



Digitalization of Management in German Sports Clubs: Customer Pain Points and Sales Strategy for Clubway

Evelyn Pfaffenrot

Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences

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Abstract

Author

Evelyn Pfaffenrot

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This thesis examines management digitalization in German hobby sports clubs and identifies the administrative pain points that create the highest workload for volunteers. The study focuses on six sport disciplines (swimming, karate, Turnvereine, cheerleading, American football, and ice hockey) to capture different club realities and operational patterns. A mixed-method design was used: an online survey (n=66) provided quantitative patterns, and semi-structured interviews (n=21) added context on why these issues occur in practice.

Across all sports, the results show a clear and consistent problem: clubs spend a large share of their time on coordination work rather than sport. Communication is the most time-consuming task in the survey and is described in interviews as difficult mainly because information is scattered across email, WhatsApp groups, spreadsheets, and separate software tools. Tool fragmentation is widespread, including in clubs that already use club software, and it leads to duplicate work, inconsistent data, and strong dependence on a few key volunteers. The most consistently demanded software capabilities are member administration, communication support, and finance/payment functions, followed by scheduling and attendance-related needs.

While the core issues are shared across disciplines, each sport has additional drivers (for example course and waiting-list management in swimming, belt exam administration and federation reporting in karate, course-heavy operations in Turnvereine, competition registrations in cheerleading, game-day logistics in American football, and pass-based administration in ice hockey).

Based on these findings, the thesis derives a sales and positioning strategy for Clubway in Germany: focus on reducing fragmentation by replacing multiple disconnected tools with one integrated workflow, and sell communication primarily as structured transparency and automation rather than more messaging. Limitations include the selected sport sample and the focus on administrative processes only.

Keywords

Sales strategy, pain point analysis, sports club software

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1 Introduction

Hobby sports clubs (*Sportvereine*) are one of the most important social structures in Germany. They offer structured opportunities for physical activity, social connection, and community engagement for people of all ages. They also support public health and social cohesion by encouraging regular exercise, promoting inclusion, and building local networks that often extend beyond sport. Participation in sport is very common, with over 27 million members across more than 90,000 sports clubs.

Despite the importance and the large scale, most clubs depend on volunteer work and operate with limited financial resources. That makes efficient administration a real challenge. Even though membership numbers are high, many clubs still run key processes through manual routines and a patchwork of separate tools. Member data is often kept in spreadsheets, payments are tracked elsewhere, and communication happens via email and messaging apps. Using many isolated and disconnected systems creates extra effort, duplicate work, and inconsistent data.

In volunteer-run organizations, these problems and inefficiencies matter. Administrative tasks tend to fall on a small number of people, and the workload can discourage volunteers from staying involved long term. This creates a practical need for digital solutions that reduce coordination effort and bring core administrative processes into one structured system.

Although participation is high and the societal value of sports clubs is well established, there is limited research on the administrative pain points across different sport disciplines. The goal of this thesis is to fill this gap by providing quantitative and qualitative data about challenges in club administration.

This thesis examines Clubway as a software solution that combines membership management, communication, event and attendance management, and financial processes into a single platform. While Clubway has established a strong position in Finland and already has customers in German-speaking markets, successful growth in Germany requires a clear understanding of local club realities: how clubs are structured, where administrative burden is highest, which tools are currently used, and which pain points matter most to club administrators. The findings of this study are used to develop a sales strategy for Clubway to support its entry to the German market.

1.1 Aim and research questions

The aim is to analyze management digitalization in German sports clubs, identify the main administrative pain points, and use the findings to develop Clubway's sales strategy in Germany.

Primary research question:

1. What administrative tasks and pain points consume the most time in German sports clubs?

Investigative questions:

2. How do clubs currently use digital tools?
3. How do needs differ across sport disciplines?
4. What sales and positioning strategy should Clubway use based on these findings?

1.2 Scope and approach

The study focuses on administrative processes: member management, payments, scheduling, communication, and reporting. It covers six sports to reflect different club realities: American football, swimming, cheerleading, gymnastics (Turnvereine), karate, and ice hockey. Interviewees are board members, trainers, volunteers, administrative staff, or other club members.

A mixed-method design was chosen. An online survey captures broad patterns, and semi-structured interviews add context and explain the reasons behind them. In total, the study includes 66 survey responses and 21 interviews with club members involved in day-to-day operations and administration.

1.3 Limitations

This study is limited to six selected sports. Other sports may operate under different management models, staff structures, funding, competitive calendars, or volunteer expectations. Those differences could change both the type and intensity of administrative challenges observed in this study.

The analysis only concentrates on administration-related functions such as membership management, payments, communication, scheduling, and reporting. Because the scope is intentionally administrative, the study does not examine other aspects such as coaching practice, athlete development and performance, facility operations, or broader club strategy. These areas are discussed only when they overlap with or affect administrative processes.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Sports in German society

Hobby sport in Germany is important for health and the whole society. Research on children and teenagers shows that taking part in sports clubs and organized sports increases physical activity. This helps prevent physical and mental health problems and supports social skills such as teamwork and inclusion (Rittsteiger et al. 2021). The hobby sport sector, which includes all activities outside professional sport, forms the base of sport in Germany and the EU. The German Olympic Sports Confederation (*Deutscher Olympischer Sportbund*, DOSB) reports that tens of millions of people take part in these clubs, which makes them important for community, health and well-being (Deutscher Olympischer Sportbund e.V. 2023).

In addition to the health benefits, sport also supports education and inclusion. Research from the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin) shows that regular sport participation is linked to better education outcomes, such as higher school completion rates and better careers. Sport teaches discipline and social skills that are useful in both learning and work (Pfeifer & Cornelißen 2010). Club-based sport helps with social inclusion, especially for immigrants and people from more challenging backgrounds, by creating networks and encouraging respect for rules. One study found that for immigrant children in Germany, football clubs are one of their strongest connections to German society (Nobis, Gomez-Gonzalez, Nessler & Dietl 2021).

Participation in sports clubs in Germany is very common. There are about 90,000 sports clubs with around 27-28 million members (Breuer, Feiler & Rossi 2021; Deutschland.de 2023). Despite the large scale, clubs often have structural challenges in the management.

Many clubs have too few volunteers and high infrastructure costs (Breuer & Feiler 2025). They still work with paper and do not use digital tools. This makes it hard to manage members, collect payments, or communicate with players and parents online (Schallhorn et al. 2022). Clubs also have trouble hiring new members and helpers, as many people who lead the clubs are older (Breuer & Feiler 2020). At the same time, more people choose fitness studios or other flexible and independent activities, rather than joining a club with regular, scheduled activities. Rising costs for sports halls and fields make the situation even harder (Nielsen Sports 2023).

2.2 Sport club structure in Germany

2.2.1 Club structure and governance

In Germany, most hobby sports clubs are organized as an *eingetragener Verein* (e. V.), a non-profit association.

Only about 2.7% of clubs employ full-time staff aside from coaches (Breuer, Feiler & Wicker 2015). Most therefore depend on volunteers. Two main types of volunteer roles have been identified (Feiler, Rossi & Hallmann 2018).

Ehrenamt refers to volunteer leaders. This includes positions such as chairperson, treasurer, or secretary. People in these roles take on more responsibility (Feiler et al. 2018). They set rules, manage budgets, hire staff when needed, and oversee areas like sports teams, youth programs, or office tasks. The board is usually elected by the members (Feiler et al. 2018).

Freiwillige are volunteer helpers. They support the club as assistants, event helpers, caretakers, or coaches. They take on practical tasks and help where needed. In most clubs, these helpers are also members, though this is not a strict requirement (Feiler et al. 2018).

Even though the administration is largely volunteer-based, coaching often is not. Many clubs employ semi-professional trainers who receive a salary (Breuer & Feiler 2025).

Most clubs have several sports sections, each with its own management, leaders, and budget. Because of the volunteer-based structure, clubs commonly face shortages of time, money, and the administrative skills needed for smooth day-to-day operation (Swierzy, Wicker & Breuer 2018).

2.2.2 Financial management

Most clubs fund their activities through membership fees. Members usually pay monthly, annually, or per session. This income covers facility rentals, equipment, and the salaries of trainers and coaches. The members' meeting (*Mitgliederversammlung*) typically decides the amount of the fee. Rates can vary by age group, sport, or membership type, and many clubs offer family discounts when several people join (Breuer & Feiler 2025).

Collecting and managing fees by hand takes time. Since most volunteers are not accounting specialists, automatic payment systems help reduce errors and ease the workload.

Clubs also earn money from course fees, facility rentals, sponsorships, and public funding (Breuer et al. 2015).

2.2.3 Daily administrative tasks

On a daily basis, club managers and administrators handle a wide range of routine tasks (Breuer & Feiler 2020; Collier & Le Roux 1997; Adam 2025):

- **Member administration:** registering new members, managing membership categories (adult, youth, etc.), and updating contact and banking details.
- **Fee processing:** issuing invoices or SEPA mandates, tracking payments, sending reminders for overdue fees, and keeping member records up to date.
- **Scheduling and facility management:** allocating training times, booking halls or fields, and coordinating teams and coaches.
- **Communication:** sharing updates on training, events, cancellations, general assemblies, and club news.
- **Compliance and reporting:** preparing annual financial reports, supporting audits, maintaining insurance, and meeting legal transparency requirements.
- **Coaching and training management:** assigning qualified coaches, planning training sessions, and handling sport-specific tasks such as equipment, licensing, and certifications.

Doing this work by hand is repetitive and takes time. Because clubs run on small budgets and rely heavily on volunteers, there is a clear need for administrative software that is affordable, simple to use, and covers a broad range of functions.

2.3 Studied sport disciplines

This study examines six sports selected to reflect the wide range of sports clubs in Germany. The sample includes activities with different participant profiles, organizational structures, and administrative demands. It covers both male- and female-dominated sports, as well as a mix of individual and team disciplines. This range allows the study to observe how clubs operate under different conditions, what kinds of support they need, and how volunteers and administrators manage daily tasks.

Each sport brings its own administrative challenges. In karate, clubs track athlete progression, document attendance, and organize examinations and certifications. These tasks require steady record-keeping and place ongoing demands on volunteers. Cheerleading adds a different type of complexity through choreography planning, music licensing, safety training, and regular coordination between athletes and coaches.

