World Bulletin Publishing Online Publishing Hub	World Bulletin of Physical Education and Sports Science (WBPESS)
ISSN (E) : 3072-1768	Volume 2, Issue 10, October 2026
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https://worldbulletin.org/index.php/2	

SPORTS TALENT MANAGEMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON ACHIEVING COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN IRAQI SPORTS CLUBS

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Abstract

The study aimed to determine the effect of sports talent management on competitive advantage in Iraqi sports clubs. This study aims to build a field-based model linking the pillars of talent management (attraction, identification and selection, development, motivation and retention) with indicators of competitive advantage (performance quality, innovation, responsiveness, reputation, and sustainability). The clubs feel the need to shift from seasonal management of distinguished players, coaches and administrators to an institutional system that takes into account planning, data and structured development pathways. The descriptive research design will be used to survey and correlate. The constructing of 36 items involves four dimensions of talent management and four dimensions of competitive advantage. The application model, proposed by the researchers, involved a random stratified sample of 140 board member coaches and administrators of Baghdad and Middle Euphrates region Iraqi clubs. Data that were simulated showed that talent management was high and had a mean of 3.64 out of 5. Meanwhile, competitive advantage has a mean of 3.72. There was a strong positive correlation of 0.81 between the two variables, while talent management explained 66% variance in competitive advantage. The best predictors were development followed by motivation and retention. The analysis determined that the possession of better talent will not give a club a sustainable advantage, unless that talent is identified under clear criteria, developed in individual programs, motivated in a fair environment, and consistent with sporting and administrative plans of the club. It has

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ISSN (E) : 3072-1768 | Volume 2, Issue 10, October 2026
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recommended setting up a talent management unit, developing a database and a performance-potential matrix, adopting Sports and administrative succession plans, linking incentives to achievement and development and measuring retention, internal mobility and returns on development programs.

The model proposed provides clubs with a diagnosis to identify talent shortages, prioritize investment in human resources, and monitor competitive effects in subsequent sports seasons. Standardizing talent identification and development decisions are basic intended aims of introducing a player performance profiling system. It helps improve organizational justice. Further, it helps club management with early indicators of attrition risks and future shortages in key positions.

Keywords: Sports talent management, competitive advantage, sports clubs, human resources, Iraqi sport.

Introduction

Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

Introduction and Significance of the Study

Human resources that are high-performing and high-potential has turned out to be a strategic resource that is difficult to imitate because they embody knowledge, relationships, experience and capacity to learn. According to the resource-based view, an organization can attain sustainable advantage when the organization has resources that are valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable, and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991). Talent in sport includes from players, coaches, administrators, scouts, and analysts to professionals with medical or marketing expertise capable of producing better outcomes than their rivals.

The assembly of distinguished individuals does not constitute talent management. It is an integrated system for assessing needs, attracting, identifying, selecting, developing, evaluating, motivating, retaining and planning succession of talent. According to Collings and Mellahi (2009), identifying the positions that are most important to competitive advantage,

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ISSN (E) : 3072-1768
Volume 2, Issue 10, October 2026
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developing a talent pool of high-potential candidates and designing HR systems that facilitate the filling of those positions, is vital.

The overall football environment in Iraq is competitive and influenced by levels of funding, quality of infrastructure, administrative stability, systems of professionalisation, and the capacity to detect youth talents, coach development, and special retention at the club level. The departure of distinguished personnel from some clubs may stem from a lack of clear career paths inequitable reward systems and short-term decision-making fimng to short-term decision-making. At times personal impressions may play a role, raising recruitment expenses and containing institutional memory.

The study theoretically significant due to integrating the application of talent management practices with the dimensions of competitive advantage for a model that fits Iraqi clubs. The practical importance lies in the questionnaire and a set of indicators that enable boards to identify gaps, make comparisons across OUs, identify critical talent and direct budgets towards their development and retention instead of responding to shortages.

Research Problem and Research Gap

The issue at hand is that certain clubs make use of either immediate recruitment or ad hoc selection for all sporting and administrative talents, without the advantage of mapping critical positions, having a unified database, potential criteria in place nor having a succession plan. This method causes a haphazard picking policy, under-investment in young and staff, loss of expertise, higher cost of replacement and volatility of performance from season to season.

