



Knowledge Management in Botswana Sport: Current Status and Future Directions

Authors' contribution:

- A) conception and design of the study
- B) acquisition of data
- C) analysis and interpretation of data
- D) manuscript preparation
- E) obtaining funding

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Abstract

In Botswana, sport is positioned as a potential driver of economic and social development. In particular, there are numerous discussions about increasing the socio-economic impact of sport and the need to professionalise Botswana sport. Knowledge Management (KM) can play a critical role in achieving this greater professionalisation and impact. Despite this importance, there have only been a small number of studies on KM in sports, and none of this literature explores the topic in sub-Saharan Africa. Against this background, the goals of our paper are two-fold. Firstly, we wish to map out the current knowledge management landscape in the Botswana sport sector. Secondly, we aim to propose concrete, evidence-based avenues to improve KM within the sector. This paper relies on findings generated through semi-structured qualitative interviews with individuals connected to Botswana sport. To allow for triangulation, these interviews are further supported by other, previous qualitative research as well as relevant academic and policy literature. The Knowledge Management framework from Sunassee and Sewry (2002) is used to analyse and structure the results. Overall, we see that KM in Botswana sport is somewhat present at the individual, organisational level, but numerous obstacles and inefficiencies exist in creating and sharing knowledge at the sectoral level. To support the growth of KM in the sector, numerous concrete recommendations are presented. In particular, we highlight a need to communicate the value of KM better and obtain the necessary buy-in.

Key words: Sport management, knowledge management, Botswana, technology

Introduction

Despite the country's relatively small population, sport in Botswana is well developed and plays an important societal role. Accordingly, its sport system is diverse and complex, featuring the government, the Botswana National Sport Commission (BNSC), the Botswana National Olympic Committee and over 30 National Sport Federations (NSFs) (Moustakas & Tshube, 2020). As a result of this size and importance, there have long been ambitions to commercialise sport and increase its socio-economic impact. The economy is heavily dependent on the mining sector (Jefferis, 2009), and there is a need to diversify sources of economic growth to ensure sustainable, long-term prosperity. Sport is often positioned as one of the solutions to this challenge. For instance, the BNSC Vision 2028

strategic document aims for sport to contribute 0.5% of the country's GDP (Botswana National Sports Council, 2013). In addition, sport can potentially play a role in supporting various sustainable health and educational development outcomes in the country (Moustakas & Işık, 2020). Parallel to conversations about increasing the economic and social impact of sport, there has been an accompanying discourse around the need to professionalise sport in Botswana. In other words, this should be understood as moving the sport sector away from being primarily non-profit, volunteer-run and publicly funded towards a self-sustaining sector with paid staff.

Knowledge Management (KM) can play a critical role in achieving this greater professionalisation, commercialisation and societal impact. In an increasingly globalised and digital world, KM is essential for success in both the public and private sectors (Ahmed & Elhag, 2017). The processes associated with KM, such as knowledge creation and sharing, are essential drivers of performance and innovation, both in general and in the sport sector (Ahmed & Elhag, 2017; Delshab & Sadeghi Boroujerdi, 2018; Mohsen Allameh, Khazaei Pool, Jaber, & Mazloomi Soveini, 2014; O'Reilly & Knight, 2007). Indeed, given the Botswana sport sector's predominantly volunteer-based nature (Moustakas, 2018), KM can be essential to manage and maximise limited resources. Despite this importance, literature on KM in sports remains an emerging topic (e.g. Delshab & Sadeghi Boroujerdi, 2018; Girginov, Toohey, & Willem, 2015; Mohsen Allameh et al., 2014; O'Reilly & Knight, 2007), and no articles were located that explore the topic in sub-Saharan Africa. There is limited literature on sport in the region and a corresponding need to understand environmental and managerial realities to support its advancement.