Team sports such as American football and ice hockey rely on large squads, extensive equipment, and regular travel, which increases logistical and budgeting requirements. Gymnastics and swimming, although more individual in nature, run multiple training groups across ability levels. This requires careful allocation of coaches, hall or pool times, and frequent communication with participants.

The six sports included in the study are:

- American football
- Swimming
- Cheerleading
- Gymnastics
- Karate
- Ice hockey

Together, they provide a balanced sample in terms of participant demographics, organizational structures, and administrative complexity. They enable comparisons of how clubs organize volunteer work, which digital tools they use or lack, how facility needs vary, and how administrative practices differ across sports with distinct cultures and requirements.

Table 1. Data sheet of the studied sports in Germany.

Sport	Number of clubs	Registered members	National association
American football	512 (American Football Verband Deutschland e.V. 2024)	73 410 (American Football Verband Deutschland e.V. 2024)	American Football Verband Deutschland (AFVD)
Swimming	2 325 (Deutscher Schwimm-Verband e.V. 2024)	602 724 (Hannemann 2025)	Deutscher Schwimm-Verband (DSV)
Cheerleading	355 (Moebius 2024)	30,033 (Moebius 2024)	Cheerleading und Cheerperformance Verband Deutschland (CCVD)
Gymnastics	18,130 (Deutscher Olympischer Sportbund e.V. 2023)	5,063,572 (Deutscher Turner-Bund e.V. 2024)	Deutscher Turner-Bund (DTB)
Karate	ca. 2,400 (Deutscher Karate Verband e.V. 2025)	75,697 (Deutscher Karate Verband e.V. 2023)	Deutscher Karate Verband (DKV)
Ice hockey	ca. 100 (Deutscher Eishockey-Bund e.V. 2024)	22,998 (Deutscher Olympischer Sportbund e.V. 2023)	Deutscher Eishockey-Bund (DEB)

2.4 SaaS: Software as a Service

2.4.1 Definition

Software as a Service (SaaS) is a model where software is provided over the internet instead of being installed and maintained on local devices. The provider hosts the system, handles updates, and takes care of security and data protection. Users access the software through a web browser or a mobile app (IBM Corporation 2024).

A major benefit of SaaS is the shift in responsibility. By outsourcing maintenance, updates, and security to the provider, organizations such as sports clubs or small businesses can focus on their main tasks. They need less in-house technical expertise and avoid the ongoing workload that comes with running local software systems (IBM Corporation 2024).

2.4.2 Characteristics and function

Key features of SaaS include:

- **One system for many users:** One version of the software serves all customers, while their data remains private (IBM Corporation 2024).
- **Centralized updates:** The provider releases updates and bug fixes for all users at the same time (IBM Corporation 2024).
- **Flexible pricing:** Pricing can depend on usage, chosen features, or number of users (García-Fernández, Parejo & Ruiz-Cortés 2024). Many SaaS providers offer several pricing tiers so customers can choose the level that fits their needs.
- **Scalability:** Systems can expand or shrink as required without extra computing power on the customer side, meaning no local IT investment is needed (Santhosh et al. 2024).
- **Data protection:** In the EU, SaaS providers must follow the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (European Parliament & Council of the European Union 2016). Customers know how their data is managed and do not have to handle security themselves.

For sports clubs that often lack their own IT specialists, SaaS provides ready-to-use tools for administration, member management, communication, and finances, without local installation or extensive technical knowledge.

2.4.3 Benefits

SaaS provides both practical and financial advantages, especially for smaller organizations such as volunteer-run sports clubs (Santhosh et al. 2024; SAP SE 2024; Microsoft Corporation 2024):

- **Lower entry cost**

There is no major setup cost for hardware or installation. The software runs on the provider's servers, and customers access it through the internet. They do not need to buy their own servers: a device with internet access is usually enough.

- **Automatic updates**

The provider handles all updates. Customers do not have to spend time installing new versions or patches, and they can rely on always using the current version of the software.

- **Accessibility**

Most SaaS systems run on any device with internet access. This helps larger organizations that want to give many members access without requiring new equipment, as long as people have a laptop or smartphone.

- **Scalability and flexibility**

Customers can scale the system up or down as their needs change. If they need more features or support for more data and accounts, they can usually upgrade to a higher tier.

- **Reduced administrative load**

The provider manages infrastructure, security, and backups. Clubs do not need to employ or rely on an IT expert for these tasks.

- **Reduced risk of failure and loss of data**

Local software depends on a single computer. If that computer fails, data can be lost or inaccessible. SaaS systems store data on secure, redundant servers, which lowers this risk.

For German volunteer clubs with limited money and staff, SaaS platforms like Clubway help manage members, payments, communication, and events in one online system. They reduce the amount of manual work that often falls on a few volunteers and make administrative tasks easier to share among several people. Because the software is available online, board members and helpers can work from different locations and still access the same information. This creates more

continuity in the club's administration, even when volunteers change roles or have limited time. SaaS therefore supports more stable day-to-day operations and lowers the technical burden that many clubs struggle with.

2.4.4 Market context

SaaS is now the dominant software delivery model in many industries (McKinsey & Company 2025). The global SaaS market size was valued at about 3 trillion US dollars in 2022 and is expected to reach around 10 trillion dollars by 2030 (McKinsey & Company 2025).

In Germany, the level of digital transformation in sports clubs varies widely. Many clubs rely on external service providers because they do not have their own IT departments (Nielsen Sports 2023). Some still use local software systems, which can be difficult to maintain and depend on a single device. Others use limited or no digital tools and rely mostly on manual work with pen and paper.

2.4.5 Summary

SaaS has changed how organizations use and manage software. For sports clubs with limited IT support or budget, it offers access to digital tools that were once available mainly to large companies. In German sport, SaaS is a good fit because it is affordable, flexible, and simple to use. Its success depends on providers meeting data protection requirements and on clubs being willing to adapt and work with digital systems.

2.5 Clubway

2.5.1 Origins and company profile

Clubway is a sports club management software developed by Taikala Oy, a Finnish company founded in 2009 (Taikala Oy 2026). The product is marketed as *Clubway* in Germany and as *my-Club* in Finland. The founders had experience in club administration and saw the need for more practical tools to handle daily tasks. This insight led to the development of Clubway (Taikala Oy 2026). More than 1,000 clubs currently use the product in Europe (Germany, Austria and Finland) (Taikala Oy 2025a).

The software is delivered as a cloud-based SaaS platform, giving clubs access through a web browser or mobile app, without a need for heavy local computing. Key features include use on any device, automatic updates, and support for an unlimited number of user accounts (Taikala Oy 2025b).

2.5.2 Core features and modules

Clubway provides a system that brings together member administration, event scheduling, financial management, communication, and mobile access in one platform.

2.5.2.1 Member management

This module stores all member data, like personal details, roles, bank information, and group allocations by team or section, in one central database. Members can update selected information themselves through a self-service portal or the mobile app (Taikala Oy 2025b).

2.5.2.2 Course, event and attendance management

Clubs can publish courses or recurring events with online registration, manage participant lists, and record attendance. These records can be used to generate reports on participation and engagement (Taikala Oy 2025b).

2.5.2.3 Financial- and contribution management

A defining feature of Clubway is its SEPA automation, which supports automatic billing and recurring payments. Clubs can create invoices, manage SEPA direct debits, and monitor unpaid fees. The finance tools connect with other modules to simplify bookkeeping (Taikala Oy 2025b).

SEPA Lastschrift (Single Euro Payments Area direct debit) is a payment method that allows organizations to automatically collect payments from members' bank accounts within the SEPA zone, which includes Germany and other EU countries (Planet Payment Group Holdings Limited 2024).

2.5.2.4 Communication and mobile access

Built-in tools support targeted communication via email, SMS, or push notifications. The Clubway mobile app, along with a separate coach app, gives users access to schedules, invoices, and club news on a smartphone (Taikala Oy 2025c; Taikala Oy 2024a).

2.5.2.5 Cloud-hosting, compliance and extensibility

The system is designed to meet GDPR requirements. Data is stored in secure hosted environments, and role-based access control limits what different users can see or change.

Clubway also offers integration through a REST API (Representational State Transfer Application Programming Interface), allowing data exchange with external systems such as accounting tools or websites (Taikala Oy 2025b). This reduces manual data entry and helps clubs connect their existing digital services.

Optional modules include for example a web shop, bookkeeping, and check-in functionality. These modules expand the system when needed (Taikala Oy 2025b).

2.5.2.6 Implementation support and positioning

Clubs can begin with a free 14-day trial. Clubway offers onboarding materials, webinars, and migration support to help clubs transition from older systems (Taikala Oy 2024b).

2.5.3 Summary

Clubway is a comprehensive club-management platform developed by Taikala Oy. It is an all-in-one software, combining member-, event-, finance-, and communication administration. Clubway is built for volunteer-run organizations. With a modular SaaS setup, mobile access, SEPA support, and GDPR-compliance, it works well for German sports clubs that need an efficient system without strong in-house IT skills.

2.6 Digitalization in Germany

2.6.1 Digitalization in society

Digitalization refers to the integration of digital technologies into how organizations operate, communicate, and handle daily work. In Germany, it is a national priority through the national digital strategy, *Digitalstrategie der Bundesregierung*. The strategy aims to strengthen Germany as a digital society and economy (Federal Government Commissioner for Information Technology (CIO Bund) 2020). It highlights areas such as infrastructure, digital skills, data sovereignty, and a more modern public administration (Federal Government Commissioner for Information Technology (CIO Bund) 2020).

Digitalization affects not only companies and public institutions but also non-profit organizations. Sports clubs and other volunteer groups increasingly use digital tools for administration, communication, and membership-related tasks. According to Nielsen (2023), digital change in German sport is progressing, but at an uneven pace (Nielsen Sports 2023). Larger and more commercial clubs adapt more quickly, while many traditional volunteer-run clubs still depend on manual processes. The report notes both the practical benefits of digital tools and the cultural adjustments needed in volunteer-based organizations.

2.6.2 Digitalization in sports clubs

Many German sports clubs are volunteer-run non-profits that have traditionally relied on paper forms, in-person meetings, and manual payment processes. Digital tools now make it easier to handle tasks such as membership management, online payments, event scheduling, and communication. These tools help reduce the administrative burden on volunteers.

The recent national sports development statistics report (*Sportentwicklungsbericht*) shows that clubs using digital systems report better organization, more satisfied members, and greater transparency (Breuer & Feiler 2025). However, small or rural clubs often have limited digital access, small budgets, and little technical support. These factors slow down digital adoption and make change more difficult for them (Breuer & Feiler 2025).

