The Hidden Assist?

Data Analytics in Football as an Organisational Capability

A Qualitative Study Exploring How Football Clubs in Allsvenskan Use Data Analytics as an Organisational Capability to Create Competitive Advantage

Bachelor Thesis

Stockholm School of Economics

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Abstract

Data analytics has become increasingly important in professional football, yet access to data does not by itself create a competitive advantage. This qualitative study investigates how clubs in Allsvenskan, Sweden's highest men's football division, use data analytics as an organisational capability to create competitive advantage, and how these capabilities vary under different resource conditions. Grounded in the Resource-Based View, the study draws on semi-structured interviews with informants across clubs, the league trade body, and technology and sport-service providers, analysed using the Gioia methodology and complemented by a contextual analysis of five clubs' annual reports. The findings show that analytics is most deeply embedded on the sporting side of clubs and less developed commercially. Since the foundational tools are accessible to all clubs commercially, they do not inherently grant any competitive advantage. What differentiates clubs is the organisational capability built around data use: the interpretation, routines, and continuity through which data informs decisions. This capability is socially complex, causally ambiguous, and path-dependent, and therefore harder for competitors to imitate. These capabilities vary across clubs as a matter of priority rather than presence: larger clubs develop analytics as a broad organisational system, while smaller, resource-constrained clubs apply it more selectively, concentrating on recruitment and talent development. The study contributes by shifting the question of football analytics from what data can measure to what an organisation can do with it. It suggests that the resource separating clubs is organisational rather than technical, an insight with potential relevance to resource-constrained organisations beyond football.

Keywords: *Data analytics, Football analytics, Organisational Capability, Resource-Based View*, *Competitive advantage.*

Acknowledgement

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our supervisor, Fredrik Lange, for his valuable guidance and support throughout this thesis. We are also deeply grateful to Anna Nash Laurell from the Center for Sports & Business at Stockholm School of Economics. Lastly, we are especially grateful to all the informants and their respective organisations for generously sharing their time, insights, and contributions.

Supervisor: Fredrik Lange

Examiner: Jennie Lorisson

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1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the study. Subsection 1.1 presents the background and Swedish context; subsections 1.2 and 1.3 present the purpose, contribution, and research questions; and subsections 1.4 and 1.5 outline the delimitations and study structure.

1.1 Background

> *"Statistical thinking will one day be as necessary for efficient citizenship as the ability to read and write" (Samuel S. Wilks, paraphrasing H. G. Wells, 1951).*

Professional football has undergone substantial commercial growth and is now one of the most financially significant sectors within the global sports industry. In the 2024/2025 season, the top 20 revenue-generating clubs worldwide recorded combined revenues of €12.4 billion, an 11% increase over the previous season (Deloitte, 2026). This development reflects broader changes in professional football, in which, since the 1990s, globalisation, organisational restructuring, and more formalised business and management practices have become increasingly influential (Smith, 2022). Consequently, success in football is no longer determined solely by the 90 minutes of play, but also by the quality of decisions made before, during, and after matches (Toma & Campobasso, 2023).

Major League Baseball (MLB) is widely regarded as the first sport to make systematic and consequential use of data analytics in player recruitment (Steinberg, 2015). In the late 1990s, Billy Beane, then general manager of the Oakland Athletics, employed statistical analysis to support scouting and roster decisions, most notably by identifying undervalued players and avoiding overvalued ones, an approach later popularised through the book & movie *Moneyball* (Lewis, 2004). The relevance of Moneyball to this study is not that football clubs should directly copy baseball methods, but that resource-constrained organisations may compete more effectively by identifying and exploiting information others overlook.

However, football has long been slower than other major sports to adopt data analytics. In this study, data analytics is understood as the collection, organisation, processing, and interpretation of data to support decision-making (Gandomi & Haider, 2015). As late as 2010, *The New York Times* described football as the *"least statistical"* of the major sports, mainly because the available data was still limited (Kaplan, 2010). Since then, however, this has changed quickly. The growth of digital technologies and the rise of specialised data companies such as Opta and Prozone have made large amounts of performance data available across

professional football (Smith, 2022). One of the best-known examples is Liverpool FC, whose success has often been linked to its use of data analytics (Graham, 2024). Ian Graham, who served as the club's Director of Research from 2012 to 2023, describes in his book how Liverpool built the Premier League's first in-house analytics department and used data in recruitment, tactical planning, and long-term strategy. This approach played a key role in the club's later success, including winning the UEFA Champions League in 2018/19 and the Premier League in 2019/20 (Graham, 2024). This influence was evident in the 2018/19 UEFA Champions League final starting line-up, where nine of the eleven players had been recruited through data-informed processes (Graham, 2024). Today, data analysis has become an increasingly common part of how elite clubs operate (Smith, 2022). Yet examples such as Liverpool also raise an important question: if analytics becomes more common across football, competitive advantage may no longer come from having data alone, but from developing the organisational capability to use it better than competitors.

In 2017, all arenas in Allsvenskan, Sweden's highest men's football division, were equipped with artificial intelligence cameras, enabling automatic recording and sharing through a shared league-wide video platform (Svensk Elitfotboll, 2019). From 2019, this infrastructure was further developed by integrating real-time player and team analysis, including metrics such as distance covered, tempo, and distances between team units (Svensk Elitfotboll, 2019). These developments suggest that Swedish football is increasingly adopting data-driven value creation.

1.2 Purpose and Contribution

Existing literature indicates that football analytics has evolved rapidly and now encompasses a diverse set of functions, as discussed further in the literature review. However, much of this research still focuses on the measurable aspects of the game, while far less attention has been given to how clubs organise, prioritise, and use analytics as an organisational capability. In this study, organisational capability refers to a club's ability to coordinate and apply its resources, including data, technology, human expertise, routines, and decision-making processes, in ways that support organisational performance and potential competitive advantage (Barney, 1991).

This gap is particularly relevant in Allsvenskan, where clubs differ considerably in their organisational conditions, due to their histories and financial conditions (EY, 2026; Svenska Fotbollförbundet, 2024). Allsvenskan, therefore, offers a valuable empirical context for examining how organisations with unequal resource conditions convert access to data into decision-making capability and potential competitive advantage. In this study, competitive

advantage is understood as a club's potential ability to strengthen its sporting and/or commercial position relative to comparable clubs. The study does not measure competitive advantage directly, but examines how analytics-related resources and capabilities may support conditions associated with such advantage; this is developed further in the theoretical framework (Section 2.5.1).

Although Allsvenskan is the empirical context of this study, the contribution is relevant beyond Allsvenskan. The findings may provide transferable insights for other football leagues, sports organisations, and resource-constrained organisations seeking to integrate data analytics into decision-making processes.

1.3 Research Question

The purpose of this study is addressed through the following research question:

> *How do football clubs in Allsvenskan use data analytics as an organisational capability to help create competitive advantage?*

To capture variation in how analytics capabilities are applied, the study also considers the following sub-question:

> *Do these capabilities vary among football clubs in Allsvenskan with different resource conditions, and if so, in what ways?*

1.4 Delimitations

Due to limitations in time and scope, this study focuses solely on Allsvenskan. We focus on how data analytics is used as an organisational capability to help create competitive advantage, rather than on the technical design of specific models, algorithms, or performance metrics. The empirical material is drawn from 11 semi-structured interviews with individuals working in or around Allsvenskan. To protect anonymity, specific individuals and organisations are not identified, and the analysis focuses on broader patterns across the interviews rather than on single clubs or respondents. The study is also complemented by a contextual annual-report analysis of five selected Allsvenskan clubs from 2023–2025. The analysis focuses on revenue sources rather than balance sheet indicators because the aim is to illustrate differences in financial scale and revenue logic, not to assess financial health. Nor is it intended to explain the specific organisations represented by the interviewees. Moreover, the study does not measure the direct effect of analytics on match results, financial performance or individual

player outcomes. Finally, the study discusses human capital as part of analytics capability, but it does not systematically examine the specific skillsets required to perform analytics work, such as statistical training, programming ability, tactical expertise or communication skills. These are considered only where they appeared in interviewees' descriptions of how analytics is organised and used.

1.5 Structural overview

The remainder of the study is structured as follows. The next section presents the theoretical background, including literature on data analytics in professional sport and the Resource-Based View as the analytical framework. Section 3 describes the research design, data collection, and analytical approach, including the Gioia et al. (2012) method used to analyse the interviews. Section 4 presents the empirical findings from interviews and annual reports. Section 5 discusses the findings in relation to theory, implications, limitations, and future research. Finally, Section 6 concludes the study with the main takeaways.

2. Theory

This section examines existing academic research used in this study, drawing on a comprehensive literature review. Sections 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 review existing literature on the use of data analytics in professional football clubs and how it can assist decision-making and value creation. Section 2.5 reviews literature on the Resource-Based View theory of competitive advantage and how it will be applied in this study. Academic sources were mainly found through Scopus and the Stockholm School of Economics library.

2.1 Conceptualising football analytics: From data tools to organisational practice

Data analytics, as stated previously, refers to the collection, organisation, processing, and interpretation of data to support decision-making (Gandomi & Haider, 2015). The authors argue that analytics should not be reduced to large datasets or advanced algorithms alone. Their broader interpretation of big data emphasises volume, variety, and velocity, as well as the ability to manage unstructured data, including text, audio, video, and other complex formats (Goes et al., 2021; Rein & Memmert, 2016). This broader understanding is highly relevant in professional football, where clubs increasingly combine multiple forms of information, including match-event data, positional tracking data, video analysis, physical-load measures, medical and injury records, recruitment information, and market data to support decision-

making across different departments (Goes et al., 2021; Lolli et al., 2025). Positional tracking data records the locations of players and the ball many times per second, whereas event data records discrete match actions such as passes, shots, fouls, and saves (Stein et al., 2015). Together, these data sources allow analysts to examine both the spatial organisation of players and the actions that occur during matches.

Football-specific research extends this view to the organisational level. Lolli et al. (2025) demonstrate that data analytics in professional clubs is integrated across multiple functions, including coaching, recruitment, performance support, medical services, and operations, rather than confined to a single performance unit. Realising this breadth requires a functional data ecosystem in which information is standardised and centralised, alongside information systems that enable staff across departments to access and use the data in practice (Bartlett & Drust, 2021; Lolli et al., 2025). Wright et al. (2014) further argue that football performance analysis only adds value when it informs coaching practice and behavioural change, and Bartlett and Drust (2021) emphasise that sport scientists must translate complex information into usable performance solutions for diverse stakeholders. The contribution of analytics, therefore, rests not on the availability of data but on how effectively staff interpret it, communicate it, and embed it in everyday decision-making (Bartlett & Drust, 2021; Wright et al., 2014).

2.2 Sporting applications of data analytics in football

This section reviews how data analytics is used in the sporting side of football. Section 2.2.1 focuses on performance, tactical, and physical analysis, while Section 2.2.2 discusses talent identification, injury prevention, and player development. Together, these sections show that analytics can support sporting decisions, but only when data is interpreted in context and combined with football expertise.

2.2.1 Performance, Tactical, and Physical Analysis

Much of the existing football analytics literature remains centred on the sporting dimensions of the game, particularly match analysis, tactical behaviour, performance indicators, and the use of positional tracking data (Goes et al., 2021; Rein & Memmert, 2016; Sarmento et al., 2014). Early contributions by Hughes and Bartlett (2002) emphasise that performance indicators such as shots, passes, possession, and errors can be misleading if analysed in isolation. Instead, such measures become meaningful only when they are compared, normalised, and interpreted in relation to relevant contextual factors, including opposition quality, match conditions, and previous performances. Hughes and Franks (2005) similarly

demonstrate that raw football statistics can lead to distorted conclusions when not properly normalised, potentially impacting the quality of tactical and training decisions. Recent studies support this contextual view by highlighting that the usefulness of football data relies on its connection to tactical, temporal, and situational factors (Goes et al., 2021; Sarmento et al., 2014). Together, these studies suggest that football analytics is not simply about collecting more data, but about interpreting performance information within the specific context in which actions occur (Hughes & Bartlett, 2002; Sarmento et al., 2014).