Against this background, the goals of our paper are two-fold. Firstly, we wish to generate an initial mapping of the Botswana sport sector's current knowledge management landscape. Secondly, based on this mapping, we aim to propose concrete, evidence-based avenues to improve KM within the sector. Ultimately, we argue that this understanding and subsequent improvements can play an important role in the sustainable professionalisation and socio-economic contribution of sport in Botswana. To support our analysis, we dissect our results through the lens of Knowledge Management and, more specifically, the conceptual framework proposed by Sunassee & Sewry (2002). Findings are generated through a combination of semi-structured interviews (including from Moustakas, 2020), document analysis and first-hand experience in the Botswana sport sector.

Moving forward, our paper proceeds in three steps. First, we present the concept of knowledge management and the associated framework in more depth. Then, we map out the current state of KM in Botswana sport against this Framework. Finally, we propose concrete pathways for improvement based on the mapping exercise, thus concluding the paper.

Conceptual framework

To start, it is crucial to define and distinguish the key terms used in the following article. Therefore, there is a need to define the concept of *knowledge* before delving into a discussion of *knowledge management*. In management, knowledge is generally defined as a combination of insights, understandings, and practical know-how. In other words, knowledge can be understood as the process of applying expertise (Alavi & Leidner, 2001). As for Knowledge Management (KM), there are numerous definitions of the term (for a review, see Ahmed & Elhag, 2017), but at its core can be understood as the process of creating, sharing, organising, and using knowledge (Girard & Girard, 2015; O'Reilly & Knight, 2007). Similarly, looking at the sport context, Delshab et al. (2019) identify five component processes within KM, namely the acquisition, creation, storage, sharing and application of knowledge.

The importance of KM is recognised across various sectors, including in the private and public spheres. Improved KM is essential for organisational growth and survival, and can contribute to learning, innovation and task effectiveness (Ahmed & Elhag, 2017; O'Reilly & Knight, 2007). From a sport-specific perspective, KM allows sport organisations to run more efficiently and better manage their limited resources (Delshab et al., 2019; O'Reilly & Knight, 2007). Especially in recent years, numerous researchers have devoted their time and attention to investigate this relationship (e.g. Winand & Anagnostopoulos, 2017; Winand, Scheerder, Vos, & Zintz, 2016). For instance, Winand, Scheerder, Vos and Zintz (2016) found that sport federations favour newness and seem driven by demands from members, creating a work atmosphere that favours knowledge creation, knowledge appropriation and innovativeness. Likewise, this research suggested numerous avenues through which sport organisations could improve their KM. These include managers encouraging a positive attitude towards developing new ideas within their organisation, appropriation of different types of knowledge, and exploiting innovative opportunities to meet stakeholder expectations (Winand et al., 2016). Furthermore, Delshab and Sadeghi Boroujerdi (2018) argue that sport organisations should foster a more appropriate context for applying and creating knowledge. Elsewhere, O'Reilly and Knight (2007) found that infrastructure and processes that efficiently facilitate knowledge creation and sharing boost sport organisation performance. The development of individual and social possessions in sport

organisations and their transformation to more efficient resources result from such knowledge creation and sharing cultures (Allameh, Pool, Jaber, & Soveini, 2014). Added to that, “the increased mobility of knowledge workers enables the opening up of more innovation opportunities related to sport” (Ratten, 2017, p. 63). Hence, there is a strong need for sports organisations to apply KM to be competitive and avoid losing critical knowledge sources such as staff, volunteers, or managers (Gholipour Souteh, Esmaeili, Honari, & Ghorbani, 2018).

Beyond understanding the definition and impact of KM, it is essential to have a conceptual framework that helps us define the components of KM and provides a starting point to map KM in the Botswana sport context. To do so, we use the framework put forth by Sunassee and Sewry (2002). This framework, presented in Figure 1, integrates cultural, human and technological components and proposes three main interlinked components: knowledge management of the organisation, of the people, and of infrastructure and processes. The emphasis here is on the importance of aligning the organisation’s knowledge management strategy and culture while also being mindful of the role of infrastructure, technology, and business processes. Firstly, knowledge management of the organisation deals with the activities that need to be performed within an organisation to support overall knowledge management efforts, such as creating a mission and vision, conducting SWOT analyses, managing the organisational culture and planning KM activities. At the people level, the focus is on managing individual behaviour and expectations. Therefore, it is essential to encourage individual knowledge acquisition, sharing and learning through both culture and policies. Finally, infrastructure and processes consist of managing the technological infrastructure and business processes associated with knowledge management activities.