Digitalization in German sports clubs is steadily increasing. A recent study reports that 57.4% of administrative tasks are now handled digitally (Thieme, Post & Weinfurter 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this shift: many clubs adopted online communication tools, digital scheduling, and online booking or payment systems, showing that clubs can adapt when they need to (Fachhochschule Dortmund 2023).

Most clubs now use basic digital tools such as email, websites, or simple messaging services. However, fewer clubs rely on comprehensive administrative software systems (Ehnold, Steinbach & Schlesinger 2023). Digitalization is progressing, but many clubs still have significant potential to modernize their administrative processes.

2.6.3 Drivers and barriers

Key drivers of digitalization in German sports clubs include:

- **Efficiency:** Automation saves time and reduces the workload on volunteers.
- **Better communication:** Members expect quick updates and mobile access.
- **Public funding and policy:** National and state programs, such as the *Digitalstrategie* or DOSB initiatives, encourage digital development.
- **Changing demographics:** Younger members tend to prefer digital services and online management.

Main barriers to adoption are:

- **Digital skills gap:** Volunteers often lack the time or training needed to work with new systems.
- **Financial limitations:** Subscription fees or necessary hardware can be difficult for clubs with small budgets.
- **Infrastructure inequality:** Rural areas still face weak broadband and mobile coverage.

The Nielsen (2023) report notes a clear “digital divide” between professional sports organizations and volunteer-led hobby clubs (Nielsen Sports 2023). Smaller clubs need digital solutions that are affordable, simple to use, and legally compliant if they are to participate fully in digital transformation.

2.6.4 Integration with club management systems

Digitalization in sports clubs often takes place through the introduction of management software. These systems combine the administration of members, finances, events, and communication in one place. This helps clubs work more efficiently while still relying on volunteers.

Typical features include self-service portals, automated invoicing, online attendance tracking, and mobile apps for communication. Research from the *Sportentwicklungsbericht* shows that using

such tools can strengthen volunteer engagement and simplify daily management (Breuer & Feiler 2025).

Government strategies like the *Digitalstrategie* set the broader direction for this development. They encourage digital inclusion and modernization across all types of organizations (Federal Government Commissioner for Information Technology (CIO Bund) 2020).

2.6.5 Summary

Digitalization is changing how sports clubs in Germany organize their work and communicate with members. Larger urban clubs often move ahead more quickly, while smaller clubs face challenges related to limited resources and training. Even so, digital tools offer clear advantages: they save time, improve transparency, and make participation easier. Club management software is becoming an important part of this broader shift toward digital working practices.

3 Research methodology

3.1 Research design and approach

This study used a mixed-method approach that combined quantitative data and qualitative insights. The design was shaped in part by the author's professional experience at Clubway/Taikala, which provided direct exposure to how German sports clubs handle administration and work with digital tools. This background helped refine the research questions and ensured that the study remained grounded in real management practices.

The research design was developed with colleagues, the thesis advisor, and a research expert from Haaga-Helia. Their feedback helped confirm the scope, select suitable methods, and align the project with academic standards. The aim was to produce results that are both practical and academically sound.

Quantitative data came from an online survey, and qualitative data from semi-structured interviews. The survey identified common challenges and measurable trends across clubs. The interviews added depth by capturing personal experiences and explaining the reasons behind those patterns. Together, these methods formed the basis for analyzing management issues and developing recommendations for Clubway's strategy in Germany.

3.2 Target group

The target group consisted of people directly involved in running German sports clubs. This included board members, executives, coaches, and administrative staff who are familiar with day-to-day tasks such as member management, billing, scheduling, and communication. Their practical experience made them well suited to identify real administrative challenges and digital needs.

These respondents were selected because they make key operational and administrative decisions. Their perspectives provided realistic insights into the workload, difficulties, and improvement needs of volunteer-based clubs. This helped ensure that the research findings reflect the actual conditions relevant to Clubway's solutions.

3.3 Data Collection Method

Data was collected through two main methods: video-call interviews and an online survey. Interviews ranged from 20 to 40 minutes and offered detailed insight into how clubs manage administration, the challenges they face, and how they use digital tools. The format allowed open discussion and the chance to clarify points that fixed questions might miss. All interviews were transcribed with the participants' permission using the Google Gemini transcription tool.

An online survey was created with Typeform to gather quantitative data. It included 12 structured questions focused on management challenges and current software use.

Together, the interviews and survey produced a balanced data set. The survey showed measurable patterns across clubs, while the interviews provided the context and explanations behind those trends. Both methods are described in detail in Appendix 1.

3.3.1 Choice of method

A mixed-method approach was chosen to capture both general patterns from survey data and deeper understanding from the interviews. The goal was to gather a large amount of credible quantitative data with the survey, and supplement this by gaining deeper understanding of the club challenges via interviews.

The online survey was created with Typeform. Typeform was chosen for its ease of use and compatibility across devices. Smooth response experience was an important factor when selecting the method, and Typeform proved to be a simple and user-friendly survey tool. The author was already familiar with the tool, which made it a natural choice.

Video interviews were used as the qualitative method to complement the survey. Interviews offer detailed information of topics and challenges that might be missed by the survey. Interviews were arranged via Google Meet. Online meetings allowed interviewing German clubs without the need to travel.

Together, the survey and interviews produced both credible statistical data and meaningful qualitative insights into digitalization and administrative challenges in German sports clubs.

3.3.2 Reliability and validity

The reliability and validity of the study was achieved by combining survey and interview data. The survey identified and quantified the broader patterns, and the interviews added context and deeper insights. A structured survey format and a consistent interview process also added to the quality of the study.

However, some limitations may have reduced reliability and validity. The sample was relatively small and inconsistent between sports, which means the results can not be generalized reliably. The qualitative analysis was interpreted subjectively by the author, which creates a risk for misinterpretations.

3.4 Data analysis techniques

The quantitative survey data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Visualizations were created with Plotly. For the qualitative data, the interview transcripts were summarized using generative artificial intelligence. These summaries were then coded manually to find recurring themes and common pain points.

4 Results

4.1 Background of responses

A total of 66 survey responses and 21 interviews were collected. Table 2 shows the number of data points for each sport.

Table 2. Number of surveys and interviews.

Sport discipline	n (surveys)	n (interviews)
Karate	19	6
Swimming	29	9
Ice hockey	1	1
American football	3	1
Gymnastics	8	2
Cheerleading	6	2
Total	66	21

Table 2 shows how many responses were collected per sport, which helps assess how stable or representative the results may be for each group.

Swimming (29 surveys, 9 interviews) and karate (19 surveys, 6 interviews) have the strongest bases. These larger respondent sizes show clearer and more consistent patterns, reducing the risk that individual outliers shape the findings.

Gymnastics (8 surveys, 2 interviews) and cheerleading (6 surveys, 2 interviews) fall in the medium range. Their samples are smaller but still offer enough information for basic observations. Results for these sports are usable but should be interpreted with the understanding that the smaller sample provides a limited representation of clubs in this sport.

American football (3 surveys, 1 interview) and ice hockey (1 survey, 1 interview) have very limited data. The small sample sizes offer limited insights from the quantitative data (surveys), but the qualitative data (interviews) still offer insights of the sports.

Overall, the most reliable comparisons can be made for swimming and karate. The remaining sports still provide valuable information with less data.

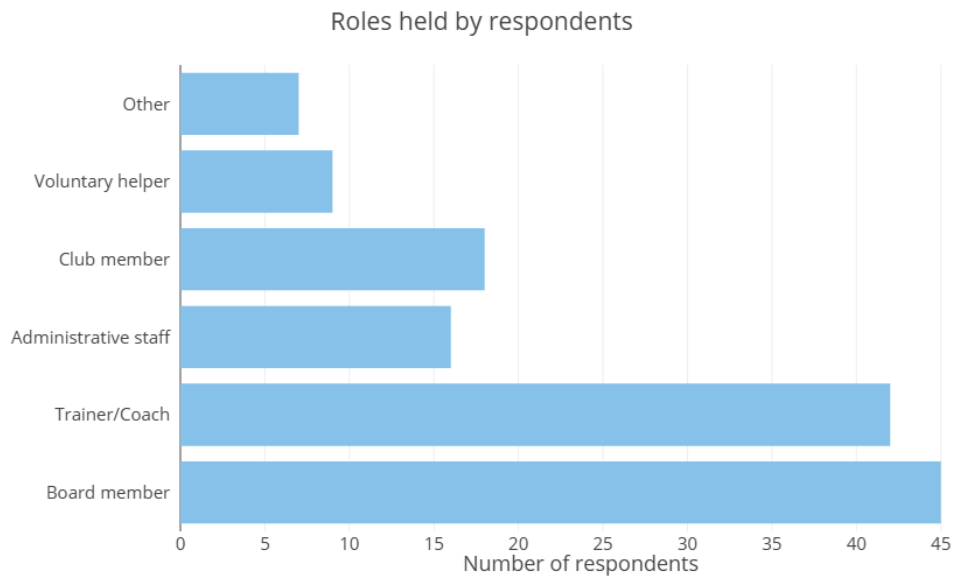


Figure 1. Respondent role in club, all answers.

Figure 1 shows how the survey answers are distributed across different club roles. Most respondents are board members and trainers/coaches, with smaller contributions from administrative staff, club members, volunteers, and other roles. This means that responses represent both the operative challenges (related to trainings/matches/competitions) as well as the administrative challenges, such as membership management and invoicing. The responses fit the target group well (Section 3.2), strengthening the value of the results.

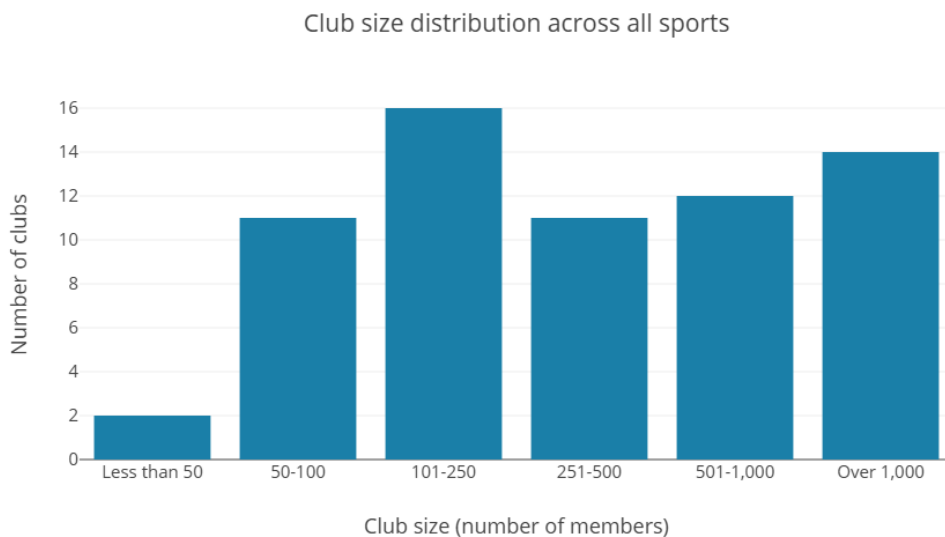


Figure 2. Club size, all answers.