The absence comes from the examination of talent management in sports federations or clubs not in Iraq, or its association with organizational trust and institutional performance as of part of the Arab literature. Limited is the evidence that tests the effect of the complete talent cycle on dimensions of competitive advantage in Iraqi clubs. A lot of studies are primarily focused on players, not integrating sporting, administrative and technical talent into one model. This study seeks to bridge this gap by measuring attraction, selection, development,

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ISSN (E) : 3072-1768 | Volume 2, Issue 10, October 2026
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and retention; and then testing their capacity to explain quality, innovation, responsiveness, reputation, and sustainability.

Main question: What is the impact of sports talent management on achieving competitive advantage in Iraqi sports clubs?

1. What is the level of talent management implementation in Iraqi clubs?
2. What level of competitive advantage has been achieved?
3. Is there a statistically significant relationship between talent management and competitive advantage?
4. To what extent do the dimensions of talent management explain competitive advantage?
5. Do the assessments differ according to club, job role, or years of experience?

Research Objectives

1. To evaluate the extent of sports talent management on its dimensions.
2. To assess how competitive sports clubs are at something.
3. To evaluate the link between talent management and competitive advantage
4. To understand how well each talent management dimension explain outcomes.
5. To find discrepancies between the occupational and organizational variables.
6. To suggest a plan to implement talent management in Iraqi clubs.

Research Hypotheses

1. At the level of .05 there is a significant correlation between sports talent management and the competitive advantage.
2. Sports talent management has a statistically significant effect on the competitive avantage.
3. Three dimensions of talent management explains competitive advantage differently in varying degrees.
4. Participants' response levels differ significantly between clubs, job roles and experience levels, according to statistics..

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Research Delimitations and Operational Definitions

Human delimitations: board members, trainers, administrators and youth-category officials. The spatial delimitations for the sports clubs proposed in Baghdad, Najaf, Karbala, and Babylon. Limit the study to the period 2026. Subject delimitation: talent management practices and their effect on competitive advantage, without evaluating the individual technical skills of players..

Table 1. Operational Definitions

Concept	Operational Definition
Sports talent management	The set of practices a club uses to attract, identify, select, develop, motivate, and retain talent, measured by items 1–20.
Sports talent	A player, coach, administrator, or specialist who demonstrates high performance or future potential in a role that influences the club's success.
Competitive advantage	The club's capacity to create value and outcomes that competitors find difficult to match in quality, innovation, responsiveness, reputation, and sustainability, measured by items 21–36.
Iraqi sports club	An organized Iraqi sports institution that participates in competition and manages human, technical, and administrative resources to achieve sporting and social objectives.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

The Concept of Sports Talent Management

Talent management involves making people decisions about the roles that matter most to outcomes. The process involves categorizing crucial roles, anticipating requirements, developing a candidate pool, offering educational opportunities, evaluating performance and capabilities, and safeguarding knowledge through transitions. In sport, current ability must be assessed along with potential. Having achieved success does not necessarily mean that a further development is guaranteed. And having a potential is not sufficient. A potential requires an environment where it can receive relevant training, support, and opportunities to participate.

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Dimensions of Sports Talent Management

Attraction of Talent and Workforce Planning.

This dimension includes identification of key functions and positions, defining competence, forecasting shortages, building up an attractive club image as well as using a wide channel for suitable players, coaches and administrators**.**

Choosing and Recognizing Talent.

It involves screening, testing, interviewing, record checking, and performance. The use of clear criteria and panels of specialists can be effective in reducing bias and balancing current performance against future potential while ensuring value congruence.

Staff Development and Performance Management.

Individualized plans, technical and administrative training, mentoring, job rotation, participation opportunities, feedback, and interim objectives reviewed are in this dimension**.**

Keeping employees engaged.

This measures fairness and equity in contracts and compensation, recognition and career security, participation and development opportunities, workload and succession options, and knowledge transfer in vital posts**.**

The Competitive Edge in Sports Clubs Businesses

The concept of competitive advantage outlines the potential a club has to generate greater value, the ability to lower cost, faster responsiveness, or a better identity and reputation. It cannot be simplified to the ranking of one team. It also covers continuity in results, quality of academic work, human resource development, innovation in techniques and administration, attraction of supporters and sponsors, and financial and knowledge sustainability. An advantage when an institutional system that is difficult to replicate supports a company, rather than an individual who may leave.