Though other conceptualisations of KM exist, both in sport (e.g. Delshab et al., 2019) and in general (e.g. Ahmed & Elhag, 2017), the selected framework provides a rigorous yet practical, holistic framework for us to map out KM in Botswana sport. Furthermore, as it was developed and tested in the Southern African region (Sunassee & Sewry, 2003), it may be more culturally relevant to the current analysis. The three categories presented will allow us to analyse and present our results in the coming sections. In other words, we aim to map KM in Botswana sport, identify existing gaps, and propose avenues to address these gaps. Finally, it should be noted that our analysis focuses on the sector as a whole and not any particular organisation. We find this perspective especially relevant as sport organisations share numerous common resources, and cross-sectoral cooperation is needed to achieve overarching goals such as sport participation, athletic success or economic impact. Indeed, many actors in Botswana sport are highly interdependent (Kasale, Winand, & Morrow, 2019); as such, a holistic analysis is required and relevant.

Methodology

Design

We rely on a mix of qualitative data to support our findings. Semi-structured interviews with individuals engaged in Botswana sport allowed us to understand and map KM in Botswana sport. Nine interviews were conducted specifically for this paper. To support data saturation and validity, these main interviews are supported by results

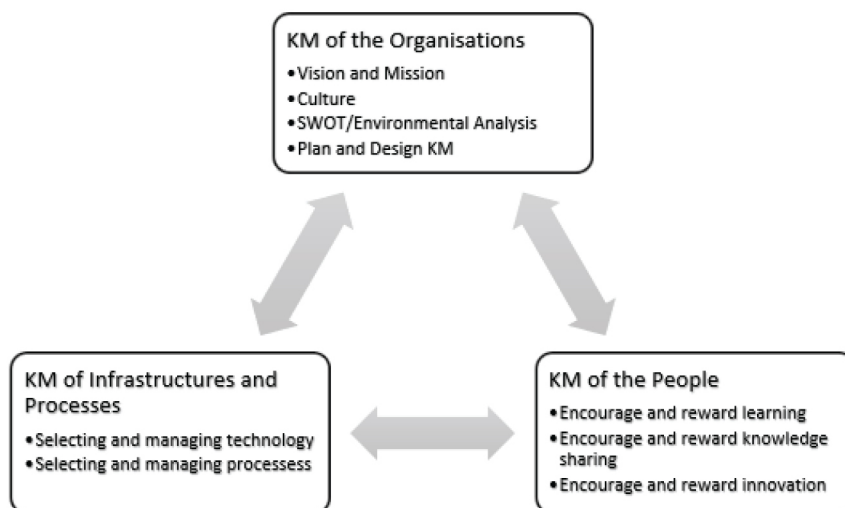


Figure 1. KM Framework adapted from Sunassee and Sewry (2002)

from previous interviews (including from Moustakas, 2020), first-hand experience in the Botswana sport sector, as well as sources such as academic literature, newspaper articles or policy documents.

Earlier interviews are included as previous research questions support the specific goals of this paper. In other words, topics related to KM in Botswana sport emerged in earlier work and strengthened the findings presented here. The interviewee IDs and timelines for all main interviewees are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of main interviewees

ID	Gender	Occupational Area
M01	Male	Politics/Government
M02	Female	Sports
M03	Male	Business
M04	Male	Regional Development
M05	Female	Sports
M06	Female	Business
M07	Male	Research/Academia
M08	Female	Civil Society
M09	Male	Politics/Government

Sampling

A purposive and snowball sampling approach was used to source interviewees. Interviewees were approached by e-mail or Facebook and generated through the first author's professional contacts in Botswana. Additional responses were generated via referrals from these contacts. Ten Individuals were initially contacted, with six agreeing to participate in an interview. Another three individuals were sourced through referrals.