Figure 2 summarizes the club size distribution across all responses. The largest share of clubs are in the 101–250 member range, while a significant portion are larger organizations (501–1,000 and 1,000+). Very small clubs are rare in the sample. These results therefore represent medium-sized and large clubs better, and extrapolation to small clubs should be considered carefully.

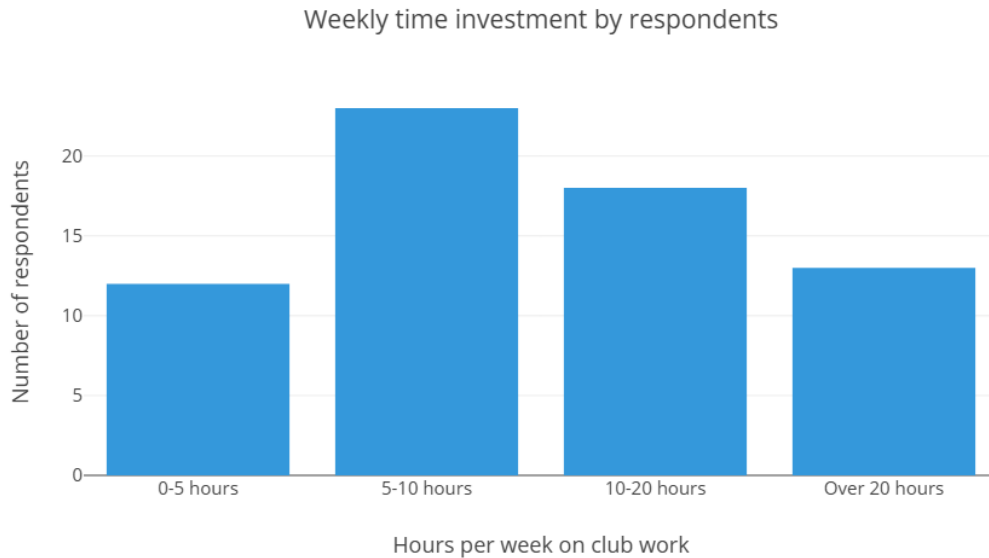


Figure 3. Weekly time investment, all answers.

Figure 3 shows how much time respondents spend on club work (administration, coaching and training) per week. Most report spending 5–10 or 10–20 hours, and a notable share spend more than 20 hours. As the work is voluntary in most cases, the time investment is significant. This data shows the clear need for software like Clubway, designed to simplify and automate processes in club administration.

4.2 Survey results – all sports

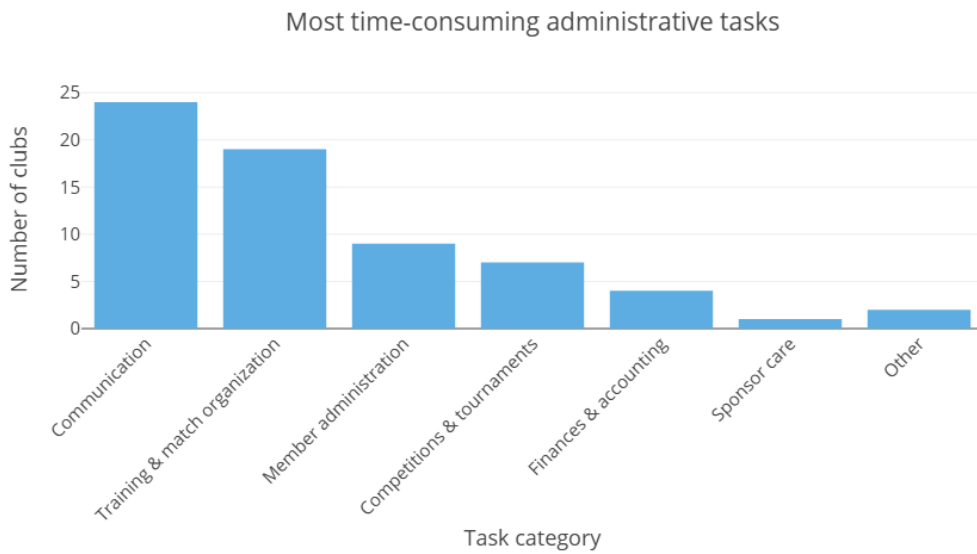


Figure 4. Most time-consuming tasks, all sports.

Figure 4 presents the single most time-consuming task category selected by respondents. Communication is the most frequent answer, followed by organizing training and game schedules. Member administration and competition organization are additional time-intense tasks. Accounting and financing, sponsor care, and other tasks appear less frequently as the top choice.

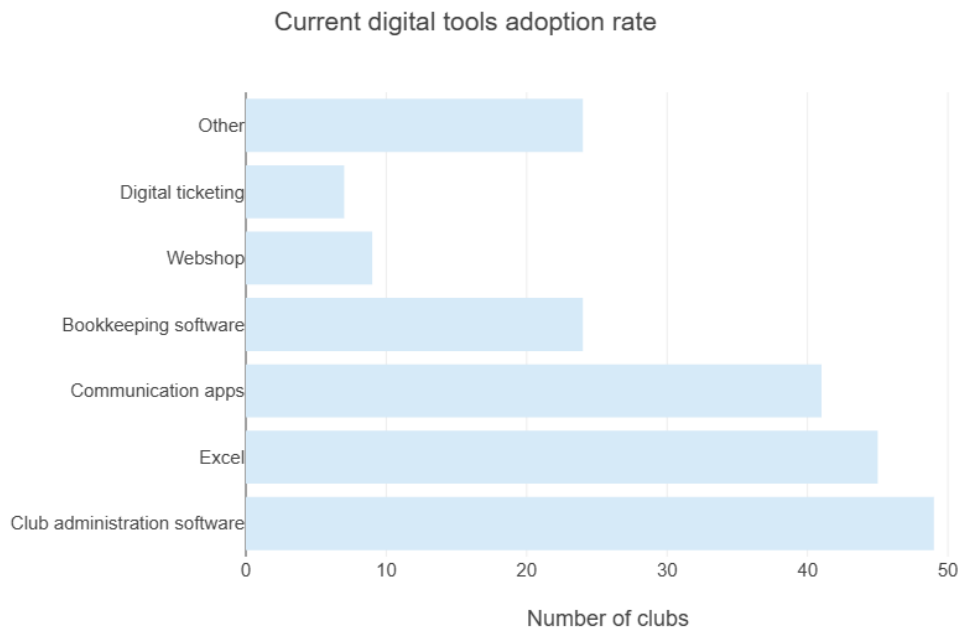


Figure 5. Digital tools use, all sports.

Figure 5 summarizes which digital tools clubs currently use. Tool use is common, and most clubs use a lot of different tools. Excel and communication apps are the most commonly used tools. The average number of tools in clubs is 3.02, which highlights the need for a universal club software. Many clubs (n=49) already report using a dedicated club software, but this does not seem to solve the fragmented tool use: Figure 6 shows the tool use in those clubs that already use a club software.

Tools used alongside club administration software (n=49)

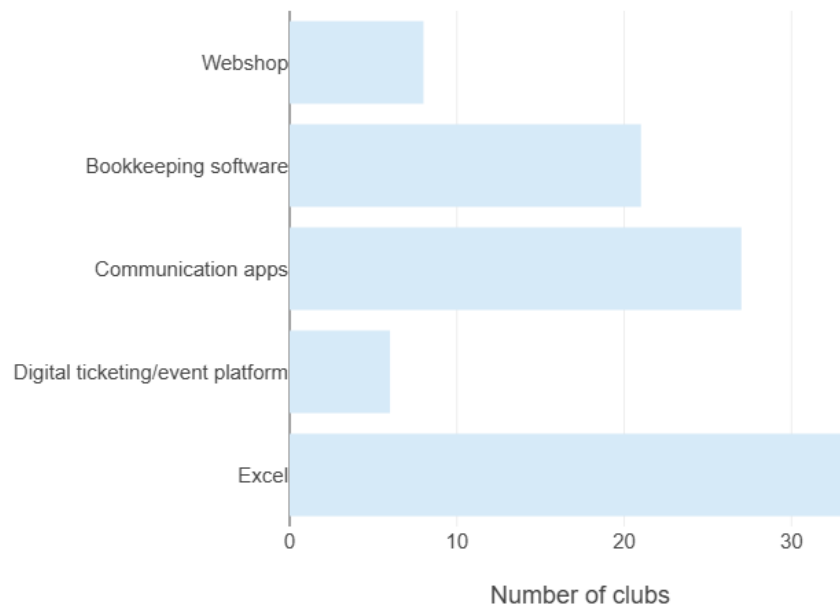


Figure 6. Digital tools use alongside club software.

As shown in Figure 6, clubs using dedicated software still use the same most common tools: Excel and communication apps. On average, clubs that have a club software use an additional 2.35 tools, meaning that these clubs use a higher amount of total tools (3.35 on average) than those without club software. This indicates that a poorly selected or underused club software rarely simplifies things, and it can even add to the workload. Clubway, which is designed to be an all-in-one club management software, aims to solve this fragmentation by combining the necessary features in one tool.