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ISSN (E) : 3072-1768
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Explaining the Relationship Between the Variables

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Study

Talent Management	Conversion Mechanisms	Competitive Advantage
Attraction and planning Identification and selection Development and performance Motivation and retention	Person–role fit Knowledge accumulation Innovation and learning Stability and succession	Performance quality Innovation Responsiveness Reputation and sustainability

Choosing wisely helps minimize wasted time and money. The process of development enhances the quality of performance and greater flexibility. The process of retention limits the loss of knowledge and cost of replacement. Having succession plans helps the club in case of unexpected vacancies. These combine to create consistency of outcome, speed of innovation and reputational power If there is no fairness or governance, talent programs may be viewed as personal favoritism and thus undermine trust.

Previous Studies

Table 2. Summary of Selected Arab Studies

Study	Field and Sample	Principal Relevance to the Present Study
Al-Shafie et al. (2019)	247 participants in Egyptian and Bahraini federations	Examined the relationship between talent management and enhanced competitive advantage.
Abu Rumman (2019)	12 Jordanian professional sports institutions	Examined the effect of strategic management on sports talent management performance.
Al-Asasfeh (2020)	200 coaches and administrators in table tennis clubs	Reported moderate levels of talent attraction, development, and retention.
Khalaf (2020)	Premier League volleyball clubs	Evaluated coaches' talent management from the players' perspective.
Shwaitah (2022)	120 employees in Egyptian clubs	Linked talent management strategies to organizational trust.
Ismail (2022)	Egyptian Olympic Committee	Examined the relationship between talent strategies and improved institutional performance.
Al-Asadi (2025)	Iraqi sports organizations	Addressed human resource and talent development in the Iraqi sports environment.

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ISSN (E) : 3072-1768
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The current study utilized a descriptive design and questionnaire which is similar to earlier studies. It focuses on Iraqi clubs directly and integrating talent and skill in sport, administration and technique. Furthermore, correlation and regression are used in the present study to estimate the effect on four dimensions of competitive advantage.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology and Procedures

Research Method

Due to the fact that it measures existing practices and individual perceptions, a descriptive correlational survey design was adopted in the study. The design furthermore tests the relationship of the independent variables with the dependents without the intervention of the researcher experiment. The individual employee or leader is the unit of analysis, while the organization is represented by the club.

Research Population and Sample

The proposed population consists of board members, coaches, administrators, and youth-category officials in clubs from Baghdad, Najaf, Karbala, and Babylon. It is suggested that a stratified random sample of 140 individuals be taken from clubs and job roles. A different pilot sample of 30 people will be used for item analysis and testing for validity and reliability and it will not be included.

Table 3. Proposed Distribution of the Main Sample

Governorate	Number	Percentage
Baghdad	40	28.6%
Najaf	35	25.0%
Karbala	33	23.6%
Babylon	32	22.8%
Total	140	100%

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Table 4. Sample Characteristics

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage
Job role	Board member	28	20.0%
	Coach/assistant coach	46	32.9%
	Administrator/specialist	66	47.1%
Experience	Less than 5 years	34	24.3%
	5–10 years	49	35.0%
	More than 10 years	57	40.7%

Research Equipment and Instruments

1. A computer and statistical software like SPSS or jamovi are needed to manage and analyse data.
2. A paper-based or electronic questionnaire to measure the two variables.
3. Interviews with administrators and coaches to understand the cycle of talent identification and development.
4. Analysis of documents including organizational structures, contracts, training plans, performance reports, and reward policies.
5. This is a coding register that encodes participant details to ensure that the names of the participants do not get disclosed..

Tests and Measures

The response categories were coded in a five-point Likert scale, i.e., strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, neutral = 3, disagree = 2 and strongly disagree = 1. The means were interpreted as 1.00–1.80 = very low, 1.81–2.60 = low, 2.61–3.40 = moderate, 3.41–4.20 = high and 4.21–5.00 = very high..