Data collection

The first author conducted semi-structured online interviews in August 2020. In total, nine individuals were interviewed, with interviews lasting between 37 and 67 minutes each. Beforehand,

participants were explained the general purpose of the research and the researcher's interest in the topic. All participants were told that their statements would remain anonymous. The latter was done to allow interviewees to feel comfortable expressing opinions without fear of negative consequences. Interviews took place over online meeting software (Zoom or WebEx) and were digitally recorded subject to interviewee approval. Notes were taken during and after the interviews. Following the literature on this method, interview guidelines were organised around a limited set of predetermined open-ended questions, and probes emerged from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee (Barriball & While, 1994; Bryman, 2012; Diccico-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Turner III, 2010). Specifically, questions moved along three general topics. First, the interviewees were asked about how they viewed the contribution of sport to sustainable development in Botswana. Then, interviewees were asked about ways to improve the sport sector and its contribution to sustainable socio-economic development. Finally, questions specific to the goals of this paper were posed, included as it related to research, data management and technology in the Botswana sport sector. A separate paper has already been written detailing the implications of Botswana sport on sustainable development. This paper, instead, focuses on the realities, gaps and opportunities related to knowledge management in Botswana sport.

Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim into word processing software. Transcriptions were then analysed using MaxQDA 2020. Transcripts were deductively analysed, coded, and organised against the three knowledge management categories put forth by Sunnassee and Sewry (2002). Throughout the transcripts, memos were also taken to note researcher reflections on the data and its meaning.

Results: Mapping knowledge management in Botswana sport

Organisation level

Various national sport documents show that a certain level of organisational KM is present. Many sport organisations, including the Botswana National Olympic Committee (BNOC), Botswana National Sports Commission (BNSC), or the Botswana Football Association (BFA), have integrated mission statements or SWOT analyses in their strategic plans (Botswana Football Association, 2017; Botswana National Olympic Committee, 2017; Botswana National Sports Council, 2013). Numerous KM tools are readily utilised across the sport sector, including environmental analyses, value gap analysis, and the balanced scorecard approach. However, these critical first steps have not necessarily translated to a broader KM culture within the sector.

Other KM activities do not appear to be planned, designed or implemented. Though sport wishes to raise its profile and commercialise, the sector has not generated the required evidence to justify increased public or private

investment: “Everybody in Botswana sports complains that sport is not considered, and I’m sitting there like, ‘the only way to build a case is to research and provide data’” (M05). One particularly salient example of this lack of knowledge creation comes from the 2014 African Youth Games follow-up. Though a feedback session was held with stakeholders from the sport sector, the session was considered “useless” and just a “tick of the box”. There is a perceived lack of continuity between activities and a lack of appreciation for developing systematic learning and feedback mechanisms. As one interviewee put it, “we don’t measure impact at all” (M08). In turn, this inhibits the measurement of strategic objectives, organisational development and the identification of athletic talent in the country. Still, it is worth keeping in mind that the Botswana sport sector is primarily volunteer-driven, and volunteers often perceive knowledge creation or monitoring activities as a diversion from their organisation’s more critical, day-to-day survival (O’Reilly & Knight, 2007).

Many avenues of knowledge creation and sharing could benefit from simple improvements, yet there appears to be a reluctance to these changes. For instance, communication between different sport organisations is still primarily through mail and courier services, as opposed to e-mail or other collaborative software: “for example, if there’s a course happening, I’ll have to wait for the federation to send me a letter. Instead of being able to, you know, see it on a website or see it on social media” (M05). One interviewee returned to the sport sector hoping to enact changes in these areas, but encountered high resistance: “Even if you try to introduce a new thing it is difficult because people are now used to their way of doing things. People are not necessarily happy with changes” (M08).

Numerous reasons could explain this resistance. There appears to be a certain level of scepticism about technological solutions. For many, these are viewed with suspicion and fear that technological change may render jobs redundant. Furthermore, as O’Reilly and Knight (2007) note, volunteers’ limited time and resources may make individuals more comfortable with one-on-one communication, which is seen as more straightforward than engaging with group, digital or published resources. The lack of role clarity and rivalry between the country’s two major sporting bodies, the BNOC and BNSC, also likely plays a role (Moustakas & Tshube, 2020). The two organisations suffer from a poor, competitive relationship that fosters “power games” (M09) and creates “too much resource guarding, not enough resource sharing” (M03). This myriad of explanations suggests that Botswana sport does not see KM as a priority, and to some extent, may even see KM as a threat as opposed to an added value.

