2 Expert Interview (Crisis Management and Crisis Communication)

To the question of what measures organizations should take between the signal detection and the crisis being present in the given country, Expert 2 mentioned that the

company should look at the risk and whether they had already identified it. As a consequence of the COVID-19 crisis, pandemics should be included on the risk radar of the clubs – just like, mass panics or fire outbreaks. Also, companies should work with scenario planning. If the crisis takes longer than a couple of days, more scenarios should be developed, and existing ones should be constantly adapted as the situation evolves. Additionally, crisis plans should be either consulted or created. Moreover, if there had not been a crisis response team at disposal, one should be created. Expert 2 stated that the team should consider the situation on a regular basis. She also mentioned that the quickness of reaction would likely depend on the organization's or the club's international scope. Plans for business continuity should also be considered. Such plans ensure continuous operations despite a situation where, for example, a key person of the organization is infected.

Expert 2 claimed that internal crisis communication would frequently be neglected. Yet, employees are the most important stakeholders of an organization because they have a double role in a crisis situation, as Expert 2 suggested. On the one hand, by employing its workforce's capabilities, an organization can solve the crisis. On the other hand, they also act as ambassadors of the company with respect to the given organization's current situation. Due to the relevance of employees, it is of crucial importance to explain the situation, the possible risks and inform them regularly about current developments. Expert 2 stressed that continuous communication would be a key success factor. Also, one of the essential tasks of crisis management and communication is to keep the people away from danger.

As for the communication with fans, Expert 2 suggested that both crisis communication and regular communication applies. Regarding the former, a lot of what was said for the employees is also valid here. As Expert 2 specified, because crises can be very emotional experiences, it is necessary to explain the situation to the fans and the employees, keep them informed and offer them a certain security. The other side of the story would be the usual communication. Expert 2 mentioned that there is no matching comparison for the intense relationship between a fan and her or his favorite football club. Therefrom, the clubs were challenged to find new and creative ways to keep in touch with the fans because of the crisis. "Do something for the city, do something for the people that are your fans." (Expert 2, personal communication, July 28, 2021). Hereby, Expert 2 implied that the football clubs are oftentimes tied to the local region or city, so they should create values for the respective community. Aside from that, the expert suggested that

people had recognized that they could also go about their daily lives without football while referring to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. For that reason, communication is vital. Nevertheless, Expert 2 stressed that communication is also about listening, amongst others, listening to the public opinion.

As Expert 2 explained, an organizational crisis would need immediate actions and responses on many fronts. Because the COVID-19 pandemic had affected the whole public, the companies' task had been to implement instructional crisis communication. This means, in effect to translate instructions given from the public health authorities into internal guidelines. Further, as Expert 2 expounded, the primary responsibility would be to decide what actions to take – given a scenario – and to communicate the decisions and actions then internally. Moreover, such a crisis with an external cause would allow companies to look abroad and learn from the companies and countries dealing with it.

When answering question 5 about the possibility for sports organizations to be opportunity-seeking during a crisis, Expert 2 suggested having two teams – given a long-lasting crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. One team should be concerned with the economic viability of the organization. The second team should then think about new opportunities from a long-term perspective. However, Expert 2 also mentioned that managing both of them would likely be challenging.

If the crisis takes multiple months and is accompanied by waves of crisis phases, organizations should learn at the end of every wave, ensuring a continuous learning process. A complement strategy would be, in the post-crisis phase, for companies to gain a certain distance to the crisis and then start to examine the entire crisis period, derive learnings, and implement change projects.

### **4.3 Survey**

A total of 52 clubs participated in the survey, representing 27 different leagues and 19 different countries. As shown in Figure 11, Germany was the country with the highest number of participants (ten), followed by seven Swiss football clubs and six clubs from Italy. Nine countries were each represented by one club.

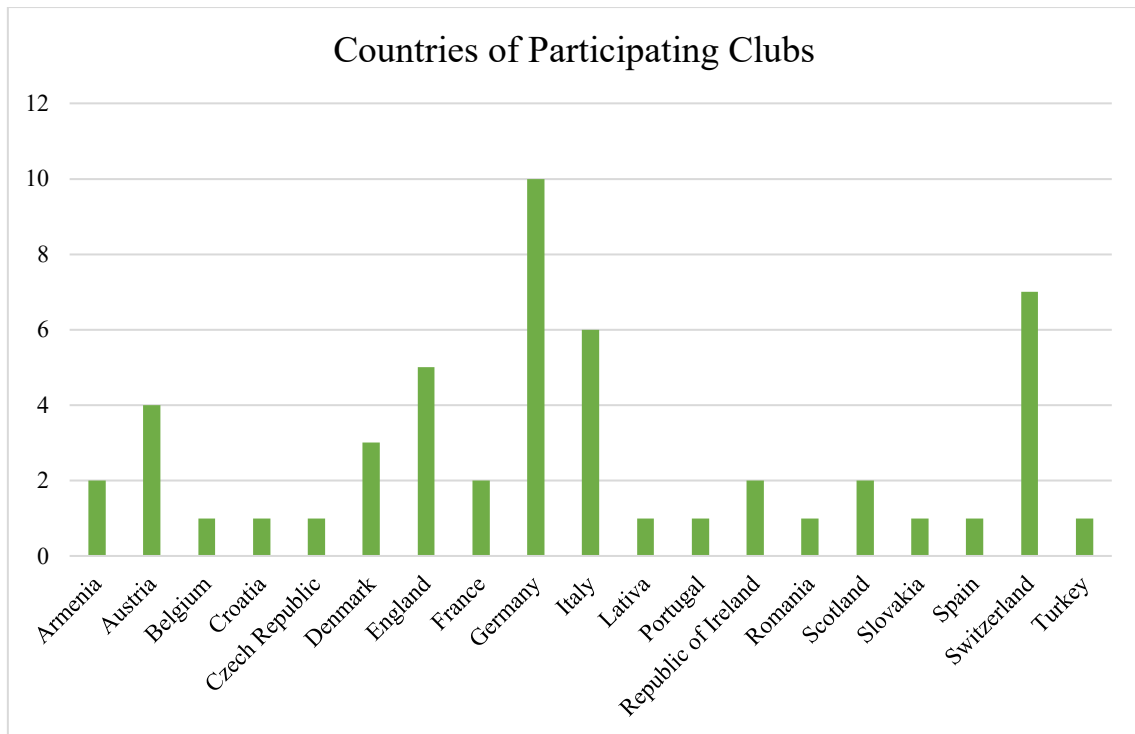


Figure 11: Countries of Participating Clubs (Own Illustration)

Figure 12 displays the league levels of the 52 football clubs. With 37 clubs, the vast majority (71%) were first league clubs in the 2019-20 or 2020 season – depending on the league format. Twelve further clubs were in their country’s second division. Lastly, a total of three football clubs from the third tier participated in the online survey.

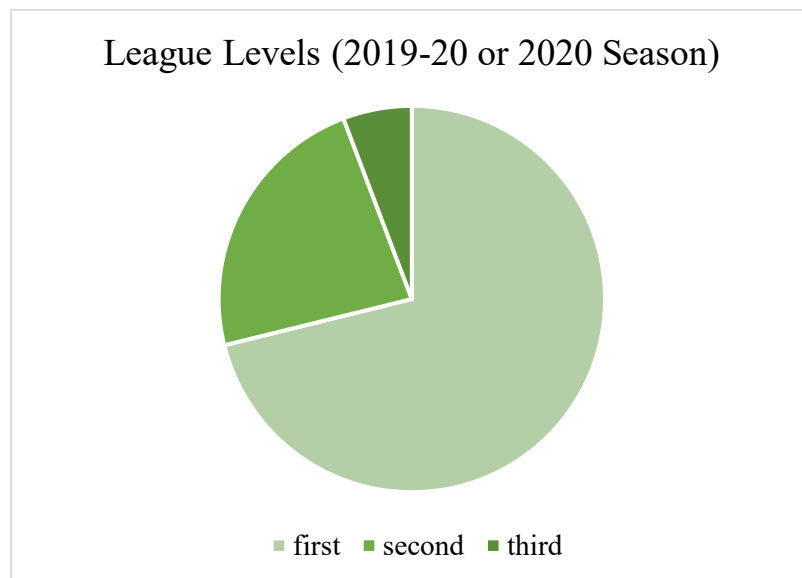


Figure 12 League Levels in the 2019-20 / 2020 Season (Own Illustration)

Figure 13 shows the degree of approval on two statements about football fans. 52 out of 52 participants rated the first statement, whereas 48 out of 52 participants rated the second one. It is visible that almost eight in ten football clubs agree that fans are an integral part of the club and co-create value. As it can be seen, the responses to the second statement are more dispersed. 54% of the football clubs somewhat agree with the second statement, with 15% agreeing and 17% disagreeing.