Dalen et al. (2016) argue that traditional time-motion analysis may underestimate workload when it focuses too heavily on speed. Their research suggests that accelerations and decelerations represent a substantial share of total player load and that these loads differ across positions. The authors argue that player load is accumulated through different forms of movement, and that actions such as turning, tackling, rapid deceleration, and other explosive movements may impose considerable physical demands even if they do not constitute high-speed running (Dalen et al., 2016; Stølen et al., 2005). This can, therefore, deepen understanding of performance beyond conventional running statistics and support more effective training and workload management.

Positional tracking data has also expanded tactical analysis by enabling clubs to examine player movement, team organisation, and spatial behaviour during matches (Goes et al., 2021; Rein & Memmert, 2016). Machine learning can further support this by automating the analysis of synchronised positional and event data, helping identify complex tactical behaviours that would otherwise require time-consuming manual video analysis (Anzer & Bauer, 2021).

2.2.2 Talent identification, injury prevention and player development

Sarmento et al. (2018) argue that talent identification in football is multidimensional, involving technical, tactical, anthropometric, physiological, and psychological factors that change over time and vary by age, maturity, and position. This review challenges narrow, one-dimensional scouting models based on physical dominance or isolated traits. For clubs, analytics can therefore support more informed talent identification by combining multiple types of information rather than relying on a single visible performance indicator (Lolli et al., 2025; Sarmento et al., 2018). In addition, Van Eetvelde et al. (2021) demonstrate that machine learning methods can help identify players at high risk of injury and reveal important injury-related risk factors by identifying patterns that may be overlooked in traditional analysis, including the effects of previous injury, greater training load, and, in some youth contexts, body

size. However, they also highlight that injury prediction, and prevention should be understood as decision support rather than a complete replacement for medical expertise or coaching judgement (Van Eetvelde et al., 2021).

The importance of workload monitoring is also supported by Chang et al. (2024), who show that workload-related variables such as minutes played and average minutes per match are linked to both performance and injury risk, which highlights the practical value of combining performance, workload, and injury data in squad planning (Chang et al., 2024; Van Eetvelde et al., 2021). Taken together, these findings demonstrate that football analytics can create value not only by improving match performance but also assisting longer-term decisions about player availability and squad planning. By supporting more holistic scouting and more proactive injury management, it can help clubs reduce uncertainty in player development, recruitment, and squad management decisions (Sarmento et al., 2018; Van Eetvelde et al., 2021).

2.3 Analytics Beyond the Pitch: Strategic, Economic, and Organisational Uses

Although sporting applications dominate much of the football analytics literature, several studies show that analytics is also relevant to strategic and economic decision-making. This is particularly evident in subsections 2.3.1 (player valuations and transfer market activity) and 2.3.2 (organisation of analytical capabilities within clubs).

2.3.1 Player Valuation and Transfer-Market Decision-Making

One of the clearest strategic applications is in player valuation and transfer-market activity (Müller et al., 2017; Toma & Campobasso, 2023). In football, market value refers to the estimated amount a club could receive for selling a player's contract to another club (Herm et al., 2014). Whereas transfer fees represent actual market prices paid, market values are forward-looking estimates and therefore play an important role in transfer negotiations. Traditionally, such values have been assessed by football experts, but crowdsourcing platforms such as Transfermarkt have become increasingly influential (Müller et al., 2017). The findings also indicate that analytics is particularly useful for valuating low- to medium-value players, enabling football clubs to rely on more objective, internally usable estimates during transfer negotiations. Expensive players, by contrast, are often harder to value accurately, as their transfer fees may reflect exceptional commercial appeal, reputation, or club-specific demand, dimensions that are less easily measured through statistical models (Müller et al., 2017). Nevertheless, statistical models may also fail to capture intangible factors such as personality, adaptability, leadership, cultural fit, commercial value and the specific tactical fit between

player and club (Herm et al., 2014; Müller et al., 2017). Data analytics may therefore contribute to competitive advantage in the transfer market by providing an internal, systematic, and less subjective assessment (Lolli et al., 2025; Müller et al., 2017).

2.3.2 Analytics as a Strategic Organisational Capability

Toma and Campobasso (2023) provide a strategic perspective on data analytics by demonstrating how it can be used to examine the relationships among spending levels, squad-value distribution, player performance, and style of play in Europe's top leagues. Their findings suggest that strategic success in football depends not simply on possessing resources, but on how clubs use data to understand, organise, and align those resources with the team's playing model. Lolli et al. (2025) reinforce this by arguing that data analytics is becoming increasingly important for sustaining competitiveness in both sporting and financial contexts. According to their findings, analytics is not only linked to coaching, player management, recruitment, and medical support, but also to broader organisational processes. Nevertheless, these benefits are not realised equally across organisations, since many still lack dedicated data engineers, statisticians, and robust governance arrangements (Lolli et al., 2025). This indicates that, although the strategic importance of analytics is acknowledged, the capability to implement it effectively varies across football organisations (Bartlett & Drust, 2021).

This tension is further developed by Gamble et al. (2020), who caution against an overly data-driven approach in football. They argue that analytics should support human expertise rather than replace it, since football decisions often require contextual judgement that cannot be fully captured by quantitative indicators. Similarly, Wright et al. (2014) show that performance analysis becomes meaningful only when it is integrated into coaching practice and contributes to changes in player, coach and training behaviours. Their study highlights that producing data is not enough; analysts must communicate information in ways that are understandable and useful for practitioners.

2.4 Analytics in the Allsvenskan Context

Since this study concentrates on Allsvenskan, existing research on Swedish elite football more broadly, spanning the men's and women's first and second divisions, is used to contextualise analytics practices in this setting. Primus and Karlsson (2025) show that performance analysis technology is widely used across these leagues, with more than 80% of respondents reporting that their clubs use one or more forms of technology. Their study provides an overview of which technologies are used, why they are used, and how they are implemented**,** rather than

examining analytics as a source of competitive advantage. For instance, strength and conditioning coaches often hold a central role, and video, GPS, and mobile apps are the most used technologies (Primus & Karlsson, 2025). Video is mainly used for tactical and technical analysis, such as player positioning, opponents, and training exercises, whereas GPS is used to track players' physical workload, including distance covered, sprinting, and accelerations. Mobile apps, by contrast, are primarily used to monitor well-being and self-reported indicators, including sleep, nutrition, recovery, and stress. The collection, analysis, and communication are led primarily by the head coach and assistant coach, with analysts and goalkeeping coaches serving in supporting roles. Furthermore, Primus and Karlsson (2025) argue that effective utilisation of these systems depends not only on technological competence, but also on the pedagogical and communication skills available within the club. It, therefore, becomes evident that the issue is not merely the availability of tools, but the existence of organisational conditions necessary to deploy them effectively (Bartlett & Drust, 2021; Primus & Karlsson, 2025; Wright et al., 2014).

To summarise, the literature shows that football analytics is increasingly used in performance analysis, workload monitoring, injury prevention, recruitment, and player valuation. However, data alone does not create value. The research gap is therefore how resource-constrained clubs organise and use data analytics in everyday decisions to create a competitive advantage.

2.5 Theoretical Framework: Resource-Based View

This study adopts the Resource-Based View (RBV) as its theoretical framework (Barney, 1991), because it explains performance differences through firm-level resources rather than industry-level conditions. RBV is operationalised through the VRIO framework, which evaluates whether a resource is valuable, rare, costly to imitate, and organised to be exploited, and thereby distinguishes resources that yield temporary advantage from those that sustain it.

2.5.1 Resources, Heterogeneity, and Competitive Advantage

The Resource-Based View shifts attention from industry structure to firm-level resources as sources of performance differences (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984). It rests on two assumptions: resource heterogeneity, meaning firms control different resource bundles, and resource immobility, meaning these differences persist because resources are not freely transferable (Barney, 1991). Barney (1991) defines resources broadly, spanning physical, human, and organisational capital, a breadth that matters here because the resources relevant

to football analytics fall across all three types. The VRIO framework, presented in section 2.5.2, operationalises this distinction.

2.5.2 Applying VRIO to Data Analytics in Allsvenskan

The research question explores why clubs within the same league, following identical regulations and having similar commercial tools, differ in their data usage and outcomes. RBV is appropriate for understanding this internal variation, as it focuses on the sources of advantage within the firm rather than externally. In football, competitive advantage has both sporting and commercial dimensions. Sporting advantage concerns results, league position, European qualification, and underlying performance, while commercial advantage concerns sponsorship, attendance, broadcast income, and other revenue streams. The two are interrelated, since sporting success generally drives commercial returns and commercial resources fund sporting investment, but they are analytically separable.

Originally formulated in Barney (1991) and refined by Barney (1995), the framework evaluates a resource against four criteria: whether it is Valuable, Rare, costly to Imitate, and whether the firm is Organised to exploit it. A resource is valuable when it helps the firm respond to opportunities or threats, and value is a precondition for the other VRIO criteria (Barney, 1991). A resource is rare when few competitors control it (Barney, 1991). If a valuable resource is widely available, it produces competitive parity rather than advantage; if it is valuable and rare, it may create temporary competitive advantage. A resource is costly to imitate when firms that do not possess it face a significant cost disadvantage in obtaining or developing it (Barney, 1991). Barney identifies three mechanisms: *unique historical conditions* (resources built up through a particular sequence of events), *causal ambiguity* (unclear links between resource and advantage), and *social complexity* (resources tied to relationships, culture, or routines that competitors cannot easily reproduce). Resources protected by these mechanisms can sustain competitive advantage over longer periods, though whether that potential is realised depends on the fourth criterion. The fourth criterion is organisation. A resource that is valuable, rare, and costly to imitate will yield sustained competitive advantage only if the firm is structured to exploit it. A firm holding such a resource without the structures to deploy it has what Barney (1995) terms an unexploited competitive advantage, a resource with the potential to generate sustained advantage that the firm fails to realise. A club is regarded as being organised to leverage its data resources when it possesses the structures, processes, and routines necessary to translate analytical work into operational decisions. This includes the placement of analysts

within the organisation, the willingness of decision-makers to act upon analytical input, and the integration between analytical and non-analytical functions.

Valuable	Rare	Costly to Imitate	Exploited by Organisation	Competitive Implication
No	-	-	-	Competitive disadvantage
Yes	No	-	-	Competitive parity
Yes	Yes	No	-	Temporary competitive advantage
Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Unexploited competitive advantage
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sustained competitive advantage

Table 1. *VRIO criteria and their competitive implications*

2.5.3 Critiques and limits of RBV

Although RBV is widely used in strategic management, it has been criticised for tautological reasoning and for the difficulty of measuring VRIO criteria objectively (Priem & Butler, 2001; Kraaijenbrink et al., 2010). It has also been criticised for being relatively static, as it says less about how resources are developed or reconfigured over time. These limitations are relevant to this study, since it does not objectively measure VRIO conditions or prove sustained competitive advantage. Instead, RBV is used as an interpretive lens to analyse how interviewees describe analytics-related resources and capabilities at one point in time.

3. Methodology

This chapter presents the study's methodological approach, including the research design, sampling, data collection, analysis, research quality, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research design

This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory design based primarily on semi-structured interviews. Rather than testing predefined hypotheses or aiming for statistical generalisation, it seeks to generate context-sensitive insights into how clubs in Allsvenskan use data analytics and how participants interpret these practices (Kvale, 1997; Stebbins, 2001). Interviewees were informed of the study's general focus but did not receive specific questions in advance to preserve openness and spontaneity in the interview setting (Kvale, 1997). This design is appropriate for the purpose of the study because the research seeks to understand how practitioners interpret and organise analytics in practice, rather than to measure the statistical effect of analytics on sporting or financial outcomes.