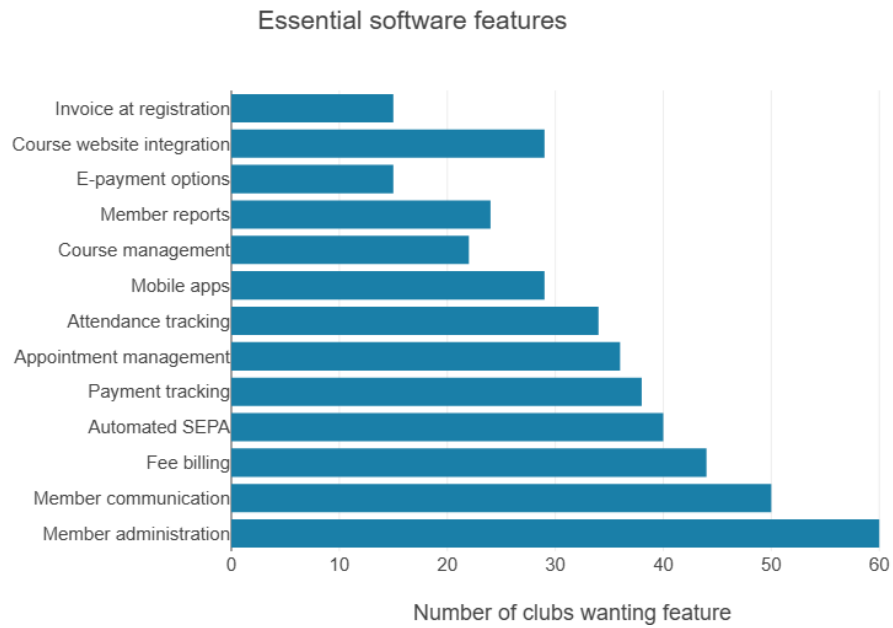


Figure 7. Feature demand, all sports.

Figure 7 shows which software functions respondents consider particularly important. The strongest demand is for member administration and communication, followed by financial and payment-related functions.

4.3 Survey results – swimming

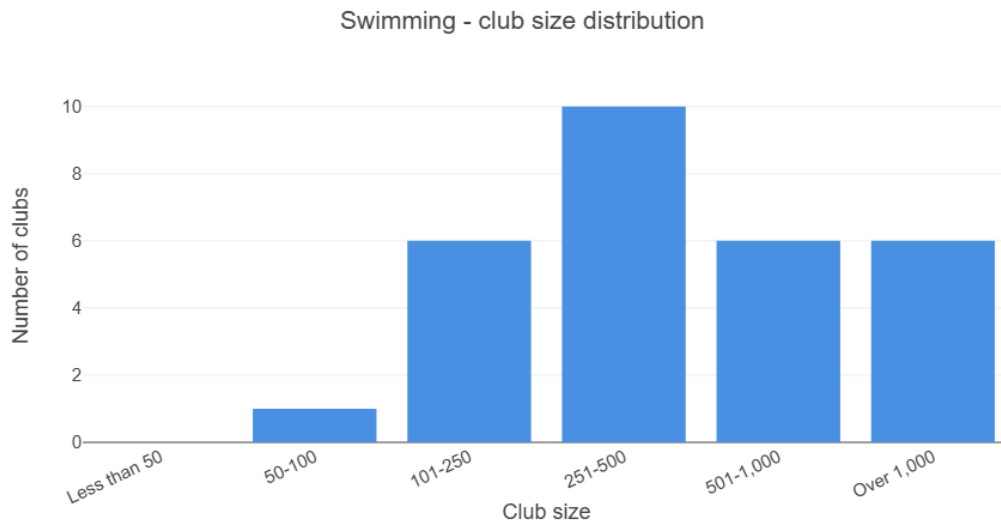


Figure 8. Club size distribution, swimming.

Figure 8 shows the club size distribution for swimming. Compared to the full sample, swimming clubs are more concentrated in the large categories, with over half of the clubs having more than 500 members. Swimming is considered an essential skill in Germany, and most children partake in a swimming course at some point, which makes the club sizes large.

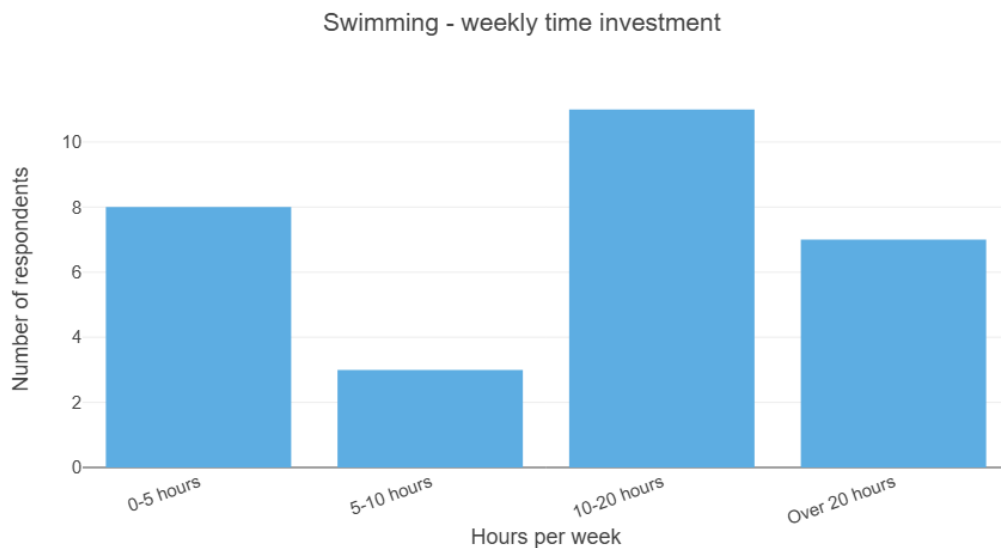


Figure 9. Weekly time investment in club work, swimming.

Figure 9 summarizes weekly time spent on club work among swimming respondents. The time investment of swimming clubs is higher than the full sample average, with most reporting over 10 weekly hours and a significant part even over 20 hours of club work per week.

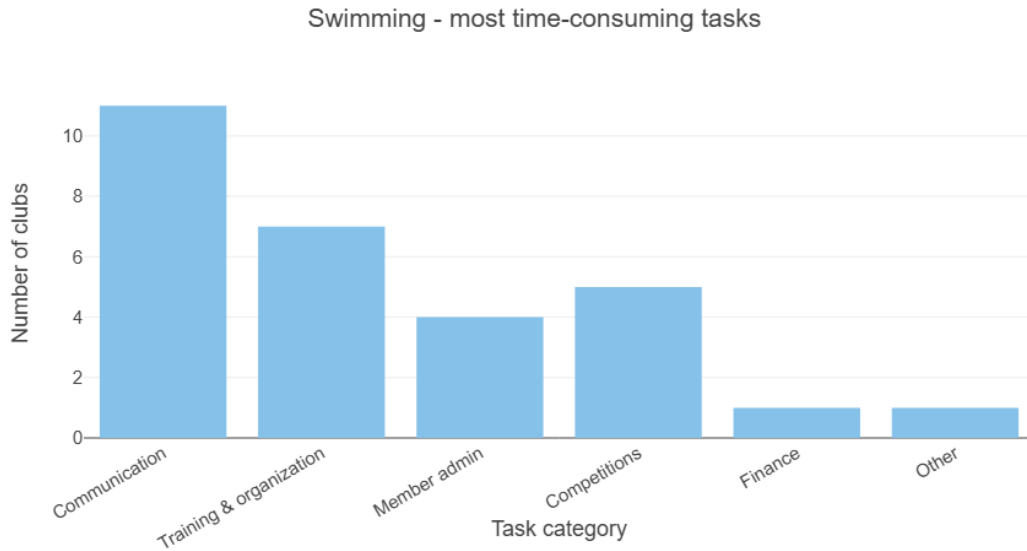


Figure 10. Most time-consuming management tasks in club work, swimming.

Figure 10 shows which task categories swimming respondents report as most time-consuming. Communication dominates the responses in swimming even stronger than for all clubs (Figure 4). This may be due to the large size of swimming clubs. Competition organizing also takes more than the full sample average.

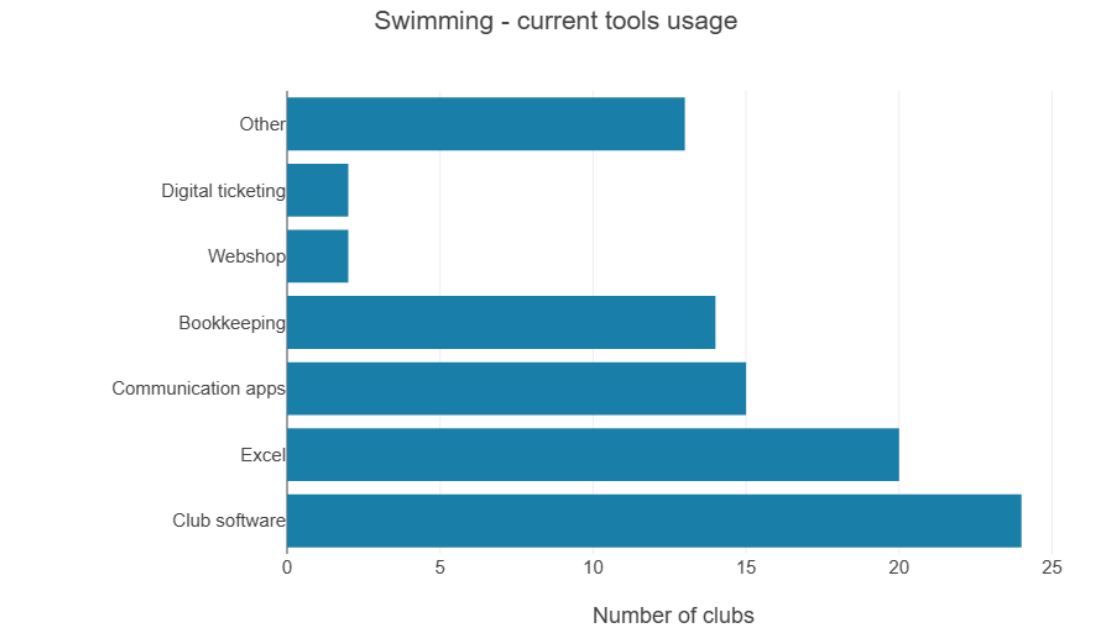


Figure 11. Current tool usage in club management, swimming

Figure 11 presents tool usage in swimming clubs. The tool use is very similar to the full sample. Swimming clubs most commonly use a club software in combination with Excel, and WhatsApp use is also quite high.