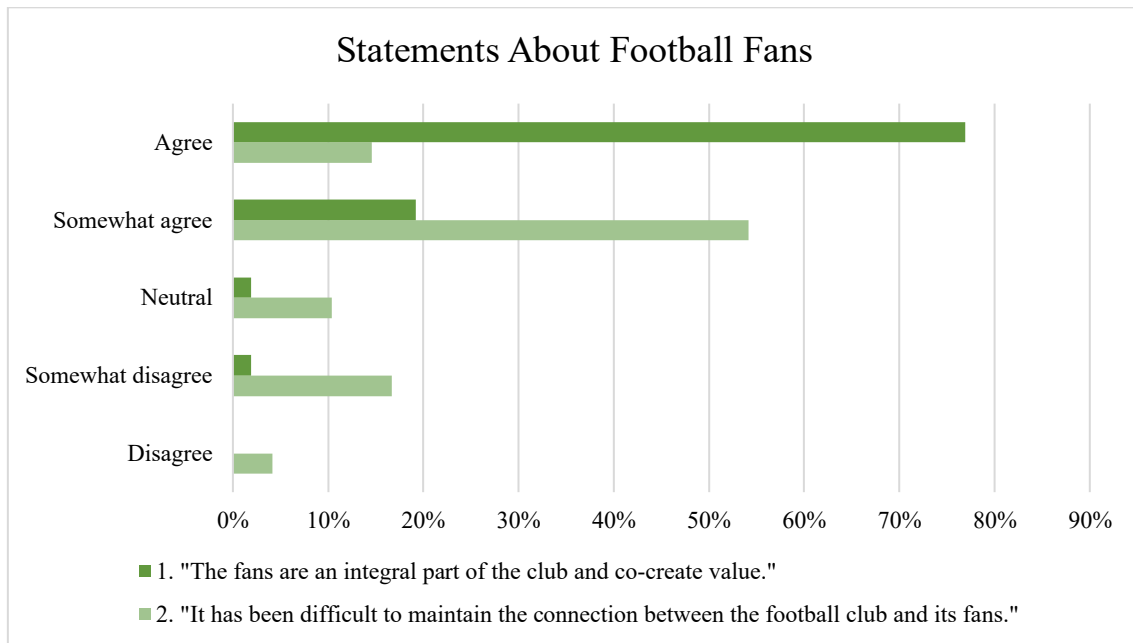


Figure 13: Statements About Football Fans (Own Illustration)

The figure below visualizes the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the revenue streams of the given football clubs. Almost all clubs (96.15%) have experienced a decrease in matchday-related income as a consequence of the pandemic. Also, commercial income has dropped at more than 80% of the football clubs. Revenues related to broadcasting or media have been negatively impacted at 23.08% of the clubs. One out of 52 football clubs indicated that the club’s revenue had not decreased.

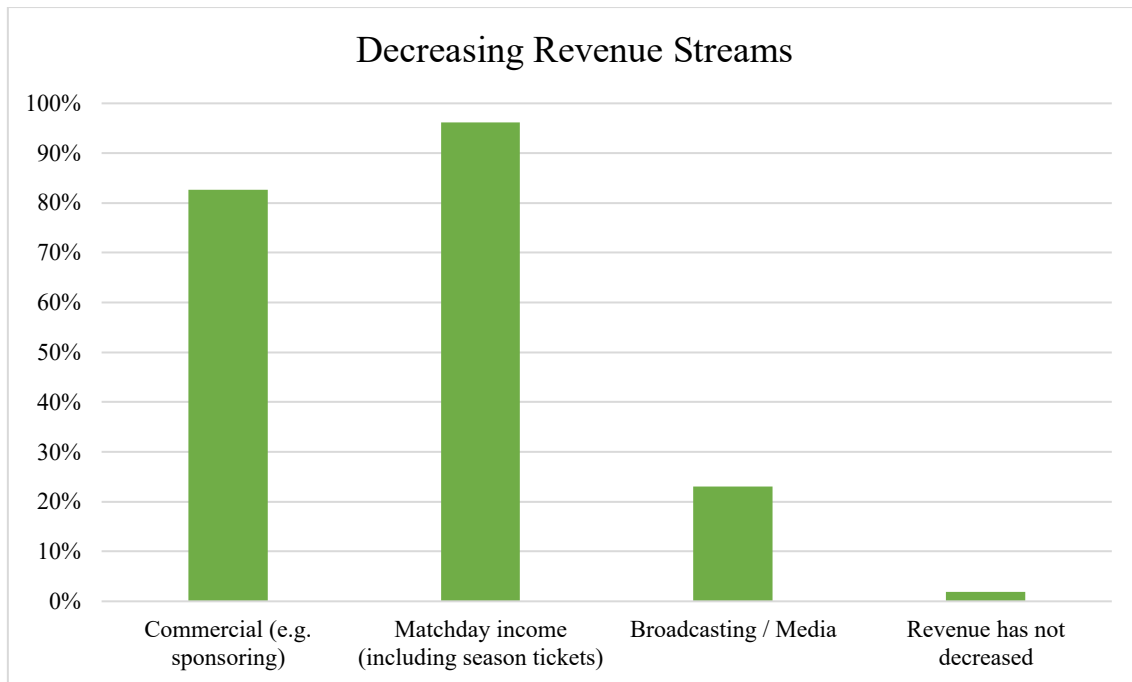


Figure 14: Decreasing Revenue Streams (Own Illustration)

43 out of 52 football clubs have implemented cost reduction measures as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. This number reflects almost 83% of the survey respondents. On the other hand, nine clubs have not reduced their cost structure, representing just above 17% of the participants. From a geographical perspective, all ten German and all seven Swiss clubs have lowered their cost levels.

When asked about financial support due to the pandemic, 55.77% of the football clubs stated that they had received the respective help from the government. In contrast, 44.23% of the survey participants have not received financial support. However, all seven clubs from Switzerland indicated that they had received governmental support.

There were two questions about the existence or creation of crisis management teams or knowledge. The first question was whether a crisis response team existed or crisis management capabilities had been in place before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. 51 clubs answered this question, with 16 football clubs (31.37%), which had one or the other in place before the pandemic. The remaining 68.63% stated that neither the response team, nor the capabilities had been existent. The second question was whether a crisis response team or the respective crisis management capabilities were established since the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis. Again, 52 answers were entered,



of which 30 clubs indicated that since the outbreak of the pandemic, one or the other was established.

	<b>Question 7:</b>		<b>Question 8:</b>	
	<b>Before the Outbreak</b>		<b>Since the Outbreak</b>	
Yes	16	31.37%	30	58.82%
No	35	68.63%	22	43.14%

Table 10: Survey Answers to Questions 7 and 8 (Own Illustration)

When analyzing the data of Table 10 more in-depth, certain insights become evident: Five clubs out of the 16 answering “Yes” to Question 7 (before the outbreak) answered “No” to Question 8 (since the outbreak). On the other side, 19 football clubs out of the 35 who answered “No” to Question 7, did answer “Yes” to Question 8. The one club not responding to Question 7, can be allocated to the 22 clubs that answered “No” to Question 8.

When asked about the weightings of the football club's reactive and proactive crisis management during the COVID-19 pandemic, 28 out of 52 (53.85%) football clubs indicated that their crisis management was equally reactive and proactive. As visible in Figure 15, each option of “100% reactive”, as well as “100% proactive” was chosen just once. 16 football clubs, representing 30.77% of all clubs, stated that crisis management was 75% reactive and 25% proactive. On the opposite side of this, six clubs, reflecting a share of 11.54%, suggested that crisis management at their site was more proactive (25%) than reactive (75%). Therefore, it can be said that there was a tendency towards a greater stake of reactive crisis management.