To answer the sub-question, an annual report analysis was conducted. This examines revenue sources to highlight differences in clubs' income structures, seen in Appendix C. Although it does not pertain to the specific clubs represented by the interviewees, it serves as contextual background to help understand how various income streams can influence clubs' resource situations and analytics focus.

The approach is abductive, with the Resource-Based View used as a sensitising lens for the research question and interview guide (Bell et al., 2019). The study is also cross-sectional, as data was collected from several football clubs at one point in time. Although a quantitative approach could have provided more precise and comparable measures, semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allow flexibility and capture complex perceptions, unexpected themes, and practitioners' interpretations of organisational practice (Bell et al., 2019; Kvale, 1997). Studying multiple organisations also made it possible to compare how data analytics is understood and used across different club contexts (Eisenhardt, 1989).

3.2 Sampling and participants

The study uses purposive sampling, selecting organisations and informants based on their relevance to the research question (Bell et al., 2019). Informants were drawn from sporting, commercial, league-level, and external service-provider roles to capture different organisational perspectives on data analytics. Within each organisation, informants were selected based on their proximity to decisions about how data is acquired and used, including sporting directors, club leaders, data analysts, and commercial heads. The specific individuals contacted depended on role availability and accessible contact details.

Recruitment occurred primarily through direct outreach to a broad set of clubs, and interviews were conducted with all who responded. Access to the technology provider was facilitated through a contact at the *Center for Sports & Business* at the Stockholm School of Economics (SSE). Snowball sampling (Atkinson & Flint, 2001) from the first league-level organisation interview led to two more interviews at the same organisation, which in turn produced two club-based data analyst interviews. An overview of all informants is presented in Table 2. The final interview sample consisted of 11 informants representing 7 Allsvenskan clubs and 4 organisations operating around Swedish elite football, including a league-level organisation, a technology provider, and a sport business service provider.

Interviewee	Role	Setting	Date	Duration
1	Senior Executive	Microsoft Teams	2026-03-10	27 min
2	Sporting Strategy	Microsoft Teams	2026-03-16	34 min
3	Data Coordination	In-person	2026-03-16	1h 4 min
4	Performance Coach	In-person	2026-03-17	1h 19 min
5	Commercial Manager	Microsoft Teams	2026-04-01	34 min
6	Chief Scout & Assistant Coach	Microsoft Teams	2026-04-03	47 min
7	Head of Sales	In-person	2026-04-09	57 min
8	Data Scientist & Scout	Microsoft Teams	2026-04-10	49 min
9	Sports Business Representative	Microsoft Teams	2026-04-23	43 min
10	Technical Director	Microsoft Teams	2026-04-28	37 min
11	Sales Corporate	Microsoft Teams	2026-04-28	48 min
				Avg = 47

Table 2. *Overview of semi-structured interviews*

3.3 Data collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews (Bell et al., 2019). This format was chosen because it allowed us to cover specific topics and themes we wanted to explore while still letting informants speak freely and giving us room to ask follow-up questions when interesting points arose (Bell et al., 2019). The interview guide was informed by the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991). The guide was also adapted before each interview to reflect the informant's organisational context, with the core themes kept consistent across interviews, but the specific framing of questions adjusted depending on whether the informant worked at a club, a league-level organisation, or a technology provider. Theoretical vocabulary was deliberately kept out of the questions themselves, so that informants described their work in their own terms rather than being prompted toward concepts from the framework or findings from literature. Questions were phrased in an open-ended way to avoid yes/no answers and to avoid steering informants toward particular responses (Bell et al., 2019). Before the main interviews, a pilot interview with a league-body representative was conducted to test the clarity and relevance of the interview guide. This interview was used only to refine the guide and was therefore not included in the empirical analysis or in the informant overview in Table 2.

Informants could choose the interview language to facilitate natural expression. All interviews were conducted in Swedish, except one in English. Interviews were carried out either in person or via Microsoft Teams, depending on location and availability, and lasted 47 minutes on

average. Online interviews were recorded through Teams, while in-person interviews were recorded on a mobile device and transcribed afterwards. Transcripts were kept in the original language, with selected quotes translated into English during the analysis and writing process.

3.4 Data analysis

Interviews were coded primarily in Swedish to preserve meaning, while selected quotes were translated into English during the writing process. NVivo, provided by Stockholm School of Economics (SSE), was used to organise transcripts, codes and themes. Coding decisions were discussed through repeated comparison with the empirical material.

The analysis followed the inductive thematic approach of Gioia et al. (2012) through three analytical steps: the development of *first-order concepts*, the construction of *second-order themes*, and the abstraction of these themes into broader *aggregate dimensions*. Each author independently read and coded the material to identify recurring topics and themes relevant to the research focus, allowing themes to be developed inductively through the authors' interpretation of the empirical material, rather than being imposed through a predetermined coding framework (Bell et al., 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2019). The authors compared their coding through group discussions to resolve discrepancies and develop a coherent thematic structure. Coding continued until no new themes were identified, indicating empirical saturation (Bell et al., 2019, p. 397). Following Braun and Clarke's (2019) view of thematic analysis, the authors recognise that themes do not simply emerge from the data, but are actively constructed through repeated reading, coding, comparison and interpretation.

In the first step, the analysis remained closely grounded in the interviewees' own words, expressions, and meanings. The purpose of this stage was to preserve the informant-centred character of the data and to ensure that the initial coding reflected how respondents themselves described the use, role, and development of analytics within football clubs. In the second step, the first-order concepts were compared, grouped, and interpreted at a higher level of abstraction. These themes captured recurring patterns in the material, where analytics is applied, how it informs decision-making, what forms of sporting, economic, and organisational value it is perceived to generate, and which resources and organisational conditions shape more or less mature use across clubs. In the third step, related second-order themes were organised into five aggregate dimensions, as shown in Appendix B. Consistent with Gioia et al. (2012), the aim was not to impose a rigid analytical template on the material, but to demonstrate a transparent progression from interview data to first-order concepts, to second-order themes, and finally to

broader theoretical abstraction. In this way, the data structure served as a bridge between respondents' accounts and the study's interpretation of analytics as a potential organisational capability within Allsvenskan.

3.5 Research quality

The quality of this study is assessed using the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, which suit the interpretive, abductive orientation of this study (Bell et al., 2019).

Credibility concerns whether the findings reflect what informants said, rather than our preconceptions. It was supported through open-ended interview questions, avoidance of theoretical vocabulary, coding primarily in Swedish, and comparison of accounts across informants and secondary annual-report data. The sample included 11 informants from sporting, commercial, league-level and external provider roles, allowing the topic to be examined from several perspectives. However, the findings remain based on self-reported accounts rather than direct observation, and some follow-up questions may have shaped informants' responses.

Transferability concerns whether a reader can judge how far the findings apply elsewhere. As a qualitative exploratory study, it makes no claim to statistical generalisation. To support reader judgement, the study provides detailed contextual description of Allsvenskan, including the *51-procentsregeln (51-percent rule),* which requires members to control at least 51% of voting rights, and the role of the league trade body, presents each informant's role and context in Table 2, and reproduces quotations at sufficient length for readers to assess the basis for our interpretations.

Dependability concerns whether another researcher could follow the analytical trail. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and all codes and themes were maintained in NVivo with attribution to the originating informant preserved. The data structure following Gioia et al. (2012) makes the movement from first-order codes through second-order themes to aggregate dimensions visible rather than hidden, and the interview guide is reproduced in Appendix A. The intention is that another researcher with access to the transcripts and coding records could retrace the analytical steps, even if they reached different interpretations.

Confirmability concerns whether findings are grounded in the data rather than in the researchers' preferences. The abductive design used the Resource-Based View as a sensitising lens rather than a deductive framework, keeping the analysis open to themes the framework

did not anticipate (Bell et al., 2019; Gioia et al., 2012). The authors discussed coding decisions and disagreements with reference to the empirical material rather than theoretical preference. We recognise that both authors share an interest in football and analytics, which can shape interpretation, and have attempted to mitigate this by anchoring each analytical claim in specific interview material.

3.6 Ethical considerations

All informants gave informed consent before participation. They were informed of the purpose of the study, that participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any point, and that the interview would be recorded and transcribed for research use only. Recordings, transcripts, and coding files are stored on password-protected devices accessible only to the authors, and personal data are handled in line with the GDPR principles of purpose limitation, data minimisation, and storage limitation. All organisations and individuals are anonymised in the reporting of findings. Anonymisation was chosen to allow informants to speak openly about internal practices, club strategy, and commercial relationships, which several of them likely would not have done if they were identifiable. We acknowledge that at the league level, where few relevant organisations exist in Swedish football, full organisational anonymity cannot be realistically achieved.

4. Findings

This chapter presents the study's empirical findings in two parts. Section 4.1 reports the findings from 11 semi-structured interviews, organised into five aggregate dimensions following Gioia et al. (2012). Section 4.2 presents a contextual analysis of annual reports from five Allsvenskan clubs, highlighting differences in revenue scale and structure. The interviews are the core of the analysis, with the annual reports providing contextual support to interpret how clubs with different resources prioritise analytics.

The distinction between sporting and commercial analytics is analytical rather than absolute. Sporting analytics refers to data used in football-related decisions, such as recruitment, match analysis, player development and workload management. Commercial analytics refers to data used in supporter, ticketing, sponsor, merchandise and partnership decisions. In practice, the two domains are intertwined because sporting performance affects commercial value, while commercial resources shape sporting investment.

4.1 Empirical findings from Thematic Analysis

The five dimensions are presented below in turn, each developed through the coding and interpretation of the interview material, as shown in Appendix B. Most interviews were conducted in Swedish, and so quotations from those interviews have been translated into English for this section.

4.1.1 Analytics as an embedded sporting capability

Across our interviews, both at club and league level, data analytics is most consistently integrated into the sporting side of the club organisation. Informants described data use across recruitment and scouting, match and opponent preparation, physical monitoring of players, training planning, and squad planning. The depth of this use varies across clubs, but the sporting domain shows a more developed and routinised use of analytics than the commercial side does. In recruitment and scouting, data is used as a structured filter rather than as a substitute for traditional methods. Clubs build their own requirement profiles on top of supplier platforms to narrow potential players before video scouting begins. A *Data Scientist & Scout*, responsible for the club's data strategy, internal data platform, and data-driven scouting, described the role as a way to bring objectivity into recruitment and expand the club's reach into less familiar markets, while supporting a business model centred on player trading:

> *"From the start it has been a lot of data scouting, to bring objectivity into the scouting, to be able to look in markets where you are not used to looking or being on the ground. […] Player sales and signings are very important for our revenue, so it is important to invest in what is modern and new in player scouting to have an edge."*

For clubs that have built this capacity, the main perceived advantage is timing: surfacing players earlier than competitors who scout in more traditional ways. A *Chief Scout & Assistant Coach* contrasted his club with those that lack data capability, characterising rival scouting as backwards-looking and end-of-season, while pointing to earlier identification of targets as their own central edge:

> *"For us, the main competitive advantage of data is that we see things others don't see with the eye, that we get an impression of many players, but above all that we catch players much earlier than other clubs that don't use data. Other clubs that don't use data know the traditional things. [For example] okay, this guy after the season, he made twelve and seven. Right, now we should contact him. […] we catch players much earlier than other clubs that don't use data."*

Across informants, the sequence was consistent: data first, traditional scouting second. The *Chief Scout & Assistant Coach* described identifying a recent foreign signing entirely through data, even though the relevant league was already followed by one of his video scouts:

> *"We use data as much for analysing players we see on video as for finding players we would not otherwise have noticed were good. One of our recent signings, [Name], who we took from [League], which is roughly the U23 league in [Country]. That league is followed by one of our video scouts. But we found him through the data."*