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ISSN (E) : 3072-1768
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Table 5. Questionnaire Structure

Scale	Dimension	Items	Number
Talent management	Attraction and planning	1–5	5
	Identification and selection	6–10	5
	Development and performance management	11–15	5
	Motivation and retention	16–20	5
Competitive advantage	Performance quality	21–24	4
	Innovation	25–28	4
	Responsiveness	29–32	4
	Reputation and sustainability	33–36	4

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To establish face and content validity, the questionnaire will be submitted to seven experts in management, human resources, measurement, and evaluation. An item will be retained when agreement is 80% or more. To examine the internal consistency validity, the statement of each question item is correlated with the dimension of the question item and the total score. The minimum cut-off value for Cronbach's alpha, which is used to estimate reliability, is .70.

Table 6. Validity and Reliability Coefficients in the Simulated Pilot Application

Scale/Dimension	Item–Dimension Correlation Range	Cronbach's Alpha
Attraction and planning	0.57–0.80	0.85
Identification and selection	0.61–0.83	0.88
Development and performance management	0.63–0.85	0.90
Motivation and retention	0.59–0.84	0.89
Overall talent management	0.55–0.82	0.94
Overall competitive advantage	0.58–0.84	0.93

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Statistical Methods

1. Percentages and frequencies to describe the sample.
2. Averages, variability, relative importance and their respective rankings.
3. Cronbach's alpha is used for reliability and Pearson's coefficient for validity and correlation.
4. Simple and multiple linear regressions are used to estimate the effects.
5. The tests for differences were the independent-samples t test and one-way analysis of variance.
6. Normality, linearity, and multicollinearity were tested at the 0.05 significance level.

Chapter Four: Presentation and Analysis of Results

The following tables present simulated data to demonstrate the analytical model. These values should be replaced with actual results after administration of the questionnaire.

Level of Sports Talent Management

Table 7. Means and Standard Deviations for the Dimensions of Talent Management

Dimension	Mean	SD	Relative Weight	Rank	Level
Attraction and planning	3.52	0.72	70.4%	4	High
Identification and selection	3.60	0.69	72.0%	3	High
Development and performance management	3.76	0.65	75.2%	1	High
Motivation and retention	3.68	0.70	73.6%	2	High
Overall talent management	3.64	0.61	72.8%	—	High

Development and performance management being ranked first suggests clubs recognize the importance of training and feedback, while attraction and planning came last. According to this result, clubs can develop those people that they already have access to. But, they must systematically forecast needs and gain access to wider attraction channels. The finding agrees with Al-Asasfeh (2020)

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ISSN (E) : 3072-1768
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because it was found that attraction, development, and retention should be integrated..

Level of Competitive Advantage

Table 8. Means and Standard Deviations for the Dimensions of Competitive Advantage

Dimension	Mean	SD	Relative Weight	Rank	Level
Performance quality	3.82	0.63	76.4%	1	High
Innovation	3.66	0.71	73.2%	4	High
Responsiveness	3.71	0.68	74.2%	3	High
Reputation and sustainability	3.69	0.70	73.8%	2	High
Overall competitive advantage	3.72	0.60	74.4%	—	High

The highest rank was held by performance quality while the lowest was held by innovation. One possible explanation is that club systems are focused on results while innovations require time, space for deviation, sharing of knowledge and rewarding novelty. The finding suggests that retaining dominance necessitates that clubs transform individual renditions into institutional learning.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

Table 9. Correlations Between Talent Management Dimensions and Competitive Advantage

Dimension	Pearson's r	p value	Decision
Attraction and planning	0.63	<0.001	Significant
Identification and selection	0.70	<0.001	Significant
Development and performance management	0.78	<0.001	Significant
Motivation and retention	0.75	<0.001	Significant
Overall talent management	0.81	<0.001	Significant

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ISSN (E) : 3072-1768
Volume 2, Issue 10, October 2026
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The results provide support for hypothesis 1, which shows a strong positive correlation of .81. Talent management practices increase maturity with competitive advantage greater than others. Since there are correlations are established, this relationship does not fully establish causation. Other factors may intervene like funding, leadership and infrastructure.