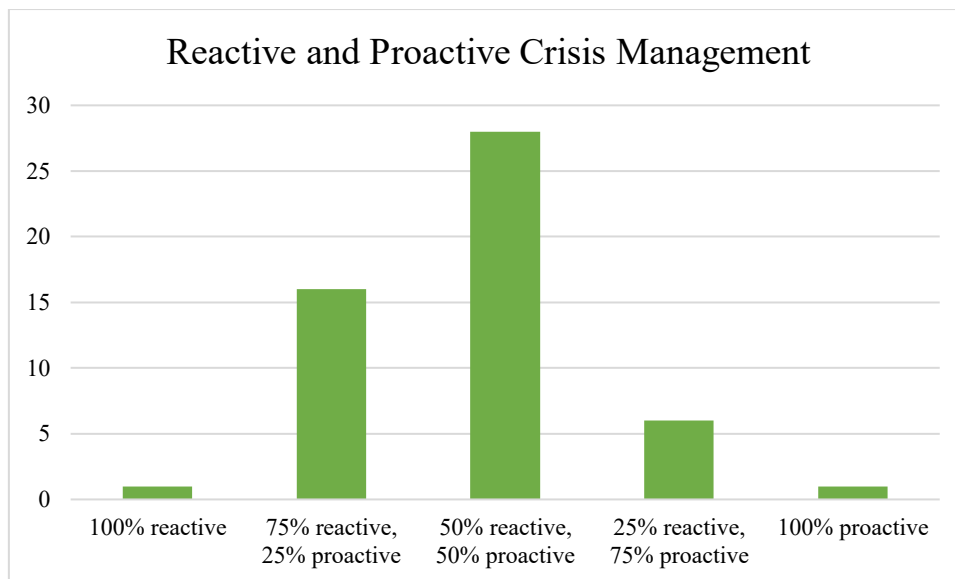


Figure 15: Reactive and Proactive Crisis Management (Own Illustration)

The last question was whether they would systematically use the crisis management gathered throughout the previous two seasons for organizational learning and training, to which 51 participants responded. About three-quarters answered “Yes”. Eleven football clubs “Do not know yet” and two clubs do not plan to use the gathered knowledge systematically.

## 5 Discussion

To collect data for the thesis, 711 football clubs from 41 out of the 54 UEFA member associations were contacted. While the ten interviewees (football clubs) represent eight countries and nine football leagues, the 52 survey participants stem from 19 countries and 27 leagues. Therewith, the paper covers a relatively wide geographical range, making it possible to gain various insights from the clubs.

### 5.1 Impact on the BMC of European Football Clubs

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the various governmental response (Hale, et al., 2021), football across the European continent was affected differently (UEFA, 2021). During the first wave in spring 2020, seasons were interrupted or abandoned except for Belarus (UEFA, 2021). When assessing the nine building blocks of the *Business Model Canvas* by Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010), it can be said that football was halted (*Key Activities*), with many players and staff in lockdown (*Key Resources*). Thereby, their contribution to the overall *Value Proposition* was disrupted.

The research has shown that practically all football clubs have experienced lower revenue figures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as expounded by Hammerschmidt et al. (2021). The impact on the three revenue streams described by UEFA (2021) is congruent with the survey results (see Figure 14 on page 62) and the interviews. Matchday-related income has been hit the hardest, followed by the commercial revenue from sponsorships and income generated from broadcasting. However, many of the interviewed football clubs managed to maintain the vast majority of their sponsors. Due to the unique cost structure of football clubs with a great weight of players' wages (UEFA, 2021), the decreasing revenues increased the cost pressures at many football clubs. Almost all interviewees also mentioned this, and above 80% of the survey participants acted upon this pressure. When incorporating the impacts into the BMC, it can be depicted that the building block of *Revenue Streams* was heavily affected by the pandemic through the loss of matchday-related income, as well as sponsorship and broadcasting revenue to some extent (*Key Partnerships*). Thus, increasing the pressure for the *Cost Structure* to be lowered.

There was also a good portion of club representatives that assessed the absence of fans in their home ground as being challenging. Many view fans as a critical part of their football club and feel like part of the local community. A vast majority of the survey

participants and interviewees agreed to the notion that football fans are of crucial importance for clubs and also co-create value. Expert 2 also suggested that there would be nothing comparable in the business world as a fan who feels so attached to a football club. Empty stadiums reduce the value of a match, according to Interviewees 4 and 7. The statement from Interviewee 2 about the comparison of football fans being the salt for food comprehensibly shows the relevance of football fans in a stadium. Woratschek (2020) would most certainly agree with this statement since the engagement platform (*Value Proposition*) relies on the interaction of various actors. As a result, the fans (Customer Segments) were not able to co-create value (*Customer Relationship*) for the benefit of the sports event, respectively the whole engagement platform (*Value Proposition*). Consequently, the interaction of the football clubs and the fans (*Channels*) was bound to be online or through direct communication towards the fan groups or the broader community.

## 5.2 Crisis Management of the Football Clubs

As previously explained, the thesis utilized the three crisis management phases due to the broad consensus in the literature (Coombs & Laufer, 2017; Firouzi Jahantigh et al., 2018). Figure 16 shows the main measures for football clubs to take in the first phase when faced with a similar crisis as the COVID-19 pandemic.

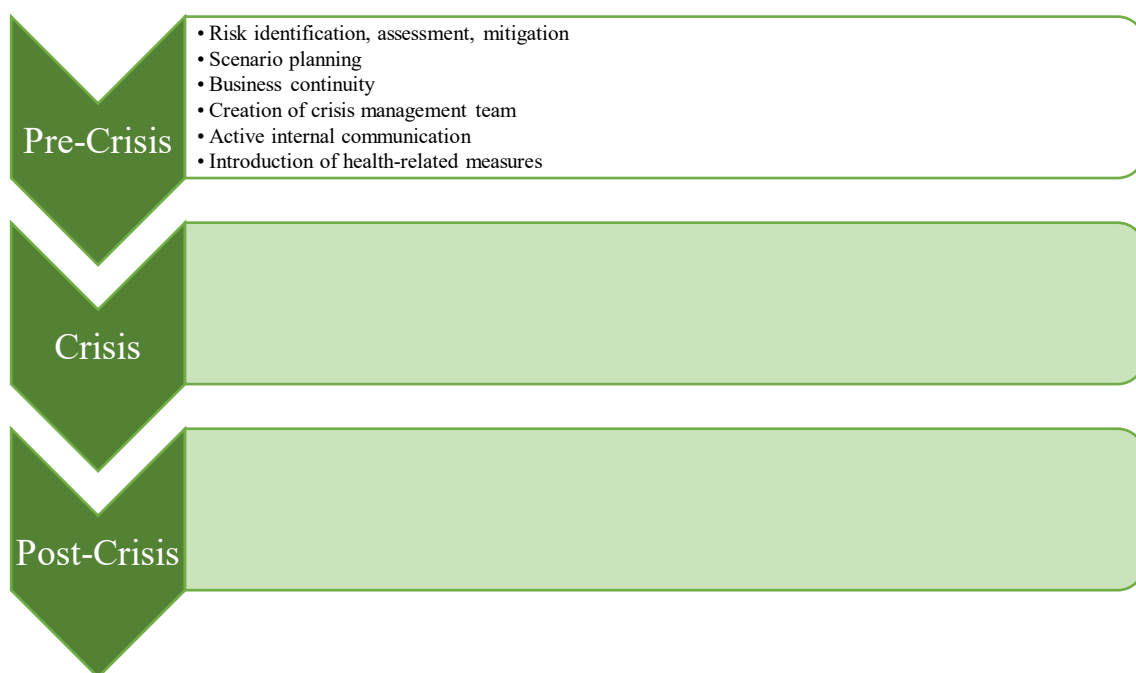


Figure 16: Crisis Management Model for European Football Clubs, Pre-Crisis Phase (Own Illustration)

Expert 2 indicates that the risk of a pandemic had been known before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, multiple interviewees stated that the global pandemic had been unexpected. Because of this crisis, the football clubs should add a potential pandemic on the risk map – besides mass panics or fires. Coombs & Laufer (2017) and Elliott (2013) agree that risk identification and assessment should be prioritized. As Expert 2 suggests and Club 5 proved, an international scope from the club or the owner can benefit the preparation work for an imminent crisis. Football clubs should also use mitigation measures to the extent possible through insurance contractual options (Expert 1, personal communication, July 20, 2021; Pauchant et al., 1991). Expert 2 suggests doing so once the signal is detected if the respective risk or threat is not listed on the map.