Data scouting was also described as limited for younger players, where the available sample is small and the data is often weakest in less-established markets. More broadly, informants treated data as decision support rather than as a replacement for football judgement. This emphasis is critical. Several informants were explicit about the limits of data, and one was openly sceptical about how some clubs adopt it. A *Technical Director*, responsible for long-term football strategy and organisational development within the football department, described those clubs as using data for image rather than for decisions:

> *"They want to be on the wave of, you know, saying that they use data analytics for the club because this looks good on them. Bad data or bad interpretation of data is worse than not having it."*

The scepticism was not framed as an objection to using data but as a condition for using it well. The same respondent allowed for clubs to compete differently, provided the choice was deliberate:

> *"You cannot compete at the highest level without it, but if you don't feel that this fits your culture, and you don't feel that this is something that you want to have as a priority, and you want to focus on other things, fine. That could be another way of winning. It's not the only way, but you have a higher chance of doing it."*

Match and opponent analysis were the most widely used sporting application of analytics in our sample. A representative at the league trade body was unambiguous:

> *"There is no club that does not work with this."*

He described post-match review and opponent preparation as standard practice across all clubs in high-level Swedish football. Clubs typically combine event data, video, and tactical tagging

tools for both retrospective performance review and prospective opponent preparation. A *Performance Coach* gave a concrete example:

> *"Oh, there were twelve counterattacks, but only one led to a goal. Why did twelve counterattacks only lead to one goal? Can we get a bit better at that?"*

Data were also described as a way of challenging emotional reactions to results. A *Technical Director* described a recent match his club had won:

> *"What data can tell you, you know, to be respectful. So, in our numbers, yesterday's game looked bad. If we perform like we did it yesterday, if we keep doing this, then we will not, win the league. We will finish really bad. So, and this is sometimes very difficult, you know (...) and then you need to wake up at 7:00 in the morning, read the report, and people do not like it."*

The *Chief Scout & Assistant Coach* extended this point, noting that the gap between how a match feels and what the underlying data shows can run in either direction:

> *"Football is football, there's a lot of emotion involved. Sometimes you think we played a disastrous match, but the numbers say the performance was actually quite good. [...] Or the other way around, you think you've dominated, but really you were quite outplayed."*

Physical monitoring was also discussed, especially by the *Performance Coach*. GPS data, training-load planning and individual reference values were used to monitor players, but the coach emphasised that these measures capture physical output rather than football quality:

> *"The numbers I get on my computer say nothing about how many successful football actions this player has."*

Physical data, therefore, informs training load and recovery decisions but does not by itself measure footballing quality. Decisions on player load are also cross-functional rather than analyst-led:

> *"We all jointly make the decision when a player is in question. I talk with the head coach, the assistant coach, and the medical lead."*

The club also used daily self-report questionnaires on sleep, soreness, fatigue and stress. These reports helped contextualise GPS data, since similar physical outputs could reflect different recovery states and therefore lead to adjusted sessions or rest.

4.1.2 Commercial analytics as an emerging organisational capability

While the sporting aspect of the interviewed clubs demonstrated a relatively consistent pattern of data integration, the commercial aspect exhibited greater variability. As a *Senior Executive* of a customer data platform argued:

> *"On the player performance side, they work a lot with data and advanced tools. On the commercial side, it's quite empty."*

Commercial analytics varied more across clubs than sporting analytics. The most basic use was building fan databases and segmenting supporters, since clubs have historically lacked a systematic way to identify and follow their fans. Although the external supplier was critical of the sector's digital maturity, some clubs described more integrated data practices. A *Commercial Manager* explained:

> *"We take the data from several different parts and put it all into one and the same basket, which means that when you have bought a ticket, we can see whether you have bought a match shirt or not."*

This linked record allows the club to tailor subsequent offers and experiences, and the same stratification underpins how it releases tickets, with members served first, previous buyers next, and the general public last. This fan database also feeds commercial product and channel innovation, where the same respondent described a sharp departure from football industry norms. A *Sales Corporate* at a smaller club made the same point more plainly:

> *"Football is late on this. We are conservative in general and find it hard to understand how to capitali*se on these things."

Partner and sponsor relationships are the commercial area where data work appears most developed across the sample. A *Head of Sales* described a partner base of several hundred companies that ranges from a seat in the arena to multinational firms, and the same respondent linked this scale to a wider shift in what corporate counterparts now expect from clubs; a shift the club marks linguistically by having retired the term "sponsor" in favour of "partner":

> *"if I sponsor you, I give you money but I expect nothing back. Today, a company that gives money expects something in return. [...] If we don't have control of our data, it's not interesting."*

Data has therefore become part of what makes the exchange work: larger partners increasingly demand visibility into club data, and renewals depend on the club demonstrating it.

Brand and exposure measurement is the fourth strand, but its conceptual basis is less settled than the others. The *Sales Corporate* at a smaller club described:

> *"It's actually worth exactly what someone is willing to pay for it. [...] You can argue it's worth a lot, you can argue it's worth zero if it doesn't lead to business."*

To address this, the *Head of Sales* described running a *nollmätning* (baseline brand measurement) on a new partnership, surveying brand awareness before the deal began and tracking it through the relationship. Several clubs also subscribe to third-party services that quantify partner exposure across television and social media and convert it into media equivalents for negotiation. Taken together with the partner work above, these practices describe a commercial side that, at the leading clubs, is more sophisticated than the supplier view would suggest, but that the respondents themselves still describe as being built.

4.1.3 Organisational foundations of analytical capability

Where 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 describe what clubs do with data, this section turns to what makes that work possible. Four threads run through the interviews: the systems in which the data is held, the people who run them, the receptiveness of the senior figures who decide whether to act on what comes out, and the continuity over time that lets the work accumulate.

Internal data infrastructure was described as a centralising layer rather than a peripheral tool. The *Data Scientist & Scout* explained both what his club's platform pulls together and what he intends it to do once the data is in:

> *"As a club we have certain data we buy in and some data we can log ourselves. And in [club name]'s own platform, which isn't commercial or owned by a [supplier] company but owned by the club, we can bring in all that information. (...) In principle, everything should be reportable and understandable in the platform by decision-makers in the club themselves."*

The platform was intended not only for analyst-facing reporting, but also as a self-serve layer that allowed commercial decision-makers to act on data without routing every question through the analytics function. At the staffing level, analytical work often depended on hybrid roles. The *Chief Scout & Assistant Coach* described this split:

> *"I'm a coach during the day, and in the evenings and weekends I'm a scout."*

A respondent at the league trade body read the same pattern more critically. Where clubs lack a dedicated analyst, he argued, the data work falls back onto other staff. For example, the coaching staff, which he saw as a problem rather than a workable arrangement:

> *"A coach should not have to spend tens of hours a week sitting and tagging clips. A coach should be a coach. They should be on the pitch working with the players, developing the players, not sitting at a computer cutting clips."*

Whether analytical work leads to decisions also depends on senior decision-makers' engagement. Two respondents from clubs of very different sizes described a nearly identical pattern: the relevant sporting director, the senior football executive in charge of recruitment and squad planning, generally supports analytics but lacks technical literacy in it. The *Data Scientist & Scout* described:

> *"Our sporting director is no expert on the numbers themselves, but he understands the value and thinks it is good and important for taking informed decisions."*

The *Chief Scout & Assistant Coach* described:

> *"Our sporting director basically doesn't understand anything I do with the data, but he trusts me a lot. So when I present it I can do it in a clear way so he understands. 'Okay, the data says this. Then it is so. If [he] says the data says it, then I trust him.'"*

The practical consequence, as the *Technical Director* articulated, is that the analyst function bears the burden of translation: findings must be delivered in the language and context the decision-maker can act on, rather than presented as raw numbers. He described this kind of friction as useful rather than obstructive, since resistance forces a sharper case:

> *"The fact that there is a challenge is because people want to succeed... It's quite beneficial, I think, for organisations sometimes. [...] If you have someone that's been resistant to it, you need to build a stronger argument and have a better reasoning."*

Organisational structures were also described as necessary to make analytics less person-dependent. The *Sports Business Representative* compared this to squad planning:

> *"You should try to build an organisation that's not person-dependent, so that you have structures. So that if someone quits or leaves or goes, you can put someone else in the office, same as you work with a player squad. You have a replacement ready before you sell someone."*

Several informants also described analytics capability as something built gradually but threatened by short-term pressure. The same informant explained:

> *"You have this short-term thing that often comes up. If you have three straight losses and you are one of the big clubs, you get stressed and start to depart from your long-term approach... you get a bit desperate and suddenly take short-term decisions. [...] Continuity, standing firm, working long-term. But there is also pressure from supporters that makes you waver on what you had decided from the start."*

The *Technical Director* pointed to the same difficulty from another angle, noting that the developmental work which sustains capability is easily crowded out:

> *"The biggest challenge with research is that it is never urgent, but it is always important. So in football you tend to go for what is urgent."*

4.1.4 Structural conditions shaping analytical variation between clubs

Sporting and commercial practice is shaped by structural conditions that operate above the level of any individual club. Resource heterogeneity was raised by almost every informant as the dominant feature of Allsvenskan. The *Sports Business Representative* explained:

> *"Two factors will create the divides in Allsvenskan. It's the clubs that succeed in European football and player sales. European football, not everyone, because only three go through. But player sales, everyone can succeed at.*"

For smaller clubs, the route is described as one of disciplined building, with gains accumulating across several seasons rather than within a single campaign.

In this framing, smaller clubs compensate for the resource gap through talent development, which is taken up in Section 4.1.5. A representative at the trade body described decision-making within the league as consensus-driven, where joint projects depend less on formal authority and more on persuasion, alignment, and getting clubs on board. This highlights

the organisational challenge of coordinating clubs with different resources, priorities, and levels of maturity. The same respondent described:

> *"The biggest are ahead of us. The largest-budget club lies before us, and we try to position ourselves somewhere we can take the ones below up with us. And we don't want to be too much of a drag on the leaders."*

The data supplier ecosystem also shaped variation between clubs. A small number of providers, including Spiideo, Playmaker AI, Hudl, GoalUnit and Catapult, supplied much of the infrastructure. Smaller clubs were described as more dependent on centrally negotiated league agreements, while larger clubs could add independent contracts.

The regulatory context was shaped by 51-percent rule, which limits external ownership in Swedish sports associations. A representative at the league trade body contrasted this with neighbouring countries:

> *"We have the 51-percent rule. We have no external investors. You only have to look to Denmark. Midtjylland are doing very well because they are owned by Denmark's richest person. He builds them a training facility for six or seven hundred million kronor. Those possibilities don't exist for us."*

Across these structural conditions, informants described a sector that is professionalising quickly. The *Data Scientist & Scout* expected what was a competitive advantage for him today would become standard:

> *"There is a [Unique Selling Point] today. If you look internationally and at how clubs operate in larger European markets, they usually have more people doing what I do."*

He anticipates that the pressure to expand specialist roles in transfer and analysis would grow as transfer revenue continues to take a larger share of club budgets. Although the *Senior Executive* was more critical of the current baseline, the broader direction was clear: more data work, more specialist roles, and gradual professionalisation across the sector.