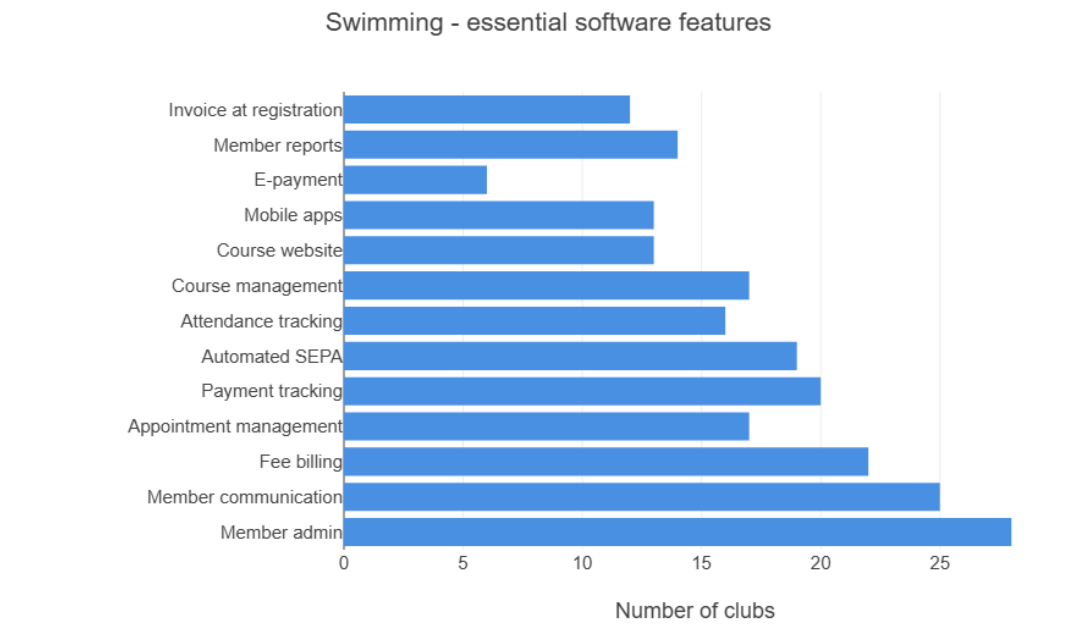


Figure 12. Necessary software features, swimming

Figure 12 summarizes which features swimming clubs consider essential. As swimming represents around 44% of the full sample, these responses are very similar to Figure 7.

4.4 Survey results – karate

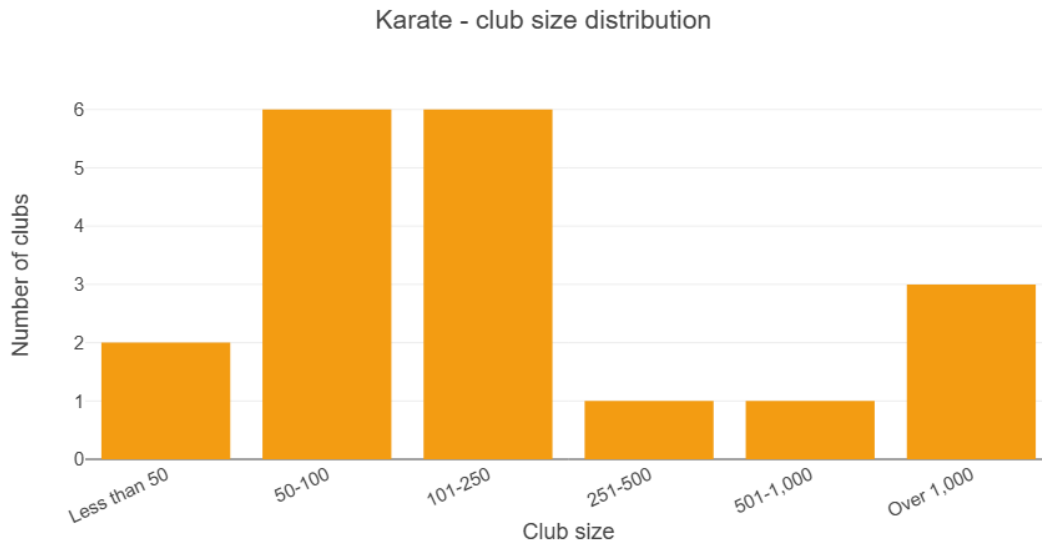


Figure 13. Club size distribution, karate.

Figure 13 shows karate club sizes. The answers are concentrated on small-to-mid categories, especially around 50–250 members. Compared to swimming, karate clubs are smaller.

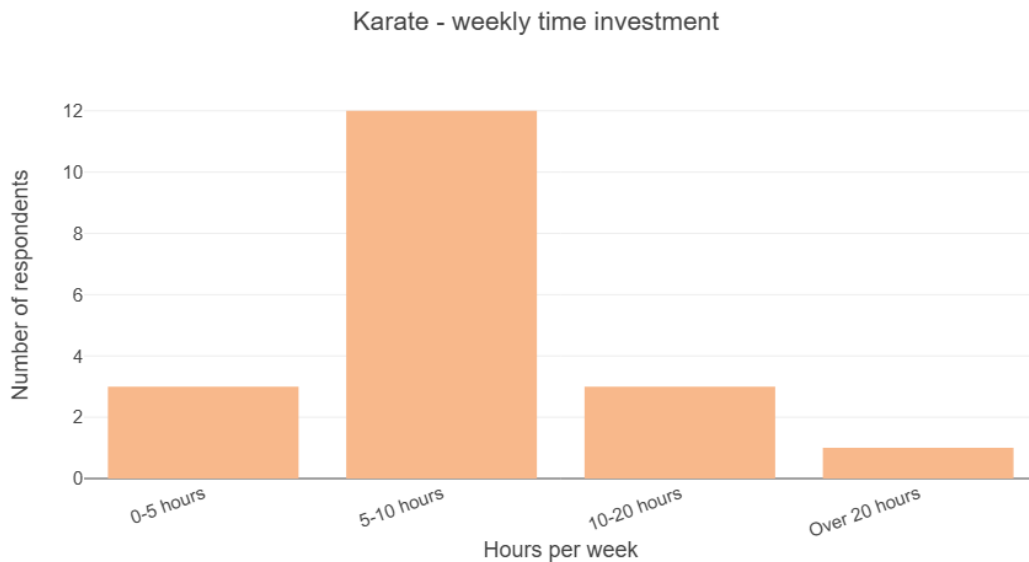


Figure 14. Weekly time investment in club work, karate.

Figure 14 shows weekly time investment among karate respondents. Time investment is more moderate than swimming, with 5-10 hours per week being the most common answer.

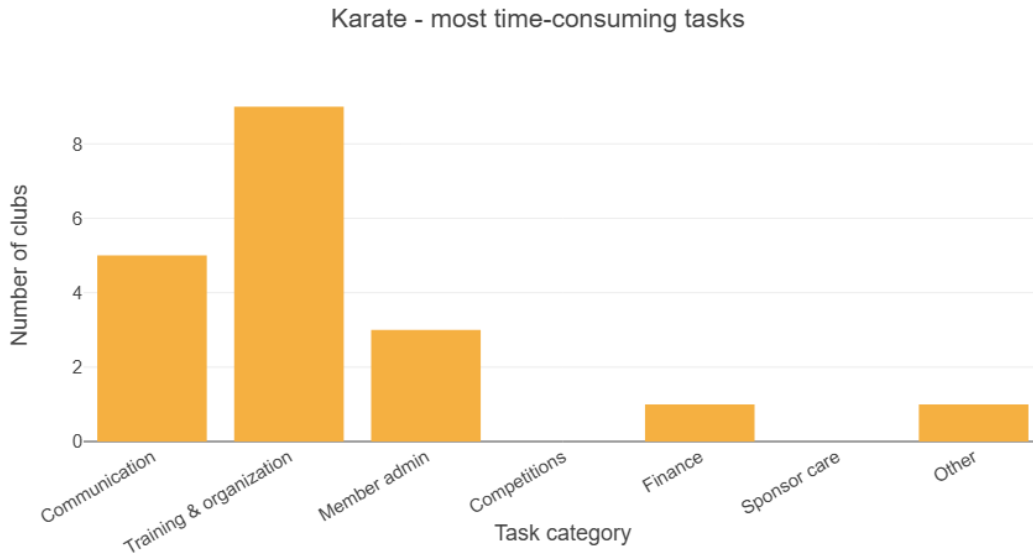


Figure 15. Most time-consuming management tasks in club work, karate.

Figure 15 summarizes the most time-consuming task categories in karate clubs. Coaching and training organization is the most time-consuming task, and communication is the second most common.

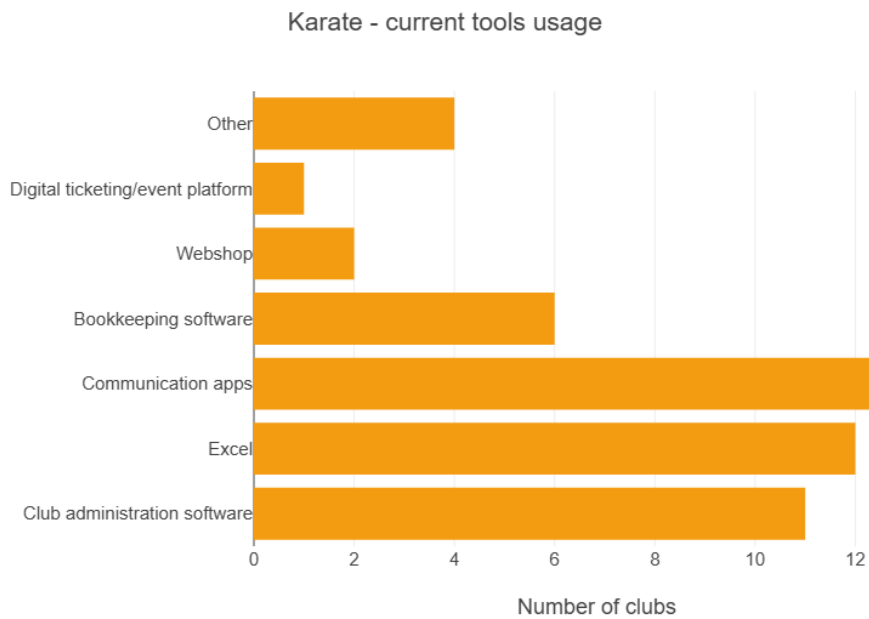


Figure 16. Current tool usage in club management, karate

Figure 16 shows which tools karate clubs use. For karate clubs, communication apps are most used, which differs from the general trend where club software is the most common (Figure 5).