If not employed already in regular times, Experts 1 and 2 advise football clubs to utilize scenario planning, a measure also suggested in the literature (Firouzi Jahantigh et al., 2018; Laws & Prideaux, 2006; Vondruška, 2020). About half of the clubs interviewed employed scenario planning throughout the crisis. Expert 2 suggests that the more knowledge is available, the more scenarios should be created. Also, it is essential to update these scenarios constantly. Additionally, scenarios should consider economic indicators and also sporting eventualities. One example would be the number of fans allowed in the stadiums (see Interviewee 9 for example).

Farther, organizations should also create plans for business continuity. Hence, the continuation of the operation is ensured through the possibility of people replacing key personnel in various situations, such as illness.

Expert 2, several authors put importance on creating a crisis response or crisis management team (Pauchant et al., 1991; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993; Santana, 1998; Sahin et al., 2015). If not too small (e.g., Clubs 7 and 10), many football clubs introduced a crisis response team. A similar situation is displayed by the survey results (see Table 10 on page 63). An increase in crisis management capabilities or the introduction of crisis response teams was evident. Five club representatives answered “Yes” to Question 7, while answering “No” to Question 8. It can be assumed that since there had been crisis management knowledge present before the pandemic outbreak, no new team or capabilities had to be established after the start of the crisis. Such a team is then responsible for continuous coordination, steering the football club, and for communication.

From a communicative point of view, it is vital to inform the employees about the situation and potential risks of the impending crisis (Argenti, 2020; Expert 2, personal communication, July 28, 2021; Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). For the whole duration of a crisis, Expert 2 attaches importance that football clubs need to introduce instructional crisis communication, meaning the communication and the implementation of the measures given by the public health authorities. Clubs 1, 4, and 6 had introduced health-related measures already in the pre-crisis phase. Access restrictions for training facilities, the start of testing, or mask mandates are possible examples.

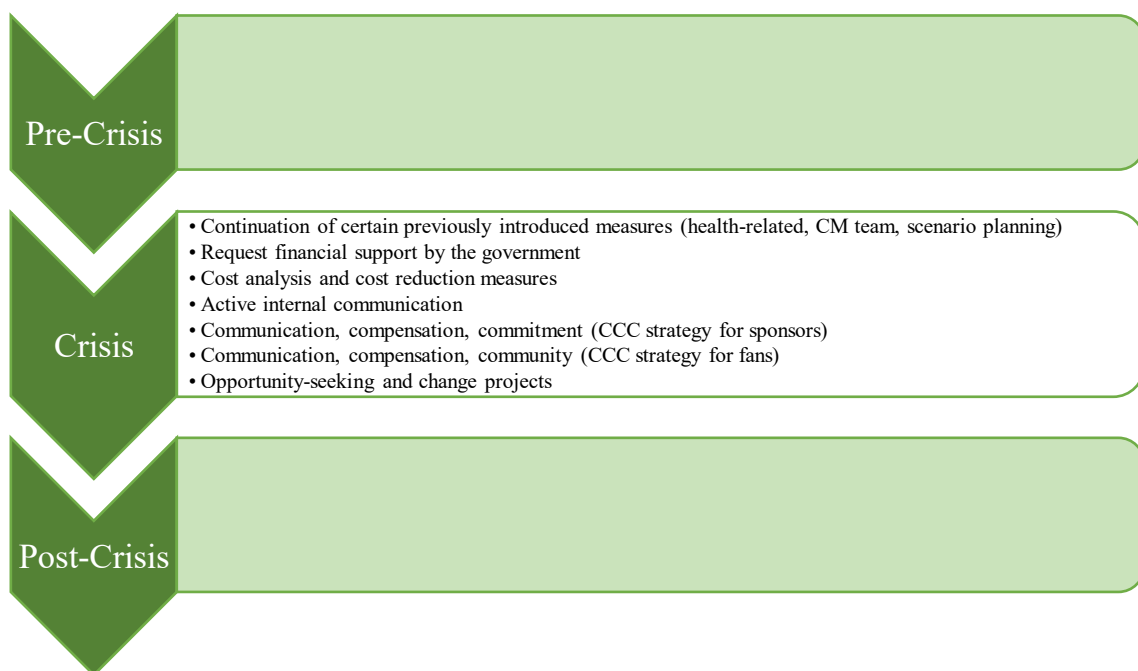


Figure 17: Crisis Management Model for European Football Clubs, Crisis Phase (Own Illustration)

Figure 17 lists the measures mentioned during the interviews that football clubs can employ during the crisis phase of a pandemic. At this stage, continuing with implementing and communicating health-related measures announced by the authorities is highly relevant (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). Generally speaking, ensuring the club's viability was a priority for practically all clubs interviewed in the crisis phase. Consequently, Expert 1 suggests that the link between economic success and sporting success (Garcia-del-Barrio & Szymanski, 2006) should focus on the financial survival of the club. Therefore, scenarios should be subject to constant adaptation and extension by incorporating instructions of authorities (Expert 2, personal communication, July 28, 2021). As many clubs executed, the established crisis management team should hold

regular meetings to analyze the situation's current state and make decisions (Argenti, 2020; Expert 2, personal communication, July 28, 2021). At some clubs, these teams consisted of the heads of departments and club leadership. Thereby, Expert 1 further hints that cross-functional cooperation is critical.

A further measure that can be of help for clubs is public support. The survey result and the interview findings are relatively congruent as the majority of football clubs received some form of support. Therefore, as Club 7 immediately did, clubs should request governmental aid once it becomes available. For example, using the short-time working compensation model allows the clubs to save personnel costs as the government ensures a specific proportion of the salaries. This scheme reflects the need amongst clubs to reduce their cost structure significantly. The potential of these measures is reflected by Club 10, for which the compensations were one of the most significant measures of all.

The cost pressure was also visible (UEFA, 2021), with more than 80% of the survey respondents implementing cost reduction measures. To do that, a generic cost analysis is recommended. Thereby, as experienced by multiple clubs, football organizations should be aware of potential new costs arising (like testing or further costs of health-related measures). On the other side, specific cost drivers can also be neutralized if there is no need. For example, a six-figure decrease in security costs had been evident at Club 10. As performed by Club 9, any investment activities should be halted in this phase at the latest. Another cost-related measure includes the request for deferred payment. Reviewing the playing squads and possibly not renewing certain contracts can also help in reducing the cost level. Additionally, as Club 5 did not want to touch the players' base salary, bonus systems could also be subject to review and restructure. If possible, clubs should avoid layoffs because of the resulting uncertainty amongst staff. Additionally, Interviewee 9 points out that such an approach would lead to a loss of know-how, which would be crucial after the crisis. Instead, Expert 1 recommends pay cuts if necessary. Thus, it is vital that employees are on the same page and all pull together.

At this point, Experts 1, 2, and multiple authors emphasize internal communication contributing to understanding and trust through explaining the situation (Björck & Barthelmess, 2020; Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). Given the public focus on football clubs, Argenti (2020), Expert 2, Frandsen & Johansen (2011), and Interviewee 9 state that active and regular communication with employees helps to prevent internal information from becoming external news. Therefore, Interviewee 9 ordered all direct reports to contact their co-workers twice a week while also complying with himself. In

contrast to Expert 3 and Germelmann (2020), Argenti (2020) and Expert 2 allude that communication should be maintained even if there is no relevant news. Similarly, Interviewee 7 thinks that regular contact decreases uncertainty. Furthermore, the organizational culture, including communication, at Clubs 8 and 10 is best described by pragmatism.