Testing the Effect of Talent Management

Table 10. Simple Linear Regression

R	R^2	F	B	Beta	t	p
0.81	0.66	267.9	0.79	0.81	16.37	<0.001

The competitive advantage variance explained by talent management was equal to 66%, and the F value was significant. Consequently, the data pass the second hypothesis. The B coefficient shows that a unit increase in talent management means an expected increase of .79 units in competitive advantage..

Table 11. Multiple Regression of Talent Management Dimensions

Dimension	Beta	t	p	Rank
Development and performance management	0.35	5.26	<0.001	1
Motivation and retention	0.29	4.48	<0.001	2
Identification and selection	0.21	3.29	0.001	3
Attraction and planning	0.14	2.18	0.031	4

The results are consistent with the third hypothesis. This can be rewritten as Development was the strongest predictor, closely followed by Motivation and Retention. The finding indicates that merely recognizing talent is not enough for achieving club superiority. It should transform potential into performance and protect knowledge and expertise. Despite the reduced direct effect, attraction nevertheless remains important as the entry point to the talent cycle.

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Differences According to Occupational Variables

Table 12. Summary of Tests of Differences

Variable	Test	Value	p	Result
Governorate	ANOVA F	1.31	0.274	No differences
Job role	ANOVA F	3.44	0.035	Differences favoring board members
Years of experience	ANOVA F	1.08	0.343	No differences

No differences appeared on the basis of governorate or experience, while limited differences were found by job role. The policies may be clearer to board members than employees who implement them daily. The results, therefore, partially support the fourth hypothesis and highlight the necessity of involving coaches and administrators in the design and evaluation of the talent system.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

1. Overall, talent management was rated highly with development coming first, and attraction and planning coming last.
2. The competitive advantage was rated at a greater level and performance quality was on the top and innovation at the bottom.
3. Talent management has strong correlation with competitive advantage and accounts for a considerable portion of its variance.
4. Enterprises appear to compete on the foundation of development, motivation and retention practices, that have greater effect on competitive prominence.
5. The selection, development, and succession system is important for individual talent to become a sustainable advantage. It means that without these, they won't be able to succeed much.
6. Restricted difference in jobs suggests a difference between policy makers and those putting the policy into action.
7. The theoretical results of the simulation must be checked with actual results of field data.

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Recommendations

1. Create an ongoing task force or committee for talent management tied to the strategic plan of the club.
2. Create a map of the roles and positions identified as critical, together with the competencies required for these.
3. Construct a common database for players, coaches, and administrators that provides information on performance, potential, and development.
4. Use tests, explicit criteria, and multidisciplinary panels for talent identification and selection to dilute bias
5. Each priority talent should have their own individual development plan with objectives, a mentor, and quarterly reviews.
6. Rewards must be linked to achievement, development conduct and knowledge transfer with fairness and transparency.
7. Prepare succession plans for critical position coaches, administrators, and players.
8. Stay and exit interviews are conducted to find out the reasons for retention and attrition.
9. Track retention, internal promotions, training return rate and how long it takes to fill positions.
10. Carry out a large-scale field study of clubs across divisions and ages and compare findings over seasons..

Proposed Implementation Plan

Table 13. Stages in Establishing a Talent Management System

Period	Action	Indicator
0–3 months	Establish the unit, inventory roles and talent, and determine the baseline	Approval of the policy and talent map
4–9 months	Standardized tests, a database, and individual development plans	Complete profiles for 90% of target groups
10–18 months	Incentives, pathways, succession, and performance reviews	Reduce talent attrition by 20%
19–36 months	Evaluate returns and expand academies and partnerships	Increase internal promotion and consistency of results

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ISSN (E) : 3072-1768	Volume 2, Issue 10, October 2026
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Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Dear Participant, this questionnaire measures the impact of sports talent management on the competitive advantage of sports clubs. Responses will be used for research purposes and reported in aggregate form. Please mark the option that best reflects your level of agreement: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree.

General information: Governorate ..... Job role ..... Years of experience: Less than 5 / 5–10 / More than 10.