4.1.5 Analytics as a perceived source of value

This section turns to the value informants attribute to data work, particularly in relation to player development, transfer revenue, and the link between financial and sporting strength. Player transfers are the central economic mechanism in Allsvenskan. The *Sports Business Representative* argued:

> *"It doesn't matter if you sell more sausages at the matches, more shirts, raise prices, fill the stands. You can only go to a certain level. But you sell one player, bang, a hundred and thirty million. You get an entirely different leverage on player sales compared to all those hours you can put into the things I just mentioned."*

However, the *Sales Corporate* at a smaller club added a more cautious perspective, emphasising that player sales are financially powerful but uncertain:

> *"It's a lottery, after all. Commercial revenue gives stability that player sales don't."*

Several informants described economic and sporting performance as mutually dependent: stronger finances enable better recruitment, leadership and analytical competence, which may improve results and raise future transfer values. A representative working at the league trade body put it directly:

> *"The largest-budget club has the most money, they have the greatest possibility to buy the best players, and so on. That's just how it is."*

The Sports Business Representative set out the mechanism behind this:

> *"You need good leaders, and to have good leaders, that costs money too, you have to have the economy for it. [...] Money is the alpha and omega for having competence, and through that being able to win more matches over time."*

Data capability was also described as a competitive differentiator in specific cases. The clearest example in our sample came from the *Head of Sales*, who described winning a high-profile multinational partner that another organisation had also been pursuing:

> *"They were in dialogue with the [Other Organisation]. [They] couldn't present the same data as we could. And that puts us on a higher level than all the other clubs."*

The *Technical Director* described a different version of the same logic, framed as a future advantage. He argued that the present analytical edge lies in retrospective work, but the genuine differentiation will come from prediction:

> *"What we need to do is more predictive than what actually happened. Doing the prediction is what is going to give you the edge."*

The same respondent reinforced this from a wider angle, observing that data has shifted the centre of gravity of decision-making within football:

> *"It has helped to remove a lot of human biases, to gather much more information."*

4.2 Annual report findings: Financial context of selected clubs

This section presents a contextual analysis of total revenue and main income sources for five Allsvenskan clubs; *Malmö FF, Hammarby IF, BK Häcken, Halmstads BK, and Mjällby AIF*, during 2023-2025.

The interviews show that data analytics is not only a technical capability, but also a financial investment shaped by clubs' resources and strategic priorities. The annual-report analysis is therefore used alongside the interview findings both to provide context and to address the sub-question on variation between clubs: the reports provide evidence of the resource conditions (financial scale and revenue structure) against which the interview findings on capability variation are interpreted in the discussion. Its purpose is not to link specific clubs to interviewees or propose solutions to Allsvenskan's wider financial challenges, and any overlap with the interview sample is incidental.

The five clubs were selected to represent a range of financial profiles within Allsvenskan, from larger clubs with diversified income streams to clubs with higher supporter-related income and smaller clubs with comparatively limited resources. Since income categories are not fully standardised across the clubs' annual reports, the comparison cannot be considered fully standardised. The result should therefore be interpreted as indicative.

4.2.1 Total revenue and financial scale

Table 3 represents the total revenue of the selected clubs between 2023-2025. The reported figures provide a basis for comparing the financial scale of the clubs in the contextual analysis.

Club	2023	2024	2025	Change 2023 → 2025
Malmö FF	432.5	**659.9**	**543.3**	+25.6%
Hammarby IF	268.1	384.3	455.5	+69.9%
BK Häcken	**498.3**	405.3	526.6	+5.7%
Halmstads BK	68.0	84.3	101.2	+48.9%
Mjällby AIF	84.4	84.1	121.9	+44.4%

Table 3. *Total revenue among selected Allsvenskan clubs, 2023-2025, MSEK.*

The table shows variation in reported revenue levels among the selected clubs. Halmstads BK and Mjällby AIF increased their revenue during the period, whereas Malmö FF, Hammarby IF, and BK Häcken reported higher overall revenue levels.

4.2.2 Overview of revenue sources

The annual reports further indicate variation in the selected clubs' revenue structure. To avoid overemphasising a single season, the revenue-source analysis covers the period 2023-2025. Malmö FF reported income from several sources, with matchday income and sponsorship/advertising among the largest sources of total revenue. Hammarby IF's revenue was strongly connected to player sales and matchday income, whereas BK Häcken differed through its combination of income from own events, mainly Gothia Cup, "*world's largest and most international youth football tournament*" (BK Häcken, n.d.) and player sales. Halmstads BK reported a smaller revenue base, with central broadcasting-related income and sponsorship as recurring sources. Mjällby AIF relied more heavily on player sales/player loans and central income. These differences show that selected clubs differ both in revenue scale and revenue sources. A detailed yearly breakdown between 2023-25 is provided in Appendix C.

5. Discussion

This section discusses the findings in relation to the research questions, previous literature, and the Resource-Based View. The discussion therefore returns to the study's purpose: to understand how data analytics is used as an organisational capability and how such capabilities may help create competitive advantage under different resource conditions. Rather than repeating the five aggregate dimensions in the same order as the results chapter, the discussion develops the main tensions that cut across the findings. These tensions concern how analytics proves useful in practice, where its limits emerge, and why its value varies across clubs with different financial and organisational conditions. Moreover, the annual report analysis serves as a contextual complement to the interview findings by showing how differences in financial scale and revenue structure may shape clubs' analytics priorities. Finally, the study's managerial implications are articulated as key points for practitioners to consider. Across these discussion themes, a cross-cutting finding is that data supports rather than replaces judgement. In each area, data becomes useful only when it is interpreted, communicated, and acted on by people within the club. The discussion, therefore, treats judgement not as the opposite of analytics, but as the organisational condition through which analytics becomes valuable.

5.1 From data access to analytics capability

The findings indicate that data analytics is most developed within Allsvenskan's sporting functions. The findings support Primus and Karlsson's (2025) observation that video, GPS, and

wellbeing tools are widely used in Allsvenskan. However, they also show that the strategic value of these tools depends on how clubs interpret, communicate, and integrate the information into decision-making. This aligns with previous football analytics literature, which has emphasised performance analysis, including tactical behaviour, positional tracking, workload monitoring, injury prevention, and talent identification (Goes et al., 2021; Rein & Memmert, 2016; Sarmento et al., 2014; Van Eetvelde et al., 2021). In RBV terms, this concentration reflects the first VRIO criterion, *value*: the sporting domain is where data analytics most clearly enables better decisions, and sporting performance in turn affects league position, player valuation, qualification for European competitions, and fan engagement.

However, the findings also suggest that access to data alone is becoming less of a differentiating factor. Rather than replacing human judgement, analytics appears to support and structure it by helping clubs identify players earlier, filter larger markets, compare profiles, and challenge subjective impressions. This can broaden scouting capacity, particularly for clubs with limited resources and smaller physical scouting networks. One interviewee explained that data scouting initially created value by making recruitment more objective and enabling clubs to identify players beyond their existing physical scouting networks, i.e., traditional scouting. Concurrently, the same respondent also noted that these practices are becoming increasingly common. In VRIO terms, the data feeds, software, and platforms that data scouting depends on constitute a form of physical capital that fails the rarity criterion, as such tools are commercially available to any club. Such resources can yield a temporary advantage for early adopters, as the interviewee's account suggests, but once the practice diffuses, they produce only competitive parity, which is why access to data alone is no longer enough to create a competitive advantage. Differentiation, therefore, depends on the club's ability to interpret, integrate, and turn analytical insights into effective decisions, including the capacity to translate those insights for coaches, scouts, and other staff who do not work with data themselves.

The findings suggest that analytics adds value by making certain patterns visible earlier, more systematically, or at a larger scale than traditional observation alone. A concrete example from the findings illustrates this movement from data to outcome. In recruitment, player data is first used by the analyst or scout to filter a large market according to the club’s requirement profile. The shortlisted players are then assessed through video and discussed with scouting and sporting staff. The data does not make the final decision, but it changes the decision process by narrowing the search, identifying players earlier and providing a common basis for

discussion. The outcome is therefore not a purely “data-driven signing”, but a more structured recruitment process in which data, scouting judgement and strategic fit are combined.

Informants reinforced this view, treating analytics as decision support rather than as a replacement for football judgement, and arguing that the quality of interpretation, not access to data itself, is what separates clubs. This echoes a long-standing point in the performance-analysis literature, that even basic indicators such as shots, passes, or possession are misleading unless normalised and interpreted in context (Hughes & Bartlett, 2002; Hughes & Franks, 2005). It also aligns with Bartlett and Drust's (2021) argument that the value of analytics lies in translating complex information into usable performance solutions, and with Wright et al.'s (2014) point that analysis becomes meaningful only when embedded in coaching practice and behavioural change. This point extends the previous literature, which often focuses on what data can measure (Anzer & Bauer, 2021; Müller et al., 2017), and instead suggests that the main challenge within clubs is not only data availability but also the ability to organise and use it in decision-making. This supports Lolli et al. (2025) and adds that data ecosystems become valuable only when embedded in everyday decisions.

The same logic gives the analytical edge a moving frontier. One interviewee argued that the present advantage lies mainly in retrospective analysis, but that genuine differentiation will increasingly come from predictive work, from doing the prediction rather than describing what already happened. If retrospective analysis is itself diffusing toward parity, as the argument above implies, then predictive capability is where a temporary advantage can still be found, until it too becomes common. The differentiator is therefore not access to data, but the capability built around it, and what that capability must deliver shifts over time. That ability is itself a resource, but a different kind from the tools. It is not physical capital but human and organisational capital: the expertise and judgement of analysts, coaches, and decision-makers, and the routines through which their work is produced and used. The findings also show that this human capital is often stretched across multiple roles. Several respondents described hybrid positions. This suggests that analytics capability in Allsvenskan is often built around flexible individuals rather than fully developed departments. From an RBV perspective, such individuals may represent valuable human capital, but they also create organisational vulnerability if analytical knowledge remains person-dependent rather than embedded in routines and systems.

Unlike commercially available tools, resources of this kind can satisfy the third VRIO criterion, *costly to imitate*. Not every such resource qualifies, however. A specialist analyst role, which one interviewee expected to become standard across the league, is valuable and currently rare but readily imitable, since a competitor can simply hire equivalent staff, and on its own yields only a temporary advantage. What resists imitation is the capability accumulated around such roles, not the roles themselves. That capability is built up over time and embedded in relationships and routines that competitors cannot simply purchase, reflecting the path dependence and social complexity Barney identifies as sources of inimitability. The club-owned platform described by interviewees is one expression; the software itself is only technology, but its value lies in the club having built it in-house and using it to hold analytical knowledge within the organisation rather than with particular individuals. This last point engages the fourth VRIO criterion, organisation: a valuable, rare, and hard-to-imitate capability becomes an advantage only if the club is structured to exploit it, and embedding knowledge in routines rather than in individuals is part of that structure.

5.2 Analytics between objectivity and football judgement

Analytics alone does not generate value; it relies on the expertise and judgement of coaches, analysts, and decision-makers to turn data into actionable decisions. The findings further show that senior decision-makers do not need to be technical experts for analytics to matter, but they need sufficient trust and understanding to act on analytical input. Where sporting directors lacked detailed data, analysts had to translate findings into clear, football-relevant arguments. This creates a tension: analytics may be valued in principle, but its influence depends on whether decision-makers understand it well enough to question, interpret, and apply it critically. If they rely too heavily on trust in individual analysts, analytical work may influence decisions, but the capability remains vulnerable and person-dependent. This reinforces the idea that analytics creates value through communication, judgement, and organisational understanding, not through numbers alone. This aligns with Gamble et al. (2020), who caution that analytics should support human expertise rather than replace it, since football decisions require contextual judgement that quantitative indicators cannot fully capture. It also aligns with Wright et al. (2014), who emphasise that performance analysis depends on integration with coaching and decision-making, and with Lolli et al. (2025), who identify expertise and knowledge translation as central constraints in football analytics.