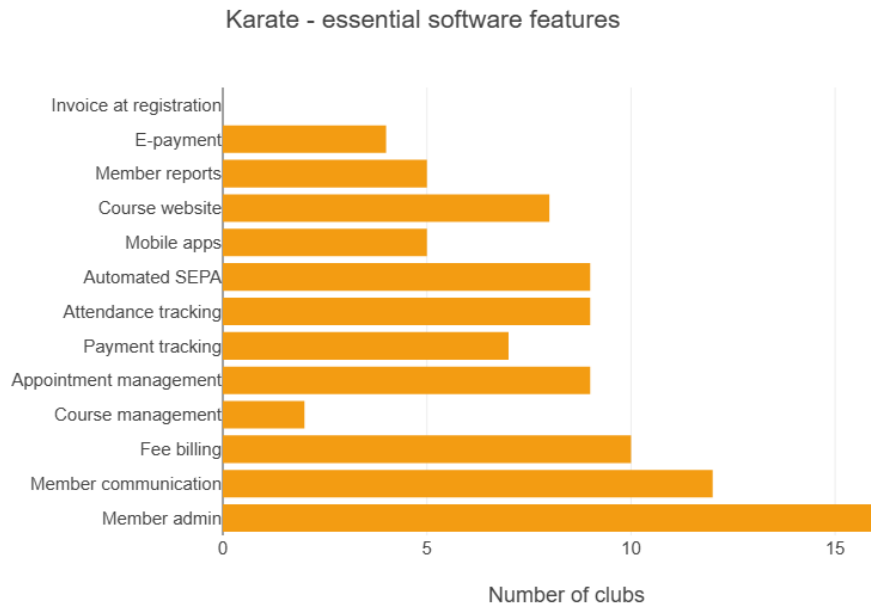


Figure 17. Necessary software features, karate.

Figure 17 presents the features karate respondents consider necessary. For karate, the most necessary features are member administration and member communication. This demand reflects the tool use shown in Figure 16: karate has a clear need for a club software that enables shifting away from Excel and WhatsApp.

4.5 Survey results – gymnastics (*Turnvereine*)

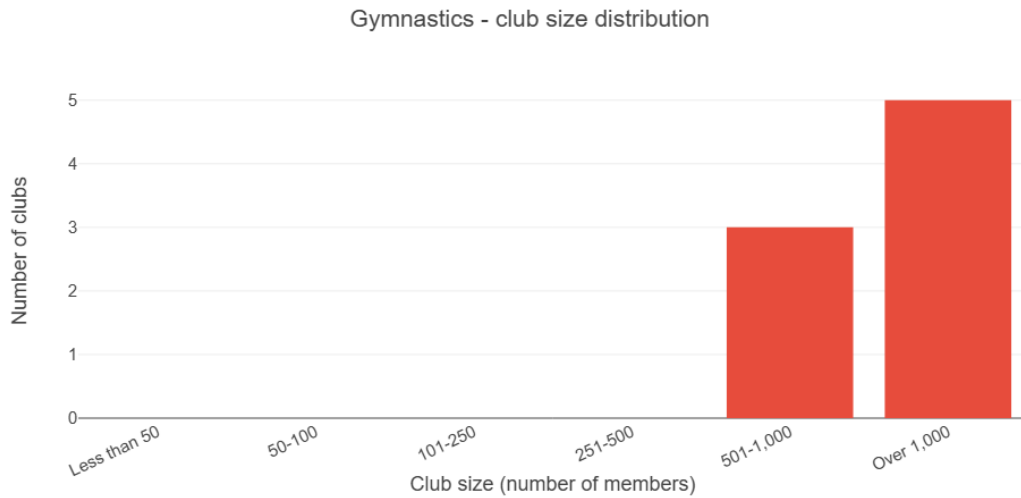


Figure 18. Club size distribution, gymnastics.

Figure 18 shows the club size distribution for gymnastics. Gymnastics responses focus strongly on larger clubs. In Germany, gymnastics clubs, or *Turnvereine*, are often traditional multi-sport clubs (*Mehrsportvereine*) instead of clubs purely for gymnastics (Pommerening 2018). All 8 respondents came from these clubs, where gymnastics is often a strong focus, but not the only sport. This dataset is therefore representative of a traditional German *Mehrsportverein*, not a gymnastics club. The category name is kept as gymnastics for consistency.



Figure 19. Weekly time investment in club work, gymnastics.

Figure 19 summarizes weekly time investment in gymnastics clubs. The distribution shows a spread from 0 to over 20 hours, further insights cannot be drawn due to the small sample size.

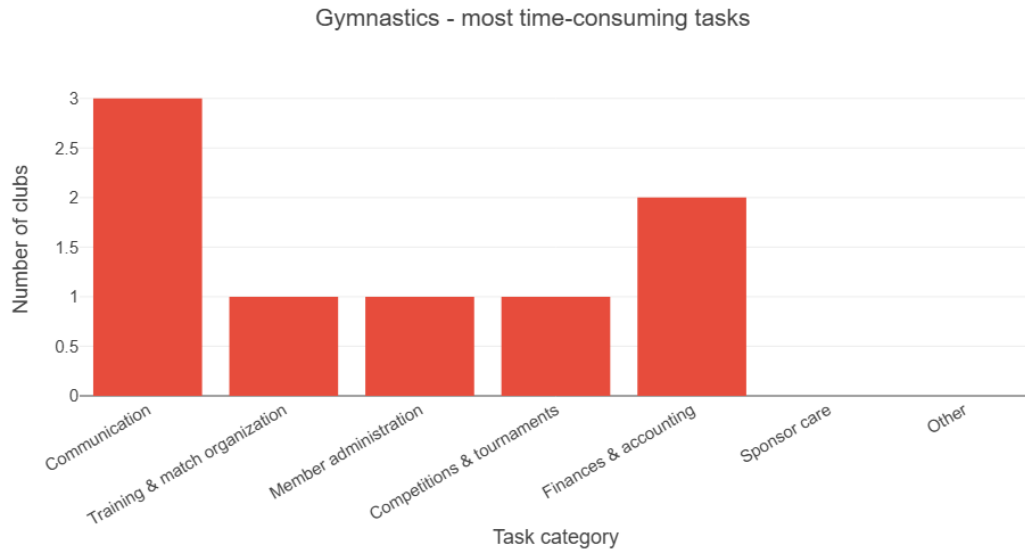


Figure 20. Most time-consuming management tasks in club work, gymnastics.

Figure 20 shows the most time-consuming tasks in gymnastics clubs. Communication again appears as a leading category: 3 out of 8 respondents selected communication as the top time-consuming task. The complex *Mehrsportverein* structure and the large club sizes may increase the need for communication.

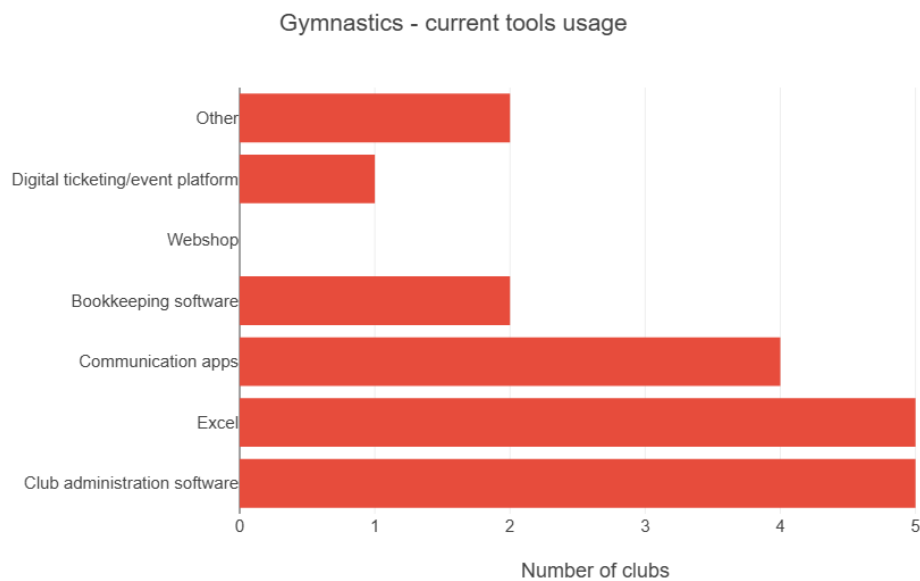


Figure 21. Current tool usage in club management, gymnastics

Figure 21 displays the tool use for gymnastics clubs. The pattern is similar to the earlier observations: club software, Excel, and WhatsApp are most commonly used, while other software is less common.

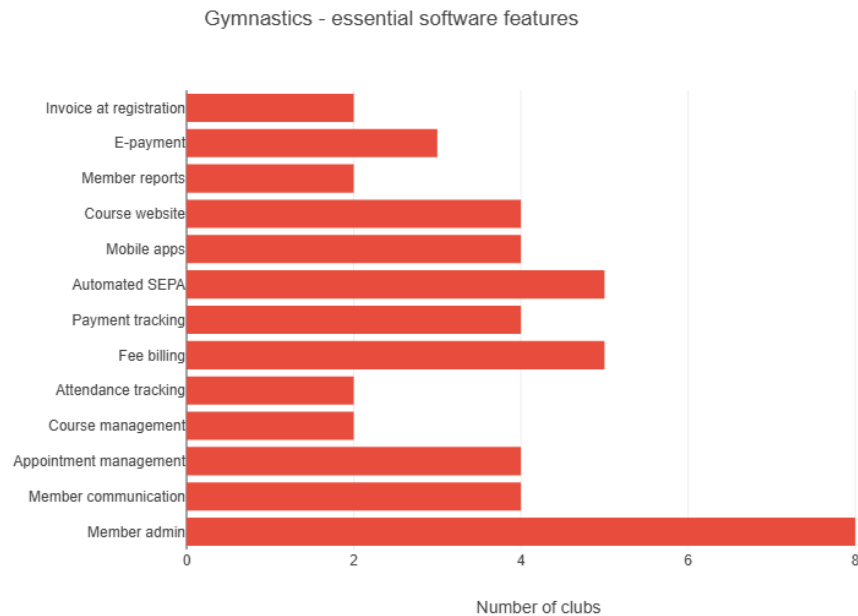


Figure 22. Necessary software features, gymnastics

Figure 22 shows feature demand in gymnastics clubs. Member administration stands out as a requested feature, with all clubs identifying a need for this. The complex multi-sport structure increases the need for well-functioning member management. Financial features are also commonly requested, reflecting the billing structure of a *Mehrsportverein* where members pay usually a basis fee and extra fees for each sport they take part in.