Similar to the situation described by Hammerschmidt et al. (2021), many interviewed clubs had enjoyed loyalty from their sponsors. For that reason, communication, compensation, and commitment are hereby looked at with a focus on sponsors (CCC strategy for sponsors). On the example of Club 9, it can be seen that constant communication ensures the bond to the sponsoring company and helps the football club assess how the sponsor's future commitment might be impacted. Direct communication was also used at Club 8 in Finland. The approach by Club 1 can ensure understanding and loyalty by explaining the situation from the club's point of view. As have the strategies of Clubs 9 and 10 proved, publicly thanking sponsors - through newspaper advertisements or on a wall of solidarity - is well received. Another form to thank them for maintaining their loyalty and financial commitment is to organize sponsor events. Nevertheless, Interviewee 9 states that sponsors should also receive services in exchange for the amount of money they invest. Therefore, Expert 1 and multiple club representatives suggest creating a compensation model. For this, it is also necessary to evaluate how the advertisement services are impacted. Then, using digitalization, compensations can also shift from offline services to online services. Generally speaking, most clubs value long-term commitment and contracts with sponsors. Club 4, on the other hand, has a medium-term sporting strategy influencing its sponsorship approach. Thus, they prefer one-year contracts. According to Expert 1, it is difficult to find new sponsors during a crisis because of their own policy of investment stops. Nevertheless, Clubs 7, 8, and 10 had been successful during the COVID-19 pandemic. If needed, the search for new sponsors should not be halted in a crisis phase.

It is also advised to introduce a CCC strategy for fans (communication, compensation, and community). Besides talking to sponsors, interacting with fans is another form of external communication. However, also compensation and community are important aspects to be considered during a crisis. In general, the significance of fans for football clubs is reflected in all interviews and the survey results. 96% of the survey participants either somewhat agree or fully agree that fans are a vital part of a club and co-create value. This view reflects the notion by Woratschek (2020) that fans co-create



value as part of the engagement platform at a given match. At the same time, almost 70% approve that it was difficult to maintain the bond, at least to some extent. Still, Argenti (2020) stresses the importance of communicating with customers in a crisis situation. Expert 2 also emphasized continuously keeping in touch – even if creative ways need to be found to do that. Given the uncertainties of possible consumer change resulting from the pandemic (UEFA, 2021), multiple club representatives and all three experts acknowledge that priorities and routines might have shifted to some degree. Therefore, communication plays a crucial role if there are no fans allowed in stadiums over a period of time. Consequently, many clubs intensified their social media channels to maintain or strengthen the connection with the fans. Especially if a particular demographic group of fans is not active on social media, other forms of contact should be employed. It is also advised to look for direct contact between club representatives and fans or fan groups if possible. Interviewee 1 did so through telephone calls, while Interviewee regularly met with a limited number of fans in the empty stadium. It is also important that the club uses a direct communication approach regarding compensation models. As Club 10 did with sponsors, it also assessed the “damage” – how many matches the fans could not attend. If the fans do not request refunds for a season card, the clubs should find another way to thank them. Thereby, Club 9 installed a wall of solidarity for the people who did not want their money back for the missed matches of the 2019-20 season. As for the 2020-21 season, Club 9 introduced various compensation possibilities for fans, which eventually strengthened the bond to the club, as two free single tickets, for example. As for higher-priced business seats, the compensations were accordingly adjusted. An example was that they were given a free season card in the regular section. This measure can be seen as an investment into the future since a certain percentage of these seats in the regular section will likely be occupied again in future seasons. Another way to thank the fans was done by Club 10, as all existing season card holders were given the 2021-22 season card for free. The last part of the CCC strategy for fans is about the community. As Expert 2 suggests, most of the clubs are a critical part of the local community, which is why football clubs should also help the community’s people. It is also confirmed by many of the football clubs that they feel like a part of their local region. Also, Argenti (2020) and Frandsen & Johansen (2011) suggest lending a helping hand and being “generous”. According to Expert 3, football clubs shall look beyond their financial dimension by incorporation social and ecological viewpoints. On this, Interviewee 1 recognizes that sustainability has evolved as a major topic throughout the pandemic. On the other side,

the social aspect has been covered more frequently by the football clubs. Examples can include donations of merchandising products (Club 9), shopping rounds for vulnerable people (Club 5), donations to local schools (Club 3, Expert 3), and donations of health-related equipment (Club 6). Additionally, the case of Club 6 showed that a football club could face two crises at once by providing food and various goods during natural catastrophes.

Some of the clubs followed the call for more sports entrepreneurship during a crisis by Hammerschmidt et al. (2021) and Ratten (2020). A similar view is shared by Expert 2 by suggesting that one team of employees focuses on more reactive measures to ensure a club's viability while another team looks for opportunities. The majority of the survey participants believe that their crisis management was about 50% reactive and 50% proactive. Interviewee 7 has the opinion that, especially with a pandemic, a club is concerned chiefly with reactive measures, such as implementing the instructions given by the authorities. On the other hand, with the creation of a fan village and the concept of 180 instead of just 90 minutes of entertainment at matchdays, Club 9 hopes to turn a match into an entire experience even before the actual match and continuing after thereafter as well. Providing the fans with a livestream was a measure in cooperation by many clubs in Switzerland with the broadcasting company. Thereby, certain advertisement services can still be fulfilled (Club 10). In England, it was a similar situation with the program iFollow. In contrast to Club 10, Club 3 did generate money through single payments for each match. Due to intense production for a professional appearance, Club 5 could offset the respective investments by the income from the single payments. Other ways to raise additional money could be through tokens (Club 6) or virtual tickets and virtual beers (Club 10). The latter is likely to revitalize the bond between them and the club when no fans are allowed in the stadium for a longer period. Given the difficulties Club 6 had with broadcasters, it might be the case that they will look for their solutions to broadcast games themselves, similar to Clubs 3, 5, and 10. By investing in young players, the example of Club 4 also displays that the opportunities can be seen on the actual football pitch. Expert 1 emphasized looking beyond matchday-related income. Football clubs could make investments in start-ups to increase economic independence from football to some degree.

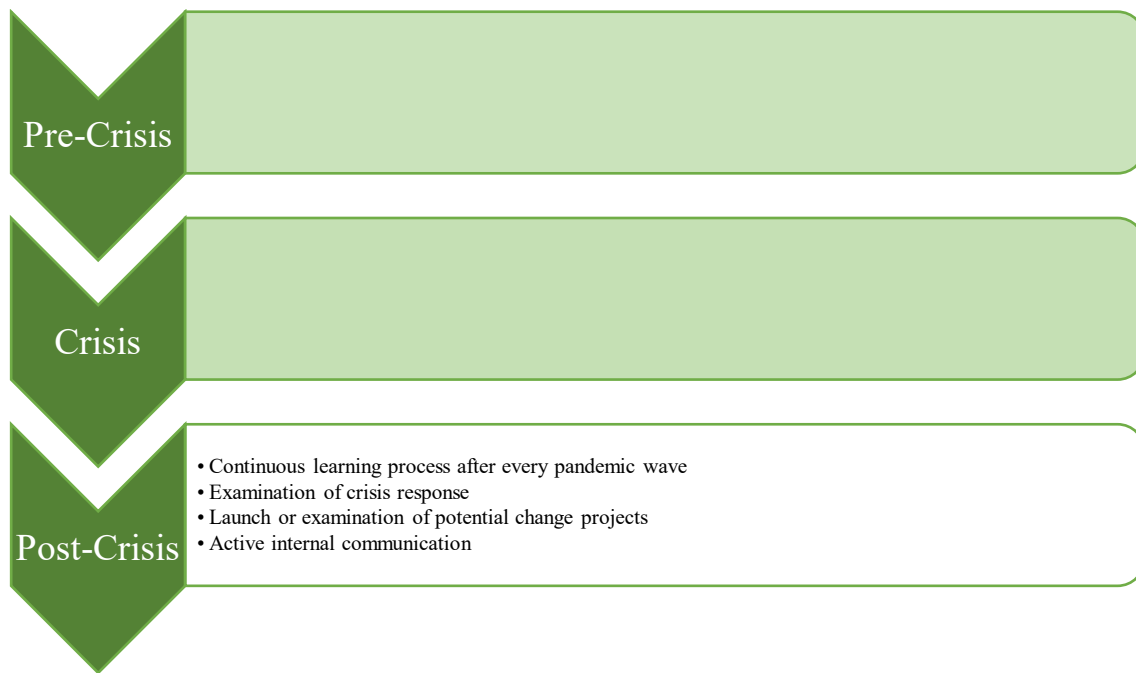


Figure 18: Crisis Management Model for European Football Clubs, Post-Crisis Phase (Own Illustration)

Figure 18 displays the measures to be taken in the post-crisis phase. When asked about the future, Expert 1 and Interviewee 6 specify that humans might forget the essential learnings once everything is back to normal. Interviewees 3 and 8 also suggest that the possibilities to prepare for a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic are limited. Yet, a critical part of the post-crisis phase is the learning aspect (Crandall et al., 2013; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). Expert 2 also evaluates that learning from a crisis is of crucial importance. If the given crisis entails several waves (e.g., pandemic waves), Expert 2 recommends continuously learning at the end of every wave. Also, with a certain distance to the crisis phase, the clubs should examine the entire crisis period to derive learnings and implement change. A certain gap between the survey responses and the interviews is evident concerning the organizational learning part of the crisis. A vast majority of the survey participants plan to systematically use the knowledge gained for organizational learning. On the other hand, the corresponding plans mentioned by the football clubs were not extensive. Instead, many of them agree with Expert 1 in such a way that digitalization can continuously play a more prominent role in a club's operations. Social media, for example, has greatly helped to stay in touch with fans. Some clubs intend to utilize scenario planning beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Since conservative budgeting, as suggested by UEFA (2021), has proved to be successful for Clubs 6 and 10, they will continue with it. From a communicative point of view, Frandsen & Johansen (2011)

advise communicating the change projects that follow due to the crisis, by also incorporating organizational learning.