The same pattern appears in physical monitoring. GPS and tracking systems generate detailed load measures, and the findings echo Dalen et al. (2016) in treating high-intensity actions such as accelerations and decelerations, rather than total distance, as the meaningful signal at the elite level. Interviewees were explicit, however, that these measures describe physical output and not footballing quality, since the data says nothing about whether a player's actions on the pitch were successful. Physical data therefore informs training load and recovery decisions but cannot evaluate performance on its own, consistent with Chang et al. (2024) and Van Eetvelde et al. (2021), who treat workload and injury analytics as decision support rather than a substitute for medical and coaching judgement. The findings show two routines that close this gap: clubs combine objective load data with short subjective wellbeing reports and allow the self-reports to override the objective figures when the two diverge, and load decisions are taken jointly across coaching and medical staff rather than by an analyst alone. In RBV terms the monitoring technology is physical capital that is commercially available and fails the rareness criterion; its value comes from the interpretive, cross-functional routine built around it, the same organisational capability that separates clubs elsewhere in the analysis.

The semi-structured interviews highlight an emotional dimension that is less visible in the literature. Football decisions are influenced not only by data, but also by context shaped by pressure, expectations, and short-term reactions to results. A win may create satisfaction even when the underlying data indicate weak performance. Conversely, a team may feel that it played badly, while the numbers indicate that the performance was better than perceived. This demonstrates that analytics not only informs decision-making but also questions emotional interpretations and encourages reflection. In VRIO terms, this turns on the *organisation* criterion: analytics may be valuable, but whether that value is realised depends on whether the club is willing to act on uncomfortable evidence rather than resist it, particularly when the analysis challenges a coach's interpretation, a sporting director's decision, or a player's self-image. That willingness is a matter of organisational culture, itself a form of organisational capital. The same uncomfortable evidence is used to improve in a learning-oriented club but rejected in a more defensive one, where its value goes unrealised.

These findings challenge overly technical or optimistic views of data analytics. Even accurate models may have a limited impact if their implications are resisted or poorly communicated. Thus, the barrier may lie less in data itself and more in the social process of interpretation, communication, and acceptance. This supports one interviewee's argument that disagreement can be productive, requiring analysts to present stronger arguments. The tension, therefore, is

not necessarily negative if it leads to clear explanations, stronger reasoning, and more informed decision-making. In VRIO terms, this culture is a costly-to-imitate form of organisational capital, since metrics and reports can be copied, but trust between analysts and coaches, constructive dialogue, and shared decision-making routines are harder for competitors to reproduce. This reflects Barney's (1991) view that socially complex resources can contribute to sustained competitive advantage.

5.3 The limits of data in recruitment and talent identification

Recruitment emerged as one of the clearest areas where data analytics can create a competitive advantage. Several interviews described data as useful for filtering large player markets, identifying players earlier, mitigating subjective biases, and enabling systematic comparison of player profiles. This aligns with Müller et al. (2017), who highlight the role of data-driven approaches in player valuation, and with Sarmento et al. (2018), who emphasise that talent identification requires a multidimensional assessment rather than relying on single indicators. The resource behind this is not data alone. In Barney's (1991) terms, it combines physical capital (data and scouting platforms), human capital (scouts' and analysts' expertise), and organisational capital (routines for evaluating and selecting players).

At the same time, the recruitment advantage has clear limits, and these are consistent with the literature rather than a challenge to it. Sarmento et al. (2018) describe talent identification as multidimensional and as resting on factors that change as a player matures, which makes young players inherently hard to assess from data alone: their performance record is both short and a weak predictor of later development. Müller et al. (2017) make a parallel point for valuation, finding that data-driven estimates are least reliable where uncertainty is greatest and intangible factors weigh most heavily. For resource-constrained clubs this creates a practical dilemma, since they have the strongest incentive to identify players early, before market values rise, yet that is exactly the stage at which the data is thinnest and, as the findings showed, often weakest in the less-established markets where undervalued players are most likely to be found. Data analytics should therefore be understood as a complement to scouting and organisational judgement rather than a substitute. In VRIO terms (Barney, 1991), data is valuable, but it becomes a source of advantage only where a club applies it in ways that are rare and hard to imitate, and is organised to exploit it.

The findings further add nuance to the player valuation literature. Although valuation models can inform decision-making, the findings suggest that player selection also depends on tactical

fit, personality, adaptability, timing, and financial planning. Therefore, data analytics may enhance the probability of better decisions, but it cannot eliminate uncertainty. This is especially relevant for clubs with less financial room for error. It helps clubs ask better questions, such as whether a player fits the team's playing style or whether the market is undervaluing a specific quality. Thus, the competitive advantage is less likely to come from recruitment data alone and more likely to come from how the club combines data, scouting experience and organisational decision-making.

5.4 Commercial analytics as resource generation

Data analytics on the commercial side appeared more uneven and less mature than on the sporting side. However, commercial analytics should not be understood as separate from sporting performance in economic terms. The two domains are separated here to clarify where data is used, but they remain connected through the club's overall resource cycle: sporting performance affects supporter interest, sponsorship and player value, while commercial revenue helps finance sporting capability. Even so, several interviewees described systematic work with fan databases, ticketing, merchandise, and annual memberships. This finding is important because it extends the discussion of football analytics beyond sporting performance. Existing literature primarily focuses on match analysis, tactical modelling, physical monitoring, injury prediction, and player valuation (Goes et al., 2021; Müller et al., 2017; Sarmento et al., 2014). The present study extends previous football analytics research by showing that analytics can support not only sporting performance, but also the commercial activities of clubs. In RBV terms, commercial analytics is a further organisational capability through which a club can pursue the value criterion: applied to supporters, ticketing and sponsorship, it has the potential to improve business decisions. The revenue it helps secure forms part of the financial means that make up a club's resource position, so commercial analytics is best understood as a capability for exploiting the commercial resources a club already holds, its supporter base, brand and sponsor relationships, rather than as a way of generating resources in its own right. Commercial analytics may therefore help clubs understand supporters, improve ticketing strategies, demonstrate sponsor value and support more systematic business decisions.

The annual-report analysis strengthens this interpretation by showing that clubs differ not only in total revenue, but also in income structure as shown in Appendix C. This is evident at Hammarby IF, where player sales increased from 15.6% of total revenue in 2023 to 40.2% in 2024 and 42.6% in 2025, indicating a growing dependence on uncertain player-related income.

In contrast, BK Häcken's profile was shaped by event-related income, with events, conferences and the Gothia Cup increasing from 28.3% in 2023 to 41.2% in 2024, before decreasing to 33.1% in 2025. Malmö FF shows another pattern, where player sales decreased from 24.4% in 2023 to 9.9% in 2025, while matchday/public income and sponsorship together accounted for 42.4% in 2025. These examples show that commercial analytics must be adapted to each club's revenue structure.

It can be interpreted both optimistically and cautiously. On the one hand, it represents an underused opportunity to strengthen more stable revenue streams, particularly when player sales are uncertain. On the other hand, it cannot remove structural differences in brand strength, stadium size, local market, or supporter base, which in RBV terms are largely fixed features of a club's resource endowment, the physical and reputational capital it cannot quickly acquire. Consequently, smaller clubs are unlikely to become commercially equivalent to larger clubs simply by adopting CRM systems, which, like the analytics tools discussed in 5.1, are commercially available and therefore fail the rareness criterion. A balanced interpretation is that commercial analytics helps clubs make better use of the opportunities they already have; in VRIO terms its contribution lies in the organisation criterion, improving how effectively a club exploits the commercial resources it already has rather than substituting for the physical and reputational capital it lacks. For smaller clubs, this may involve improving local sponsorship and fan retention. For larger clubs, it may support integrating commercial and sporting data into strategic planning. For clubs reliant on player trading, it may reduce vulnerability by strengthening recurring revenue.

Two further findings qualify how far commercial analytics can be taken. The first is cultural. Even the clubs furthest ahead commercially described football as a conservative industry that limits how aggressively they can innovate, with one respondent noting that visible departures from convention would be rejected by supporters rather than rewarded. The same culture that operates as a costly-to-imitate asset on the sporting side, discussed in 5.2, here works as a constraint, bounding the commercial practices a club can adopt regardless of its data capability. The second concerns measurement. Interviewees described the value of brand exposure as inherently difficult to fix, since it is ultimately worth only what a partner will pay for it. Clubs respond by trying to make this value legible, through baseline brand measurement at the start of a partnership and third-party services that convert exposure into media equivalents. In RBV terms this is an attempt to turn reputational capital, which clubs already hold but cannot easily price, into something they can demonstrate and negotiate with. Commercial analytics therefore

operates within limits set partly by culture and partly by the difficulty of measuring the resources it is meant to exploit.

One case in the findings shows commercial analytics working as more than an efficiency tool. The *Head of Sales* described winning a high-profile multinational partner that the league trade body had also been pursuing, attributing the win to the club being able to present data the trade body could not. Here commercial data capability acted as a genuine differentiator, not only as a way of exploiting existing resources. This is a single account and should not be over-generalised, but it suggests that in partner and sponsor work the organisational capability around commercial data can itself become rare and hard to imitate, rather than only a means of using fixed assets more effectively.

5.5 Continuity, urgency and long-term capability building

An important theme concerns time, revealing a tension between short-term urgency and long-term development. Interviewees stressed the importance of strategic work. However, they also noted that football is often driven by immediate results, leading to changes in leadership, especially at larger clubs. Interviewees argue that long-term development is easier to sustain when a club follows concrete plans over time and does not abandon them during difficult periods. The same interviewee also suggested that clubs operating in environments with lower supporter pressure may have better conditions for continuity, as people in leading positions are less likely to be replaced after a difficult six-month period. Moreover, the view that research on new methods and tools is not urgent captures why data analytics development may be difficult to sustain in practice. This directly reflects the findings, which showed that analytical capability depends on long-term strategy, internal systems, knowledge translation, and reduced person dependence (Bartlett & Drust, 2021; Lolli et al., 2025; Wright et al., 2014).

As a result, these demands can limit investment in predictive models, internal systems, data structure, and long-term planning. Yet these are precisely the investments that build a club's analytics capability, and with it the potential for a more durable advantage. The findings indicate that clubs with more developed analytics practices are often those that have worked consistently over time with long-term strategies, continuity, and clear organisational direction. One interviewee linked this to having a defined club strategy and playing model, which helps create alignment across the organisation. Hence, the tension is not simply between data and intuition, but also between short-term operational pressure and long-term capability building.

According to Barney (1991), resources are more difficult to imitate when they are shaped by unique historical conditions, causal ambiguity, and social complexity. A club's analytics capability can be difficult to imitate in each of these ways. The tools, the software and the data feeds, can be bought by any club; what cannot be bought is what a club builds around them over years of steady use: accumulated experience, repeated trial and error, working routines, and a fit between the data and the club's particular way of operating. This is shaped by a specific history that a competitor cannot replay, and it carries a degree of causal ambiguity, since it is rarely obvious from outside which elements of it produce a club's results. It is also socially complex, distributed across people, working relationships, routines, and the club's culture rather than held as a discrete asset, an embedded part of culture and judgement discussed in Section 5.2. A capability of this kind is therefore costly to imitate, which is what can make analytics a durable advantage rather than a tool every club shares. This also illustrates the Organisation criterion of VRIO: a club may possess hard-to-imitate analytical resources, but it only turns them into an advantage when it is organised to exploit them, which here means embedding the capability in stable routines. The reverse holds as well: where a club frequently changes its leadership, playing style, or recruitment strategy, the build-up never gains stability, and analytical routines never become embedded.

Nonetheless, continuity should not be idealised. In Barney's terms, a resource is valuable only in relation to a club's competitive environment, and that environment does not stand still. An embedded analytics capability that fits a club well today can lose that fit if the conditions it was built around change, and the same routines that made it costly to imitate can then become a constraint. Analytics is double-edged here: the same capability that sustains continuity can also reveal when continuity has stopped paying off. Continuity is a strength only when a club tests it against evidence, not when it treats the current plan as settled.

