

# Creating an infrastructure for knowledge development and distribution in sport management

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## Introduction

Over the last couple of years the social and economic importance of sport has increased significantly (1). As a consequence there is a growing need to take a more professional approach to governing and managing sports organisations (2). As with any industry an important component in driving the required professionalism is the development and circulation of knowledge within that industry. Currently in the Netherlands there is no organised way for the different stakeholders in the sport management area , to share and enlarge sports management knowledge.

Based on this premise the sport management lecturership, established by the HBO-raad (Council for Higher Education) and Pro-Value, a sport management consulting firm have commenced a study to investigate the need and opportunity to create an infrastructure for knowledge development and distribution in sport management and a theoretical model which can be used as blueprint for the knowledge infrastructure.

## Theoretical concept

To define the field of sport management a the sport management community is defined as an entity with which the different stakeholders interfere (see figure 1).

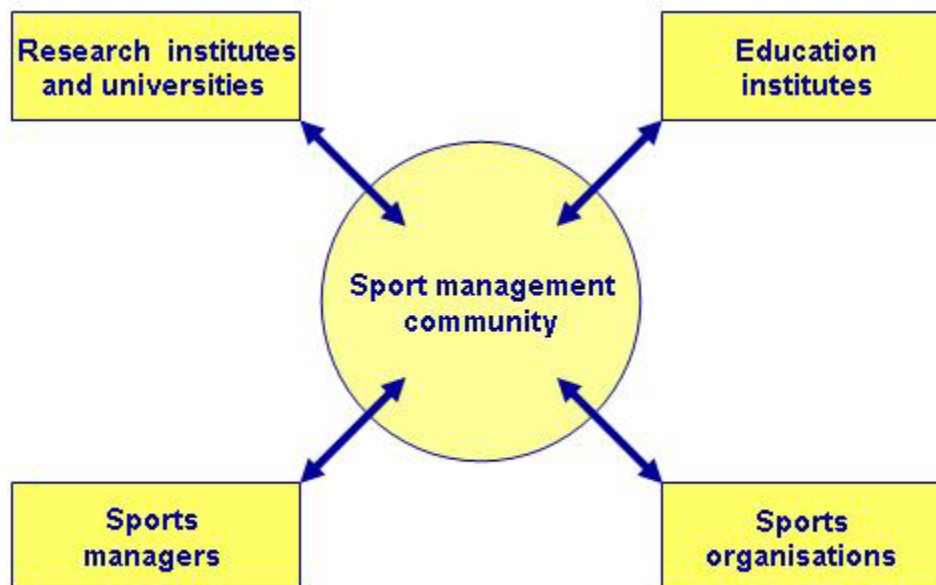


Figure 1. The sport management community and its stakeholders.

The knowledge infrastructure should care knowledge is distributed towards sports managers and used in the sports organisations. To complete the professional knowledge development circle good communication with sport managers and sports organisations should inspire research institutes to do research and develop new knowledge.

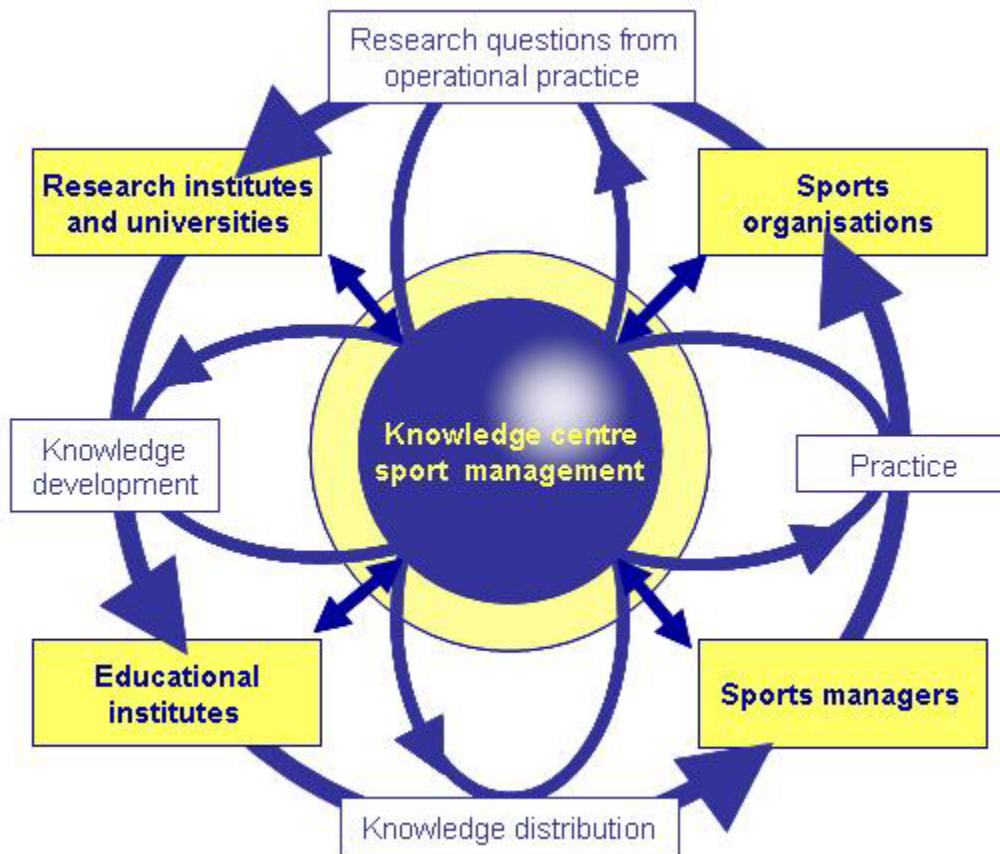


Figure 2. Model knowledge circulation.