## 6 Conclusion

In conclusion, due to the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, European football clubs needed to employ measures on multiple levels. The survey results accentuate the findings from the literature. Through the interviews with different European football clubs and three experts, a *Crisis Management Model for European Football Clubs* (CMMEFC) was created (see Figure 19). Given the uniqueness of sports, football club managers can use the model entailing the best practices during crises, especially crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

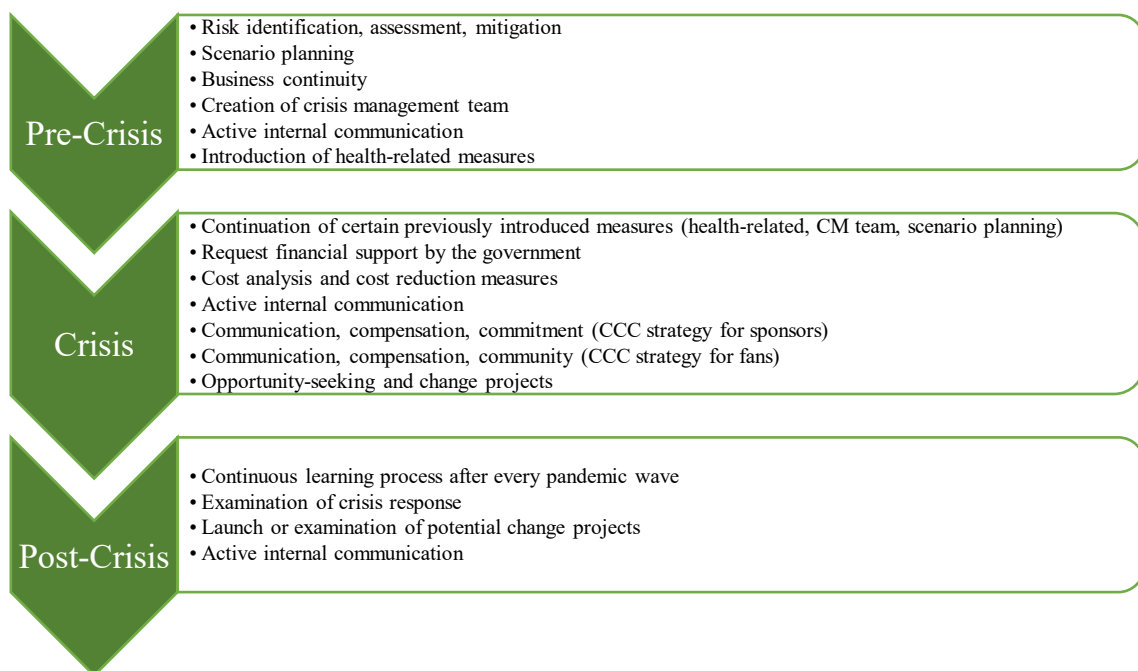


Figure 19: *Crisis Management Model for European Football Clubs* (Own Illustration)

As it can be seen in the figure above, the measures are chronologically divided into the following three phases: (1) pre-crisis phase, (2) crisis phase, (3) post-crisis phase.

The pre-crisis phase starts with signal detection and is concerned with preparatory or preventive work. Crisis management in the first stage is linked to risk management to some extent, as football clubs need to identify, assess and possibly mitigate the specific risk. Additionally, it is recommended that scenario planning is implemented, and continuously extended, and adapted through constant monitoring of the impending crisis' development. At the same time, football clubs should enact plans for business continuity. In the context of a pandemic, it is advised that there is a replacement possibility for any key position. To centrally coordinate and communicate the measures taken for the specific football clubs, the creation of crisis management teams is strongly recommended.

Such a team is responsible for guiding through the crisis. Given possible uncertainties amongst employees, employees should be regularly informed through direct and authentic communication. All guidelines proclaimed by the public health authorities must be implemented, translated into club guidelines, and consequently communicated.

When facing the actual crisis in the second phase, multiple measures of the pre-crisis phase shall be continued. As just described, the crisis response team will lead through the crisis. Also, scenario planning is to be frequently updated. Changes in health-related measures from the authorities are respectively implemented on a club level. Furthermore, clubs are advised to request governmental support if needed and if available. A halt to any investment is to be adopted. In addition, the whole cost structure ought to be examined. It is critical to be aware of possible new costs on the horizon due to the crisis. At the same time, certain cost drivers can likely be eliminated. Suppose the given situation requires the personnel costs to be touched. In that case, measures of bonus system review or pay cuts are recommended since layoffs can lead to further uncertainty in the football club and loss of know-how needed again after the crisis. Due to the sensitivity of personnel expenses, internal communication should be concerned with explaining the situation, the measures, and the reasons. Understanding and acting in concert can be the consequence. Because sponsors contribute a significant part to a club's revenue, this thesis suggested introducing a CCC strategy (communication, compensation, commitment) for sponsors. Thereby, direct communication contributes to the relationship and helps clubs assess the sponsor's future commitment, which could also impact the scenario planning. Secondly, compensation is about ensuring the advertisement service in alternative ways. Lastly, the commitment deals with the implications of the overall sponsorship strategy of the club. The results showed that a crisis or a change in sporting strategy can lead to the adaptation of the respective strategy. Generally speaking, long-lasting sponsorships are to be preferred. In football, the fans are a vital part of the whole value co-creation process. Therefore, it is advised to follow a CCC strategy (communication, compensation, community) for fans in the wake of a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, football clubs shall keep in touch with football clubs in various ways. The fans have a right to compensation too. Hence, it is recommended that the compensations strengthen the bond and potentially lead to further interaction with the football club in the future. Due to the link between a football club and its community, clubs should connect with the community and help them wherever possible. The last measure which emerged throughout the research is that football clubs

should try to be opportunity-seeking despite the crisis. In doing so, possible new projects can lead to new income sources and a stronger connection to the fans, the community, or the sponsors.

Given a longer lasting crisis, it is advised that learnings should be implemented after every single pandemic wave. In the post-crisis phase, football clubs shall also examine their crisis responses and assess the success factors and areas for further improvements. Additionally, possible change projects ought to be evaluated or started in the post-crisis phase. Once again, internal crisis communication plays a critical part in the third phase to convey the message of organizational learning.

This research employed a holistic view in analyzing the crisis responses of football clubs across the European continent in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, examining the actions in each of the three phases, the measures can be attributed to specific areas; hence, for future crisis management, football clubs should be concerned with implications on their revenue streams and cost structures, maintaining their bond towards fans and sponsors, and internal communication.

## **6.1 Limitations**

Due to the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic was not over at the time of submission, especially the significance of the suggestions for the post-crisis phase is somewhat limited.

The broad consideration of clubs from across Europe allowed to gain various insights. Nevertheless, due to the varying contexts (e.g., divisions, countries), the comparability is only given to a certain extent.

In view of semi-structured interviews, specific limitations need to be considered. For one, semi-structured interviews increase the level of flexibility during the interview. However, this may also lead to lower comparability because the follow-up questions vary amongst the interviews. The respondents' elaborations do not necessarily cover the same topics and are not equally detailed. Even though the researcher of this study tried to ask the guiding questions in the same way, there were still variations that could again lead to different understandings.