5.6 Different resource conditions, different analytics priorities

The analysis of the annual reports suggests that a single analytics model is unlikely to fit all Swedish elite clubs. Because these figures are drawn from publicly available annual reports, the clubs can be discussed individually to show how financial scale and revenue structure shape their analytics needs. The revenue categories are not fully standardised across reports, as Swedish clubs prepare their accounts under general accounting rules rather than a football-specific reporting template. Each group's matchday, commercial, and player-trading revenues vary, but patterns reveal distinct differences in financial scale and revenue logic. The key point

is not only that some clubs are larger, but that financial scale shapes whether analytics can be developed as a broad organisational system or must be used more selectively. A league trade body representative noted that analytics tools are difficult for smaller clubs to afford because they require staff, platforms, and expertise. This is consistent with Lolli et al. (2025), who found that many still lack dedicated data engineers, statisticians, and robust governance arrangements. This is also evident in how many of the informants working in data analytics held multiple roles at the club. The interviewees also stressed that spending on tools does not in itself produce results; analytics adds value only when it is used in a structured way and adapted to how the club works. For smaller clubs, cost-effectiveness depends on prioritising activities that offer the greatest value relative to cost, not merely on whether tools are affordable.

The income structures further show why priorities should differ. Hammarby IF and Mjällby AIF had high shares of player-related income in 2025, making recruitment analytics, player valuation and development tracking especially relevant. BK Häcken's event-related income from events, conferences, and Gothia Cup underscores the value of customer data, sponsor reporting, and event evaluation. Malmö FF's broader revenue base suggests a stronger need for integration across sporting, commercial and strategic analytics, while Halmstads BK's smaller scale points to practical tools that reduce recruitment mistakes, support player development and protect limited resources. These resource differences also have to be read against the structural context in which Swedish clubs operate. Under the *51-procentsregeln*, (51 percent rule), members must control at least 51 % of the club's votes, which prevents an external owner from injecting capital as owners do across much of European football. The findings reflected this directly, contrasting Sweden with leagues in England, Spain, and even Denmark, where large companies can buy and direct clubs. A Swedish club must therefore generate its resources itself, primarily through player trading and European competition, and the findings described the resulting economic gaps between clubs as self-reinforcing over time. This enhances the suitability of the RBV reading, as a club's resource position is primarily accumulated through its own operations and historical development rather than external acquisition. It is inherently path-dependent, as Barney describes, and each club predominantly competes with its existing resource position.

This resource logic raises a tension with the rest of the discussion. Several informants described economic and sporting strength as mutually dependent: a larger budget lets a club recruit better players, leaders, and analysts, which improves results, which in turn raises transfer values and revenue. One informant described money as the "alpha and omega" for having competence and,

through it, winning over time. Taken at face value, this implies that the binding constraint on a club is financial rather than organisational, which would undercut the argument in 5.1 and 5.5 that durable advantage lies in capability rather than in resources a club can simply buy.

These two readings are better understood as coupled than as competing. Money here is not itself the advantage; it is an input that buys the staff, infrastructure, and continuity from which capability is built, while capability, particularly in recruitment and player trading, helps generate the transfer income that money depends on. The relationship is circular rather than one-directional. RBV accommodates this: financial resources are a resource in Barney's (1991) sense, but on their own, they produce only the capacity to invest, not an advantage. What turns that capacity into a durable advantage is the capability built around it, which is path-dependent and socially complex. The 51 percent rule tightens the loop, since a Swedish club cannot enter it through external capital and must generate funds internally through the player trading that analytics supports. This circular relationship is also what makes the resource gaps between clubs self-reinforcing over time.

The findings also support RBV by showing that the value of analytics is club-specific: the same activity can be valuable given one resource position and of little value given another (Barney, 1991). It also adds to football analytics literature, which often focuses on performance and recruitment, by showing that analytics priorities are shaped by revenue logic as well as sporting needs (Toma & Campobasso, 2023; see Appendix C).

5.7 Managerial Implications

This study is exploratory rather than hypothesis-driven, so the following points are offered as informed orientation for clubs rather than as tested prescriptions. In keeping with the study's purpose and contribution (Section 1.2), the study concerns how clubs organise and prioritise analytics as an organisational capability, and how this differs across clubs with unequal resource conditions, rather than the specific tools, models or metrics a club adopts. They follow from the discussion above and are grouped around where the findings suggest managerial attention is most useful.

1. **Competitive advantage is unlikely to come from acquiring analytics tools or data feeds.** These are commercially available to every club and, on their own, produce only competitive parity. What clubs can act on is the capability built around the tools: the expertise of analysts and coaches, the routines through which analytical work reaches decisions, and the practice of holding analytical knowledge within the organisation

rather than in particular individuals. Investment is therefore better directed at people and routines than at software, and staff who can bridge analytics with football or commercial knowledge are a resource worth developing and retaining.

2. **The value of analytics depends on whether a club is organised to act on it.** The findings suggest that the main barrier is rarely the data itself but rather the social process of interpretation, communication, and acceptance. Clubs benefit from a culture in which analytical evidence can challenge intuition without being treated as a threat, and from decision-makers, sporting directors in particular, who have enough data literacy for analysts' input to carry weight in final decisions. The same caution applies to recruitment: data is most useful as a complement to scouting and organisational judgement, helping a club ask better questions about fit and valuation, rather than as a substitute, especially given its limits in identifying young talent.
3. **Analytics investment should be matched to a club's resource position and revenue structure** rather than copied from larger clubs, since no single model fits every club. Smaller clubs, in particular, benefit from being selective, prioritising activities with the strongest value relative to cost, and using collective or league-level agreements that lower the cost of access. Commercial analytics is an underused area worth developing, but with realistic expectations: it helps a club exploit its existing commercial resources rather than close structural gaps with larger clubs.
4. **Analytics capability is built over time, which makes it a long-term investment.** Boards and owners can support it by protecting continuity and resisting reflexive leadership changes after short-term setbacks, while still periodically testing whether the current approach continues to fit the club's situation.

6. Conclusion

This study asked how football clubs in Allsvenskan use data analytics as an organisational capability to help create competitive advantage, and whether that capability varies among clubs with different resource conditions.

Clubs use data analytics unevenly across the sporting and commercial domains. In performance operations, use spans match and opponent analysis, recruitment and scouting, and physical monitoring. In commercial operations, data informs audience insight, ticketing and sponsorship.

Use is not uniform across the league; it varies with club size and resources, and data work is more developed and routinised on the sporting side than the commercial side.

Viewed through the Resource-Based View, the analytics tools themselves are a weak source of competitive advantage. They are widely available on the open market and therefore largely fail to meet the criteria of rarity and inimitability. What is harder to imitate is the organisational capability surrounding data use, the routines, the human competence to interpret and act on data, and the alignment between analytics and strategic decision-making. These capabilities are socially complex, causally ambiguous and path-dependent. It is here, rather than in the technology, that a defensible advantage can be located.

Turning to the sub-question: Do these capabilities vary among clubs in Allsvenskan with different resource conditions, and if so, in what ways? They do vary, but the variation is one of priority rather than of presence. Larger, better-resourced clubs can develop analytics as a broad organisational system spanning sporting and commercial functions, while smaller and resource-constrained clubs use it more selectively, concentrating on the activities with the strongest value relative to cost, above all recruitment and talent development, where analytics can widen a limited scouting reach and protect against costly errors. A single analytics model, therefore, does not fit all Swedish elite clubs; what counts as a valuable capability depends on the resource position from which it is applied.

6.1 Summary

This study examined how clubs in Allsvenskan build and use data analytics in a setting where the underlying tools are available to every club. Across the five dimensions analysed, a single pattern recurs: access to data has been levelled, but the capacity to use it well has not. The study's broader contribution is to shift the question of football analytics from what data can measure to what an organisation can do with it, and to show that the resource that separates clubs is organisational rather than technical.

This lesson is not specific to football. Once a valuable technology becomes widely available, advantage shifts from holding it to the slower work of building the capability to use it, an argument the Resource-Based View captures and one that the Swedish setting illustrates with particular clarity, since the *51-percent rule* forces clubs to generate their resources internally rather than acquire them. The pattern may therefore extend to other leagues and to resource-constrained organisations more generally, though that broader claim lies beyond what this study can establish.

6.2 Limitations & Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the clubs that agreed to be interviewed are likely those that work more actively and deliberately with data analytics and employ someone with explicit responsibility for it. The findings, therefore, probably overstate the maturity and prevalence of analytics use across Allsvenskan as a whole, and the variation observed between clubs is likely a conservative estimate of the real gap. Second, the study is confined to one country and one point in time, which limits what can be said about how these capabilities develop and whether the pattern holds elsewhere. Third, the analysis rests on informants' descriptions of their own practice rather than on observed practice, so the account reflects practitioners' representations of their work. The Resource-Based View highlights internal resources but offers limited insight into how the competitive environment changes, focusing on internal factors. External market dynamics and competition, better understood through other theories, receive less attention.

Each limitation points to a direction for future research. A study that includes clubs that work less actively with analytics would provide a fuller picture of the league-wide distribution. A longitudinal or observational design would show how analytics capability is built over time rather than how it is described after the fact. Comparative work across leagues with different ownership regimes would test whether the *51-percent rule* materially shapes the pattern found here. Finally, quantitative research linking analytics maturity to sporting and commercial outcomes would test the capability argument this study develops qualitatively.

A further limitation is that the study does not systematically investigate the specific skillsets required to build and use analytics capabilities. While several informants discussed translating data into insights, trust and hybrid roles, they did not provide detailed accounts of their own technical, statistical or football-specific competencies. Future research could therefore examine the human-capital side of football analytics more directly, including which skill combinations are most important for analysts, coaches and sporting directors.

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8. Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Guides

Interview Guide (English)

Formalities

- Introductions
- Briefing on anonymity in the study

Who are you?

- What is your role at (club/organisation name)?
- How long have you been at the (club/organisation)?

Creating competitive advantage

- How do you work to create a competitive advantage for (Club name)?
- How do you create/perform these … (whatever it is they do e.g. workouts, tools, strategies, plans, CRM programs, etc)
- What is the performance measure which you aim to improve? How do you work towards this, including both positive and negative scenarios and their causes, examples?
- What resources do you use to create this advantage?
- Are there resources you would have liked to use but for some reason cannot?

Use of Data Analytics (without mentioning the word Data)

- In the ideal scenario, how would you wish to create a competitive advantage?
- How is technology involved in your work?
- What criteria are used to evaluate what type of technology should be introduced in your field?
- Provide examples of any concrete results or improvements that can be attributed to the technology used?

Cross-collaboration

- How do you collaborate across the whole organisation?
- How deeply involved are different parts of the organisation?
- Describe situations where analysis enabled you to accomplish desired outcomes?

Challenges

- Describe challenges faced when integrating these tools into your organisation.

Opinions/Acceptance

- How well do these tools and process integrate with how you work?
- How do you perceive that (club name/League name) has integrated this into their work and processes
- What are your thoughts and experience of the technology used?

Concluding

- Are there any other things which you would like to add?
- Do you have any questions for us?

Interview Guide (Swedish)

Formaliteter

- Presentation
- Information om anonymitet i studien

Vem är du?

- Vilken är din roll på (klubbens/organisationens namn)?
- Hur länge har du varit på (klubben/organisationen)?

Skapa konkurrensfördelar

- Hur arbetar ni för att skapa en konkurrensfördel för (klubbens namn)?
- Hur skapar/genomför ni dessa … (det de gör, t.ex. träningspass, verktyg, strategier, planer, CRM-program osv.)
- Vilket prestationsmått strävar ni efter att förbättra? Hur arbetar ni mot detta, inklusive både positiva och negativa scenarier och deras orsaker, exempel?
- Vilka resurser använder ni för att skapa denna fördel?
- Finns det resurser som ni hade velat använda men av någon anledning inte kan?