People level

At the people level, KM is equally paradoxical. Sport organisations invest considerable time and resources in learning activities. For instance, the BNOC facilitates the delivery of numerous sport administrator courses, including an Executive Master’s Degree and other smaller courses. In 2018, the Olympic committee contributed nearly 3,2 million BWP to such activities (Botswana National Olympic Committee, 2019). Elsewhere, the BFA is currently engaged in a coach development project in collaboration with the German Olympic Committee. In short, actors in the sport sector place significant value in supporting and encouraging learning amongst individuals in the sector. Nonetheless, for many interviewees, there is a clear sense that more investment needs to be made in both the quantity and quality of learning: “my belief is that we don’t even have the calibre of people who can engage in sport. What do we need to invest a lot in training people that they know how to act” (M06).

Furthermore, amongst stakeholders, information sharing is not necessarily encouraged or rewarded. Many of the factors described previously feed into this. As we will discuss later, part of this issue also lies within Botswana sport’s overall infrastructure and processes. For instance, there is no centralised list or registry accessible to all sport organisations keeping track of crucial resources such as athletes, coaches, referees, equipment or infrastructures. Overall, the reluctance towards change and the competitive relationship between the BNOC and BNSC foster an environment where individuals are not encouraged to share information. During the lead up to the African Youth Games, many stakeholders reported poor communication with the Organising Committee. Most notably, it is clear that sharing is not encouraged at the highest levels of strategic management. The strategic plans of the BNOC and BNSC are aligned to different targets and, most strikingly, put forth differing medal targets for the Olympic Games. In the end, this lack of knowledge sharing leads to a fragmented sport system and a conflicting, inefficient working atmosphere.

Infrastructure and processes

Very few centralised knowledge management infrastructures or processes exist in the Botswana sport sector. Most notably, there is an organisation dedicated to the registration and provision of volunteers for sport. Known as the Sport Volunteer Movement (SVM), this organisation maintains a national database of sport volunteers that organisations can use to source volunteers. The website has been recently updated, and the service’s numbers have grown in recent years (Moustakas, 2020).

Beyond this, there are very few sector-wide approaches in this area. For one, there is a lack of public-facing platforms to serve individual organisations and sport as a whole. Many federations do not have up-to-date websites or have a limited social media presence. And there is no platform for knowledge sharing with the public or between sectoral stakeholders: “web sites are not updated, email blasts are not done” (M04). That means that opportunities that are of interest for the entire sport sector, such as administrator courses, grants or events, are limited to well-informed individuals or those living in urban centres. Providing such information in a public fashion would be of great value. It would help attract individuals to different events and support arguments about the opportunities and value that can be generated through sport. In particular, numerous interviewees recognised the value of not only having a central platform but of more actively and regularly engaging individuals via social media: “Social media is such a powerful tool (...) every second person in the country is on Facebook” (M01).

Of course, such a centralised, public resource can only happen with adequate knowledge sharing processes and infrastructure within or between organisations. At the moment, these are equally lacklustre. Data is collected, analysed and shared in relatively old, ineffective ways. Communications between organisations are still often done by traditional mail, whereas the tracking of athletes, coaches or leagues still rely on handwritten materials or spreadsheets. These methods inhibit data preservation or collection and prevent the country from getting a consistent picture across numerous vital metrics, such as athletes’ demographics, qualified coaches, athletic performance, or economic impact. As noted above, the sector has high sporting and economic ambitions. Yet, current KM processes do not fully reflect that: “We’re trying to compete [with top nations], but we’re still not able to do the basics of performance analysis” (M05).

Discussion: advancing knowledge management in Botswana sport

As the preceding sections show, KM in Botswana sport is a mixed bag with significant room for improvement. There appear to be positive trends in creating internal strategic knowledge and encouraging individual learning. Conversely, individual and sectoral knowledge sharing is not widely supported, with organisational cultures and the lack of adequate technological infrastructure acting as barriers.