### Benchmark knowledge centers(3)

Main questions:

- Organizational design
- Knowledge functions
- Financial feasibility
- Software systems
- Factors of success and failure

### Field research

In the field research a total of 21 representatives from all stakeholder groups, including a couple of Flemish representatives, were interviewed regarding commitment, feasibility, required functions of a knowledge infrastructure (development, distribution and transfer), and how the realisation of the infrastructure should be initiated and set-up. Questions about the characteristics of sport management as a discipline completed the interviews. This included the basics of competence profiles and where the responsibility lies for the development of the body of knowledge of sport management in The Netherlands.

The information obtained from the interviews was translated into value propositions for each group of stakeholders regarding the need for a knowledge infrastructure and the way an important element of the infrastructure, a knowledge centre should be initiated.

## Results

The idea of stakeholders about an organised knowledge infrastructure for sport management are translated into a value proposition for each group of stakeholders. The results from these value propositions are shown in table 1.

	education institutes	sport organisations	research institutes and universities	sport managers
<b>Commitment</b>				
Necessity	+	0	0	0
Contribution to professionalism	++	0	0	++
<b>Feasibility</b>				
External circumstances	+	0	-	+
Financial feasibility	-	-	--	+
Offered functions of knowledge	+	0	+	+

Table 1. Value proposition of groups of stakeholders for a knowledge infrastructure in sport management

This table indicates the following:

- Conditions for collaborative professional is unsuitable according to academics.
- The need for knowledge circulation is most important to educational institutes, academics and professionals.
- Educational institutes have greatest belief in a organised process of professionalisation.
- Financial feasibility of a formal organisation to enhance a knowledge infrastructure is doubtful.

From the interviews the attitude of the different stakeholder groups towards the model for professionalisation are concluded. The result of this interpretation are shown in table 2.

	Field knowledge and experience	Joint knowledge base	Knowledge infrastructure
Educational institutes	0	++	0
Sports organisations	+	-	--
Research institutes and universities	0	-	0
Sports managers	++	0	-

Table 2. Attitude of stakeholder groups towards a knowledge infrastructure in sport management

From this table can be concluded:

- From the research institutes, universities and educational institutes there is limited attention and interest in the knowledge and experience of the individual sports manager.
- The educational institutes are focussed on joint knowledge base. For the sports manager there are limited opportunities to develop their individual knowledge. Nor the research institutes and universities nor the sports organisations stimulate this development.
- The current knowledge infrastructure is limited. Though different per educational institute, initial educational possibilities are available. Lately there are positive initiatives to increase the capacity at research institutes and universities.

The consolidated results of all stakeholder groups towards the way an initiative for a knowledge centre should be organised are shown in table 3.

	continuing current situation	small organisation (0,5 fte)	limited organisation (2 fte)	medium organisation (4-5 fte)
<b>Commitment</b>				
Necessity	0	0	+	+
Contribution to professionalism	-	-	+	+
<b>Feasibility</b>				
External circumstances	+	+	+	0
Financial feasibility	+	0	-	--
Offered functions of knowledge	--	-	+	++

Table 3. Value proposition of groups of stakeholders against alternative knowledge infrastructure organisations

From this value proposition can be concluded that:

- The need for a project focussed professional approach for all stakeholders.
- The professional process will only be strengthened in this type of organisation.
- According to the financial focus, in the short term, small, but decisive project organisation will be the best option.

### Discussion

Though the research is not set up to identify statistically significant differences between the groups of stakeholders, some interesting trends can be concluded. For instance, the low score (0) on the necessity of professionalism has a lot to do with the fact that even the sport managers themselves do not feel recognised when more strategic and policy sport management issues are discussed. The educational institutes, who develop the future sport managers to the industry are more convinced.

There is also a difference of opinion between the diverse types of sport organisations; commercial sport organisations agree strongly on the necessity and subsequent contribution to professionalism of a knowledge structure. Governmental organisations are more unsure. The results seems to depend on whether a local, provincial or national organisation is questioned. Within the area of publicly 'organised' sport there is a battle between the traditionalists and those who support a more professional approach. For the moment the traditionalists have the most influence.

In the sport management community there is no joint vision on the professionalisation process yet. Obviously the added value of a knowledge infrastructure in which all conditions as mentioned before are fulfilled will pleat stakeholder groups to share this vision and start participating on the knowledge circulation loop. The realisation of a knowledge centre for professional sport management with a charter to catalyse the knowledge circulation will accelerate the professionalisation process in sport management.

The value propositions of all groups of stakeholders were used to judge four alternative organisations for such a knowledge centre, varying from the current situation in which there is no formal infrastructure, to a medium size (4-5 full time equivalent) professional organisation to support knowledge development and distribution.

It can be concluded that getting the financial means is the key factor. The challenge is to start with a low budget with incentives to convince all stakeholders of the added value of the initiative. None of the participants are in a position to invest risk capital in the initiative. Obtaining subsidy for the entire project is both unlikely as well as undesirable. Therefore a small scale project with an emphasis to enable the

circulation of knowledge is to be encouraged. Starting with a limited number of participating organisations, institutes and persons, the initiative will get the change to proof its added value. The initiative should be supported and sponsored by private companies with an existing infrastructure for knowledge distribution (4).

### **References**

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