Användning av dataanalys (utan att nämna ordet data)

- I ett idealt scenario, hur skulle du vilja skapa en konkurrensfördel?
- Hur är teknik involverat i ert arbete?
- Vilka kriterier används för att utvärdera vilken typ av teknik som bör införas inom ert område?
- Ge exempel på konkreta resultat eller förbättringar som kan tillskrivas den teknik som används?

Samarbete över funktioner

- Hur samarbetar ni över hela organisationen?
- Hur djupt involverade är olika delar av organisationen?
- Beskriv situationer där analys möjliggjort önskade resultat?

Utmaningar

- Beskriv utmaningar ni mött vid integrationen av dessa verktyg i organisationen.

Åsikter/Acceptans

- Hur väl integreras dessa verktyg och processer med hur ni arbetar?
- Hur upplever du att (klubbens namn/ligans namn) har integrerat detta i sitt arbete och sina processer?
- Vad är dina tankar och erfarenheter av den teknik som används?

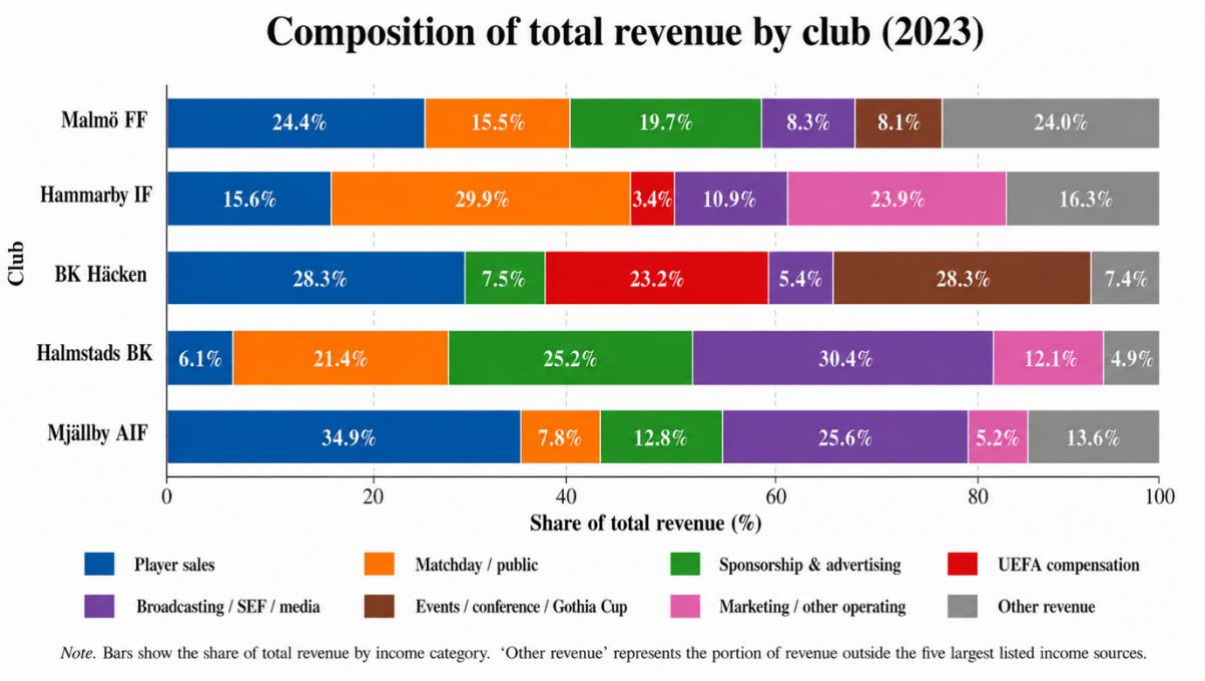
Avslutning

- Finns det något annat du vill tillägga?
- Har du några frågor till oss?

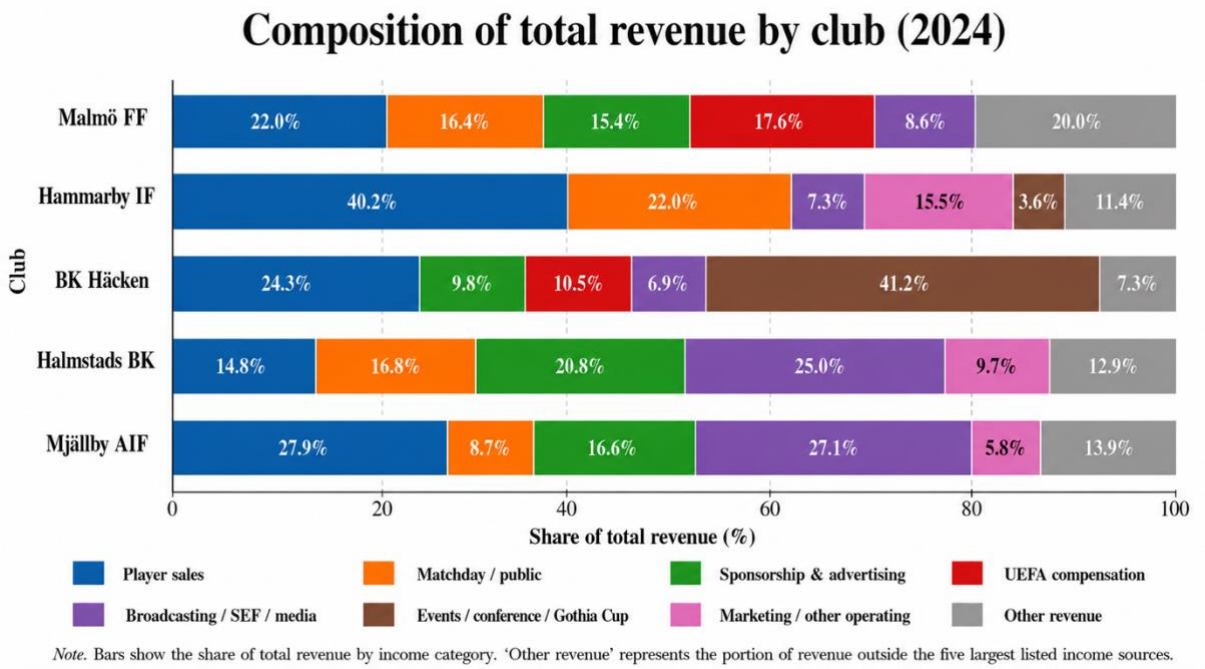
Appendix B: Aggregate dimensions

2nd-order themes	Aggregate dimensions
1.1 Data-driven scouting and player selection	**Analytics as an embedded sporting capability**
1.2 Hybrid of data-driven and traditional scouting	
1.3 Early talent identification and timing advantage	
1.4 Limits of data in player evaluation	
1.5 Match and opponent analysis	
1.6 Physical load monitoring and training planning	
1.7 Player wellbeing, injury management, and load management	
1.8 Squad construction and player valuation	
1.9 Cross-functional performance decision-making	
2.1 Fan and customer data infrastructure and engagement	**Commercial analytics as an emerging organisational capability**
2.2 Commercial product and channel innovation	
2.3 Partner and sponsor relationships	
2.4 Brand and exposure measurement	
3.1 Internal system development and data infrastructure	**Organisational foundations of analytical capability**
3.2 Specialist roles and analytical competence	
3.3 Long-term strategy and path-dependent development	
3.4 Data-supportive organisational culture	
3.5 Knowledge translation between analysis and decision-making	
3.6 Organisational resilience to staff turnover	
4.1 Resource heterogeneity and competitive asymmetry between clubs	**Structural conditions shaping analytical variation between clubs**
4.2 League-level coordination and shared infrastructure (SEF)	
4.3 Data supplier ecosystem and data quality	
4.4 Regulatory and ownership context (51-percent rule)	
4.5 Sector professionalisation and data adoption	
5.1 Player development and transfer revenue as economic driver	**Analytics as a perceived source of value**
5.2 Economic strength and sporting success as mutually dependent	
5.3 Data capability as competitive differentiator	

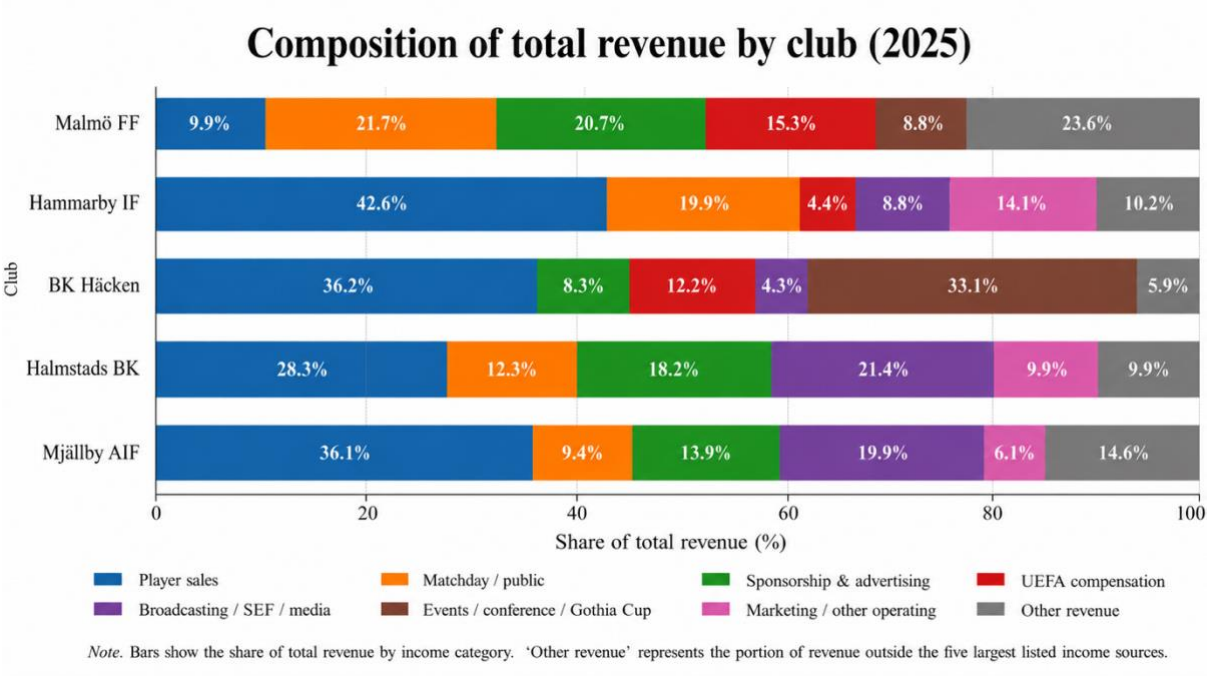
Appendix C: Composition of total revenue 2023-2025



Note. Bars show the share of total revenue by income category. 'Other revenue' represents the portion of revenue outside the five largest listed income sources.



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Appendix D: AI Transparency Note

Generative AI tools, ChatGPT and Claude, were used in a limited and supportive capacity during the research process. Their use was primarily restricted to language-related assistance, such as improving readability, suggesting synonyms, and reformulating overly long or unclear sentences. They were also used to create images illustrating the composition of total revenue. In the early stages, these tools supported brainstorming and initial familiarisation with the subject area, and later they were used to reduce sentence length. However, they were not used to generate the substantive content of the study, nor to produce the empirical analysis, interpretations, or conclusions. All AI-assisted outputs were carefully reviewed, revised, and critically assessed by the authors before being incorporated into the text. Since generative AI cannot be relied upon uncritically in academic work, all arguments, interpretations, and final decisions presented in this study remain the authors' own responsibility.

In addition, NVivo, provided by Stockholm School of Economics, was used as a practical tool to support the analysis of the interview material. More specifically, it was used to facilitate the organisation, coding, and examination of qualitative data, as well as to assist in identifying recurring patterns and themes across the interviews. NVivo thus supported the analytical process, but the interpretation of the material and the development of themes were carried out by the authors.