Moving forward, our results have numerous important practical implications for the sector in Botswana and elsewhere. First and foremost, there is a pressing need to communicate better the need and value of KM. In that sense, we echo the conclusions of numerous authors who also note that volunteers or staff may have reservations about sharing knowledge (Delshab et al., 2019; O’Reilly & Knight, 2007). As such, leaders in the sector must present the potential benefits of improved KM in concrete, understandable ways. In particular, there may be a fear that sharing or technology could put jobs at risk. Though we can not dismiss this out of hand, improved KM is likely to enhance the sector’s economic and social potential, leading to increased long-term employment.

Parallel to this buy-in, there is a need to select and implement relevant technological infrastructure and processes to improve KM. The sport sector in Botswana shares numerous common inputs and resources. Athletes, coaches, equipment and facilities all interact with multiple sport organisations. Yet, there is no sector-wide tracking and monitoring of these different resources. Despite some attempts to create sector-wide data sharing, the chosen software, Zeus, is perceived as complex and not user friendly. Nonetheless, there is a clear need to move in this direction. Otherwise, it will remain impossible for the sector to monitor its progress, track strategic objectives, and make its case to the public or private sectors.

Furthermore, such a centralised resource could allow organisations to share other materials, such as strategic plans, competition formats or other best practices. In addition, this could feed into a public-facing website that disseminates various sport-related opportunities from across the sector. At present, information and access to events or courses remain restricted to individuals with connections to the sector. Such central, public-facing platforms have been successfully implemented in other countries, including Estonia (see Estonian Foundation of Sports Education and Information, 2021). Also, social media must be used more consistently to support this public dissemination. Finally, we note that the Covid-19 pandemic has forced many organisations to employ online learning tools, which has increased the attendance and accessibility of courses. As one interviewee who hosted an online event noted, she was able to attract “2000 people to watch the discussion”, whereas, when doing physical events, she only has “between 60 and 100 people” (M06). This is a trend the sector should embrace and invest in further, even post-Pandemic.

In the end, the above recommendations may remain moot if the endemic rivalry between the BNOC and BNSC persists. There has long been a narrative that the two organisations have been at odds. Former BNSC Chairperson Solly Reikeletseng once characterised the organisations as involved in a “territorial turf war” (Botswana Guardian, 2019). The tensions between the two organisations have also been formally recognised, including back in the 2001

National Policy on Sport (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture, 2001) and the 2017-2020 BNOC Strategic Plan (Botswana National Olympic Committee, 2017). Though not the focus of this research, this topic regularly emerged in our interviews. Interviewees pointed to high organisational protectionism levels that led to overlap, competition and obstruction within various sport policy and programmes. This situation directly affects other organisations in the sport sector, as roles and communication channels remain unclear, and these organisations must often navigate politically delicate situations. There have been recent efforts to clarify roles and harmonise relations between the organisations, but these measures appear to have been ineffective. More drastic steps, including a merger, should be considered. Unless this issue is entirely and finally addressed, sustainable improvement of knowledge management in the sector will remain elusive, if not impossible.

Conclusion

With this paper, we aimed to provide an initial mapping of the current Knowledge Management practices in the Botswana sport sector as well as identify specific potential avenues for improvement. In turn, this mapping and related suggestions can support the growth of the sport sector and help boost its socio-economic contribution,

Overall, we see that KM in Botswana sport is present at the individual, organisational level. Organisations engage with several strategic knowledge management tools and encourage individual learning. In contrast, numerous obstacles and inefficiencies exist in creating and sharing knowledge at the sectoral level. Yet, there is a clear need to think and act at a sectoral level. Numerous interdependencies within Botswana sport and sport organisations share numerous vital resources, including athletes, coaches and infrastructure.

To support the growth of KM in the sector, numerous concrete recommendations are presented. In particular, we highlight a need to communicate the value of KM better and obtain the necessary buy-in. Furthermore, we emphasise the need to resolve the endemic tensions between the BNOC and BNSC, which act as a severe inhibitor to KM and overall sectoral growth.

Competing interests

The author(s) have no competing interests to declare.

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