Despite the explicit decision to use only closed questions for the survey, there was a possibility that valuable contributions or insights from the 52 participating clubs could not be considered because of fixed answer options.

## 6.2 Future Research

Given the limitation mentioned above about the persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic, future research is suggested to examine specifically the measures employed in the post-crisis phase.

As previously indicated, the football clubs varied in terms of multiple characteristics. For this reason, complementary research should be conducted by allocating football clubs into different groups. Amongst others, the respective grouping factors could be the specific countries, leagues, size of club operations, or budgets.

According to Franck (2010) Hammerschmidt et al. (2021), a football club's governance is structured either through a private firm, a public corporation, or an association of members. Therefore, further research is recommended concerning the influence of the governance structure on crisis management during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Given the holistic perspective of the thesis, further research could provide more in-depth insights into specific areas of football clubs in the context of a pandemic. Possible focus areas include leadership, internal communication, or stakeholder management and involvement. The latter could provide a variety of further sub-categories, such as sponsorship management or communication towards fans.

Further, it is advised that future research should examine the various European leagues and their role in the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, when considering the governmental support, the corresponding perspective from the ministries of sport and finance could be of interest. Especially, the interlinkages between the leagues, the political decision-makers and the individual clubs provides potential for future research.

Complementary research could be conducted by focusing on one single case, one single football club. Thus, the financial dimension could be the subject of an in-depth analysis. Also, other areas and further documents (e.g., protocols of the crisis management team meetings, financial or communication documents) could be considered more extensively.



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## 8 Appendices

### 8.1 Appendix A: Business Model Ontology

Business model ontology	Stähler 2001	Weill and Vitale 2001	Petrovic, Kittl et al.	Gordijn 2002	Afuah and Tucci 2003	Tapscott, Ticoll et al. 2000	Linder and Cantrell 2000
Value Proposition	Value Proposition	Value Proposition, strategic objective	Value Model	Value offering	Customer Value		value proposition
Target Customer		Customer Segments		Market Segment	Scope		
Distribution Channel		Channels	Customer relations model				channel model
Customer Interface			Customer relations model				commerce relationship
Value Configuration	Architecture		Production Model	e3-value configuration	connected activities, value configuration	b-webs	commerce process model
Capability		Core competencies, CSF	Resource Model		capabilities		
Partnership	Architecture	e-business schematics		Actors		b-webs	
Cost Structure				Value exchange	cost structure		
Revenue Model	Revenue Model	Source of revenue	Revenue Model	value exchange	pricing, revenue source		pricing model, revenue model

Figure 20: Business Model Ontology – Part 1 (Osterwalder, 2004)

Business model ontology	Hamel 2000	Mahadevan 2000	Chesbrough and Rosenbloom 2000	Magretta 2002	Amit and Zott 2001	Applegate and Collura 2001	Maitland and Van de Kar 2002
Value Proposition	Product/market scope	Value stream	Value proposition	What does the customer value?	Transaction component	Product and Services offered	Value proposition, assumed value
Target Customer	Market scope		Market segment	Who is the customer?		Market opportunity	Market segment
Distribution Channel	Fulfillment & support, info & insight			How can we deliver value at an appropriate cost?		Marketing/sales model	
Customer Interface	Relationship dynamics					Brand and reputation	
Value Configuration	Core processes	Logistical stream	Structure of the value chain		Architectural configuration	Operating model	
Capability	core competencies, strategic assets					(Organization and culture, management model)	
Partnership	suppliers, partners, coalitions		Position in the value chain		Transaction component	Partners	Companies involved in creating value
Cost Structure			Cost structure	What is the underlying economic value?			
Revenue Model	pricing structure	Revenue stream		How do we make money in this business		Benefits to firm and stakeholders	Revenue Model

Figure 21: Business Model Ontology – Part 2 (Osterwalder, 2004)

8.2 Appendix B: Overview of Business Model Components

Component Author	Strategy	Resources	Network	Customers	Market offering (value proposition)	Revenues	Service provision	Procurement	Finances	Spectrum of the Components
Hamel (2000)	Core Strategy, Strategic Resources		Value Network	Customer Interface						●
Mahadevan (2000)			Logistic Stream		Value Stream	Revenue Stream				●
Wirtz (2000)	Combination of production factors for strategy implementation	Core competencies & Core assets		Market & customer segmentation	Service offer & Value proposition	Systematization of revenue forms	Combination & transformation of goods & services	Production factors & Suppliers	Financing & Refinancing	●
Hedman/Kalling (2002)	Managerial and organizational, longitudinal process component	Resources		Customers	Competitors, Offering		Activities & Organization	Factor & Production Input Suppliers		●
Bouwman (2003)		Technical architecture		Customer, Value of Service					Financial arrangements	●
Atuah (2004)	Positions	Resources			Industry Factors		Activities		Costs	●
Mahadevan (2004)				Target Customers	Value Proposition	Revenue Model	Value Delivery			●
Voelpel/Leibold/Tekie (2004)		Leadership capabilities	Value Network (Re)Configuration for the Value Creation		Customer Value Proposition					●
Yip (2004)	Scope, Differentiation	Organization		Nature of Customers, Channels	Value Proposition, Nature of Outputs		How to transform inputs (including technology)			●
Lehmann-Ortega/Schoettl (2005)					Value Proposition, Value Architecture	Revenue Model				●
Osterwalder/Pigneur/Tucci (2005)		Core Competency	Partner Network	Target Customer, Distribution Channel, Relationship	Value Proposition	Revenue Model	Value Configuration		Cost Structure	●
Tikkanen et al. (2005)	Strategy & Structure		Network				Operations		Finance & Accounting	●
Al-Debel/EI-Haddadeh/Avison (2008a)			Value Network		Value Proposition, Value Architecture				Value Finance	●
Demillecocq (2010)		Resources & Competences, Organization			Value Proposition	Volume & Structure of Revenue Streams			Volume & Structure of Revenue costs	●
Johnson (2010)		Key Resources		Customer Value Proposition	Customer Value Proposition	Profit Formula	Key Processes			●
Osterwalder/Pigneur (2010)		Key Resources	Key Partners	Customer Relationships, Channels, Customers Segments	Value Proposition	Revenue Streams	Key Activities		Cost Structure	●
Intensity of use										●



Figure 22: Overview of Business Model Components (Wirtz et al., 2016)

### 8.3 Appendix C: Frameworks for Crisis Management

TABLE 1.1 Frameworks for Crisis Management						
3-Stage Framework:	3-Stage Framework:	3-Stage Framework	4-Stage Framework	4-Stage Framework:	5-Stage Framework:	This Book:
General	Smith, 1990	Richardson, 1994	Myers, 1993	Fink, 1996	Pearson & Mitroff, 1993	Crandall, Parnell, & Spillan, 2009
Before the Crisis →	Crisis of management	Precrisis/disaster phase	Normal operations	Prodromal crisis stage	Signal detection	Landscape survey
					Preparation/Prevention	Strategic planning
During the Crisis →	Operational crisis	Crisis impact/rescue phase	Emergency response	Acute crisis stage	Containment/Damage limitation	Crisis management
			Interim Processing	Chronic crisis stage		
After the Crisis →	Crisis of legitimation	Recovery/demise phase	Restoration	Crisis resolution stage	Recovery	Organizational learning
					Learning	

Figure 23: Frameworks for Crisis Management (Crandall et al., 2013)