No.	Dimension	Item	5	4	3	2	1
1	Attraction and planning	The club identifies the roles and positions that directly influence its success.	□	□	□	□	□
2	Attraction and planning	The club forecasts its needs for players, coaches, and administrators.	□	□	□	□	□
3	Attraction and planning	The club uses diverse channels to attract talent.	□	□	□	□	□
4	Attraction and planning	The club offers an attractive value proposition to target talent.	□	□	□	□	□
5	Attraction and planning	A clear budget is allocated to attracting priority talent.	□	□	□	□	□
6	Identification and selection	Written criteria are available for identifying talent and assessing potential.	□	□	□	□	□
7	Identification and selection	Tests and performance data are used alongside observation.	□	□	□	□	□
8	Identification and selection	A multidisciplinary panel participates in selection decisions.	□	□	□	□	□

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Online Publishing Hub

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ISSN (E) : 3072-1768 | Volume 2, Issue 10, October 2026

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No.	Dimension	Item	5	4	3	2	1
9	Identification and selection	The selection process balances current performance with future potential.	□	□	□	□	□
10	Identification and selection	Management reviews the accuracy of selection decisions after an appropriate period.	□	□	□	□	□
11	Development and performance management	An individual development plan is available for each priority talent.	□	□	□	□	□
12	Development and performance management	Training programs address identified performance gaps.	□	□	□	□	□
13	Development and performance management	Talented individuals receive regular, actionable feedback.	□	□	□	□	□
14	Development and performance management	Progressive participation opportunities and responsibilities are provided to accelerate learning.	□	□	□	□	□
15	Development and performance management	The impact of development programs on performance and outcomes is measured.	□	□	□	□	□
16	Motivation and retention	Fair rewards linked to achievement and development are applied.	□	□	□	□	□
17	Motivation and retention	Management provides talent with recognition and participation in decision-making.	□	□	□	□	□
18	Motivation and retention	Clear pathways for sporting or career progression are available.	□	□	□	□	□
19	Motivation and retention	Management monitors the reasons talented individuals leave the club.	□	□	□	□	□
20	Motivation and retention	Backups and succession plans are available for critical positions and roles.	□	□	□	□	□

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World Bulletin of Physical Education and Sports Science (WBPESS)

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No.	Dimension	Item	5	4	3	2	1
21	Performance quality	The club's teams and units maintain consistent performance levels.	□	□	□	□	□
22	Performance quality	Errors are reduced through effective person–role fit.	□	□	□	□	□
23	Performance quality	The efficient use of human and financial resources improves.	□	□	□	□	□
24	Performance quality	The club achieves its sporting and administrative objectives to a high standard.	□	□	□	□	□
25	Innovation	Talented individuals propose new ideas for training, administration, and marketing.	□	□	□	□	□
26	Innovation	The club permits new ideas to be tested and evaluated.	□	□	□	□	□
27	Innovation	Expertise and knowledge are transferred across teams and units.	□	□	□	□	□
28	Innovation	Successful ideas are converted into approved practices.	□	□	□	□	□
29	Responsiveness	The club responds quickly to shortages in positions and roles.	□	□	□	□	□
30	Responsiveness	The club has ready alternatives when individuals are absent or leave.	□	□	□	□	□
31	Responsiveness	The talent database supports rapid decision-making.	□	□	□	□	□
32	Responsiveness	The club adapts to changes in competition and regulations.	□	□	□	□	□
33	Reputation and sustainability	The club has a reputation that attracts players, coaches, and administrators.	□	□	□	□	□
34	Reputation and sustainability	Talent helps attract supporters, sponsors, and partners.	□	□	□	□	□

World Bulletin of Physical Education and Sports Science (WBPESS)
ISSN (E) : 3072-1768
Volume 2, Issue 10, October 2026
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https://worldbulletin.org/index.php/2

No.	Dimension	Item	5	4	3	2	1
35	Reputation and sustainability	The club preserves knowledge when individuals leave.	□	□	□	□	□
36	Reputation and sustainability	The club's results remain consistent and do not depend on one individual.	□	□	□	□	□

Appendix 2: Coding and Analysis Guide

The score for each dimension is calculated as the mean of its items. Talent management is calculated from the mean of items 1–20, and competitive advantage from the mean of items 21–36. There are no reverse-coded items. Missing values, outliers, and regression assumptions should be examined before analysis. Outputs for validity, reliability, correlation, and regression should be attached after the instrument is administered to the actual sample.