## 8.4 Appendix D: Systemic Crisis Management Strategy

<p><b>Strategic efforts</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Drastic changes in corporate philosophy</li> <li>2. Integration of Crisis Management (CM) into corporate excellence</li> <li>3. Integration of CM into the strategic planning process</li> <li>4. Inclusion of outsiders on board, crisis management unit (CMU), etc.</li> <li>5. Training and workshops in CM</li> <li>6. Crises simulations</li> <li>7. Diversification and portfolio strategies</li> </ol> <p><b>Technical and structural efforts</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Creation of a CMU</li> <li>9. Creation of dedicated budget for CM</li> <li>10. Developing and changing emergency policies and manuals</li> <li>11. Computerized inventories of plants' employees, products and capabilities</li> <li>12. Creation of an emergency room or facility</li> <li>13. Reduction of hazardous products, services and productions</li> <li>14. Improved overall design and safety of products and production</li> <li>15. Technological redundancy, such as computer backup</li> <li>16. Use of outside expert and services in CM</li> </ol> <p><b>Evaluation and diagnosis efforts</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17. Legal and financial audit of threats and liabilities</li> <li>18. Modifications in insurance coverage</li> <li>19. Environmental impact audit and respect of security norms</li> <li>20. Ranking of most critical activities necessary for daily operation</li> <li>21. Early warning signals detection, scanning, Issues Management</li> <li>22. Dedicated research on potential hidden dangers</li> <li>23. Critical follow-up of past crises</li> </ol> <p><b>Communicational efforts</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>24. Media training for CM</li> <li>25. Major efforts in public relations</li> <li>26. Increased information to local communities</li> <li>27. Increased relationships with intervening groups (police, media, etc.)</li> <li>28. Increased collaboration or lobbying among stakeholders</li> <li>29. Use of new communication technologies</li> </ol> <p><b>Psychological and cultural efforts</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>30. Strong top management commitment to CM</li> <li>31. Increased relationships with activist groups</li> <li>32. Improved acceptance of whistleblowers</li> <li>33. Increased knowledge of criminal behavior</li> <li>34. Increased visibility of crises' human impact to employees</li> <li>35. Psychological support to employees</li> <li>36. Stress management and management of anxiety</li> <li>37. Symbolic reminding of past crises and dangers</li> </ol>
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Figure 24: Systemic Crisis Management Strategy (Pauchant et al., 1991)



**8.5 Appendix E: Contact Message (LinkedIn Contact Request Message, in English)**

Dear Ms. ... / Dear Mr. ...

As part of my master thesis (Crisis Management of European Football Clubs), I would like to send you a link to a survey (5 mins), or conduct an interview (30-45 mins) with you.

Thank you in advance for your answer and cooperation.  
Best regards from Switzerland,

Simon Walser

**8.6 Appendix F: Contact Message (LinkedIn Contact Request Message, in German)**

Sehr geehrte Frau ... / Sehr geehrter Herr ...

Im Rahmen meiner Masterarbeit (Crisis Management of European Football Clubs) würde ich Ihnen gerne einen Link für eine 5-Minuten-Umfrage zusenden, oder mit Ihnen ein 30/45-Minuten-Interview führen.

Vielen Dank für Ihre Antwort  
Freundliche Grüsse aus der Schweiz

Simon Walser

### 8.7 Appendix G: Interview Question Guideline

No.	Question
1	What has been the biggest challenge for your football club during the last two seasons?
2	[Explanation of the <i>Logic of Value Co-Creation</i> by Woratschek (2020)] How do you assess this – also with respect to the absence of the fans?
3	How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your revenue?
4	How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your cost structure?
5	What measures have you taken between the first signals of a new virus and the halt of the season (pre-crisis phase)?
6	What was the main concern of crisis management at your club during the crisis (crisis phase)?
7	How have you maintained the connection between the club and the fans?
8	[Explanation of the call for more sports entrepreneurship by Hammerschmidt et al. (2021) and Ratten (2020)] With respect to your club, how would you evaluate this call for more sports entrepreneurship?
9	[Explanation of the consumer behavior assessment by the UEFA (2021)] How do you evaluate the situation of fans returning to the stadium?
10	How will you incorporate the gained knowledge for the purpose of organizational learning?
11	What has been the biggest learning during the last two seasons?

Table 11: Guide for Interview Questions (Football Clubs)

### 8.8 Appendix H: Interview Question Guideline (Expert Interviews – Sport Management)

No.	Questions in English	Questions in German
1	What has been the biggest challenge for football clubs in the last two seasons?	Was war die grösste Herausforderung für Fussballklubs in den letzten beiden Spielzeiten?
2	[Explanation of the <i>Logic of Value Co-Creation</i> by Woratschek (2020)] How do you assess this – also with respect to the absence of the fans?	[Erklärung der <i>Logic of Value Co-Creation</i> von Woratschek (2020)] Wie bewerten Sie dies – also in Bezug auf die Abwesenheit der Fans?
3	How can sports clubs prepare for a crisis (pre-crisis phase)?	Wie können sich Sportklubs auf eine Krise vorbereiten (Pre-Crisis Phase)?
4	How do you assess the connection between economic and sporting success in times of crisis?	Wie sehen Sie die Verbindung von ökonomischem und sportlichem Erfolg in Krisenzeiten?
5	How should football clubs maintain the connection between the club and the fans?	Wie sollten Fussballklubs die Beziehung zwischen Klub und den Fans pflegen?
6	[Explanation of the call for more sports entrepreneurship by Hammerschmidt et al. (2021) and Ratten (2020)] How can football clubs also see the crisis as an opportunity?	[Erklärung des Rufs für mehr «sports entrepreneurship» von Hammerschmidt et al. (2021) and Ratten (2020)] Wie können Fussballklubs die Krise auch als Chance sehen?
7	[Explanation of the consumer behavior assessment by the UEFA (2021)] How do you evaluate this situation?	[Erklärung der Publikation von der UEFA (2021) bezüglich möglichen im Konsumverhalten] Wie bewerten Sie diese Situation?
8	How can clubs integrate the knowledge gathered during the COVID-19 pandemic for organizational learning?	Wie können die Fussballklubs das während der COVID-19-Pandemie gesammelte Wissen für «Organizational Learning» nutzen?

Table 12: Guide for Expert Interview Questions (Sport Management)

### 8.9 Appendix I: Interview Question Guideline (Expert Interview – Crisis Management and Crisis Communication)

No.	Question
1	What are key actions organizations should take between the signal detection (i.e., news about a new virus) and the actual crisis being present in the country?
2	What are key elements of internal communication if there are increasing cost reduction pressures due to decreasing revenues at football clubs? Is there a difference between players and employees?
3	Given the “outside cause” of the current crisis, what are crucial aspects of (crisis) communication to maintain the bond between club and fans for more than a year without attending “a regular match”?
4	How has the COVID-19 crisis differed from an “organizational crisis” with respect to the actual crisis management during the crisis phase? And what are key success factors to bring an organization back on track during a crisis, which it did not cause?
5	[Explanation of the call for more sports entrepreneurship by Hammerschmidt et al. (2021) and Ratten (2020)] How do you assess the possibility for (sports) organizations to be opportunity-seeking in a crisis, while also ensuring the viability of the organization?
6	How should crisis management and the gained experiences be incorporated into organizational learning?

Table 13: Guide for Expert Interview Questions (Crisis Management and Communication)

### 8.10 Appendix J: Survey Questions

No.	Question & Answer Options
1	<p>My football club operates in ...</p> <p><i>List of all 55 countries (UEFA member associations)</i>”</p>
2	<p>In the 2019/20 season (or 2020) season, my football club was in the ... division.</p> <p>first</p> <p>second</p> <p>third</p>
3	<p>Please rate the following statements.</p> <p>“The fans are an integral part of the club and co-create value.”</p> <p>1 – Disagree</p> <p>2 – Somewhat disagree</p> <p>3 – Neutral</p> <p>4 – Somewhat agree</p> <p>5 – Agree</p> <p>“It has been difficult to maintain the connection between the football club and its fans.”</p> <p>1 – Disagree</p> <p>2 – Somewhat disagree</p> <p>3 – Neutral</p> <p>4 – Somewhat agree</p> <p>5 - Agree</p>
4	<p>As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, decrease in revenue has been evident in the following areas:</p> <p>Broadcasting / Media</p> <p>Matchday income (including season ticket renewals)</p> <p>Commercial (e.g., sponsoring)</p> <p>Revenue has not decreased</p>
5	<p>Has the club implemented cost reduction measures as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic?</p> <p>Yes</p>

	No
6	Has the club received financial support from the government as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic?  Yes  No
7	Had a crisis response team been existent before the COVID-19 pandemic? / Were crisis management capabilities in place before the COVID-19 pandemic?  Yes  No
8	Has a crisis response team been established since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic? / Have crisis management capabilities been established since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic?  Yes  No
9	How would you describe the crisis management during the COVID-19 pandemic by your football club?  100% reactive  75% reactive, 25% proactive  50% reactive, 50% proactive  25% reactive, 75% proactive  100% proactive
10	Will you use the knowledge gathered throughout the last two seasons for organizational learning and trainings?  Yes  No  Do not know yet

Table 14: Outline of Questionnaire