4.6 Survey results – cheerleading

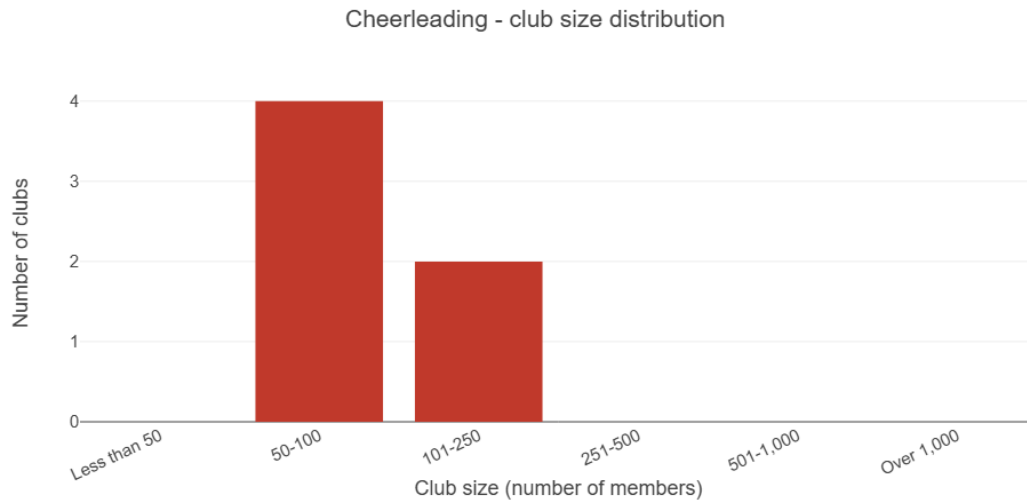


Figure 23. Club size distribution, cheerleading.

Figure 23 summarizes cheerleading club sizes. The sample suggests smaller-to-mid sized clubs, though the data is inconclusive because of the limited number of responses.

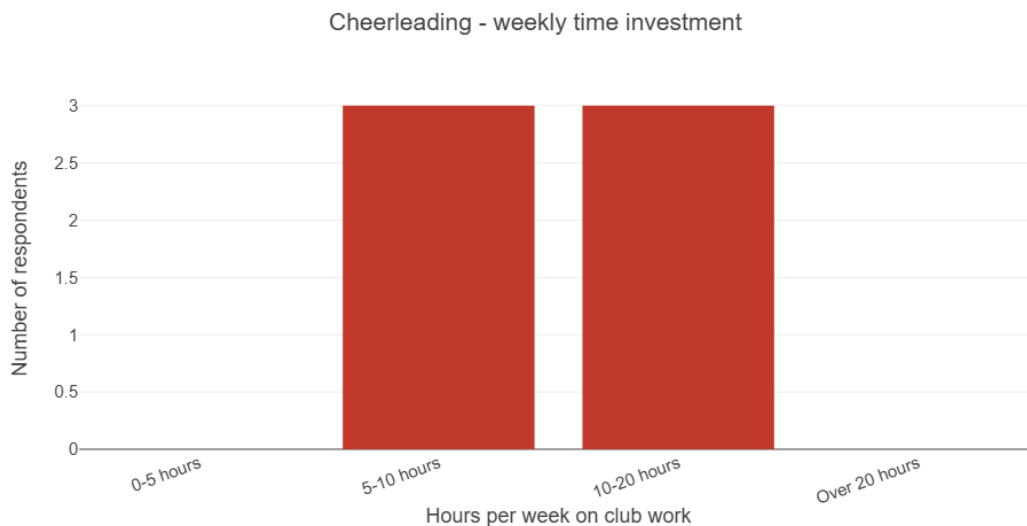


Figure 24. Weekly time investment in club work, cheerleading.

Figure 24 shows weekly time investment among cheerleading respondents. The data suggests that cheerleading clubs invest moderately (5-20 hours) in club work.

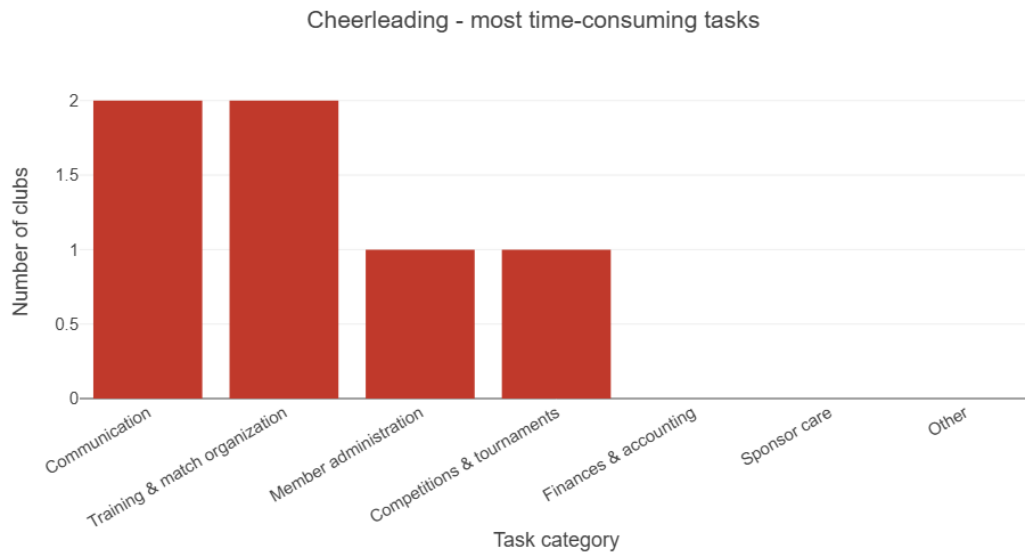


Figure 25. Most time-consuming management tasks in club work, cheerleading.

Figure 25 presents the most time-consuming tasks in cheerleading clubs. Most common answers (n=2) were communication and organizing trainings and matches.

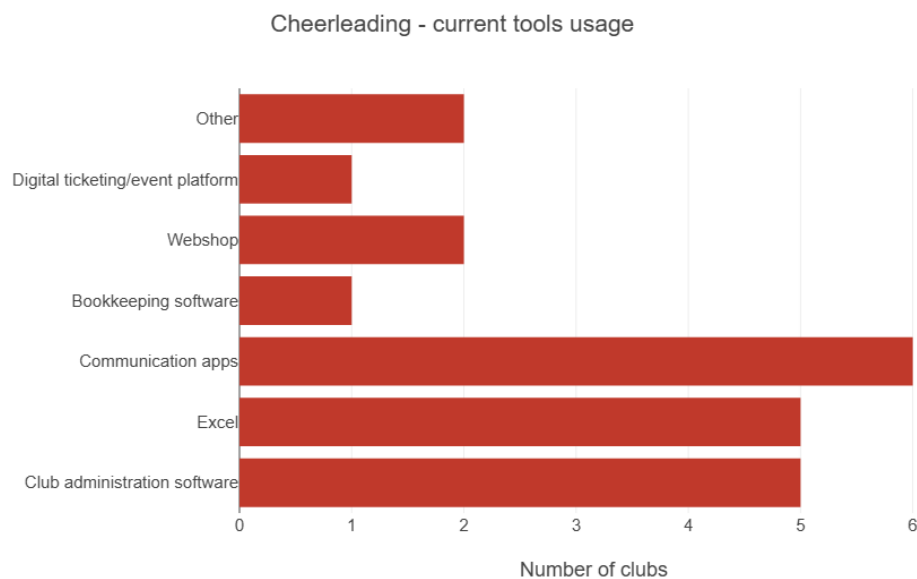


Figure 26. Current tool usage in club management, cheerleading.

Figure 26 shows tool usage in cheerleading clubs. Communication apps and spreadsheets are widely used alongside specialized club software, matching the repeated pattern seen across other sports. This indicates that “fast” tools for coordination remain important in practice, even when more formal systems are in place.

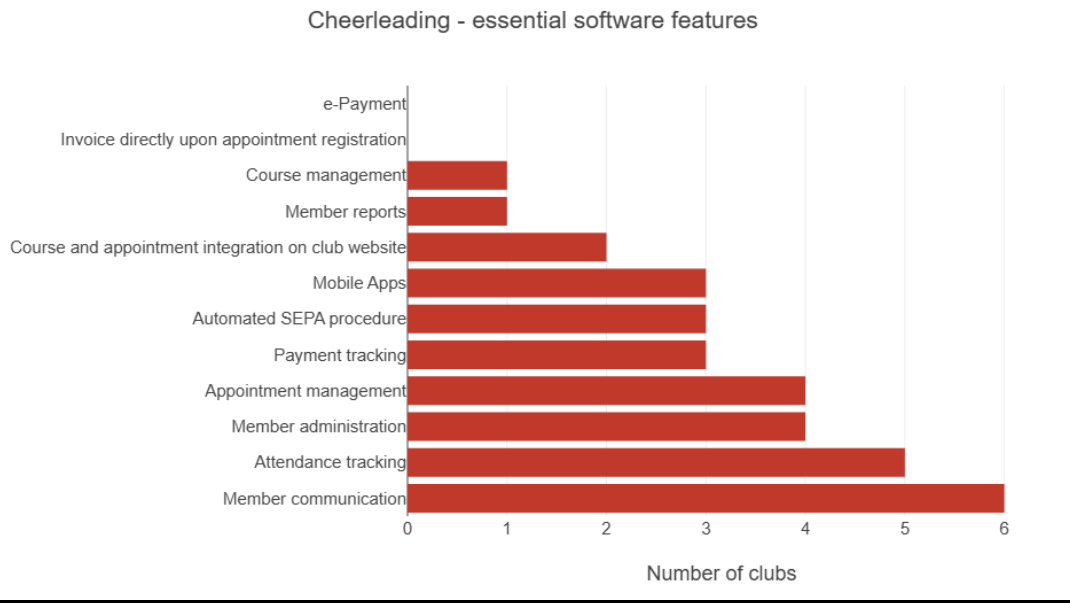


Figure 27. Necessary software features, cheerleading.

Figure 27 summarizes essential feature demand in cheerleading. Communication is the most important demand. Member administration, attendance tracking and appointment management are also important for cheerleading clubs.

4.7 Survey results – cross-sport comparison

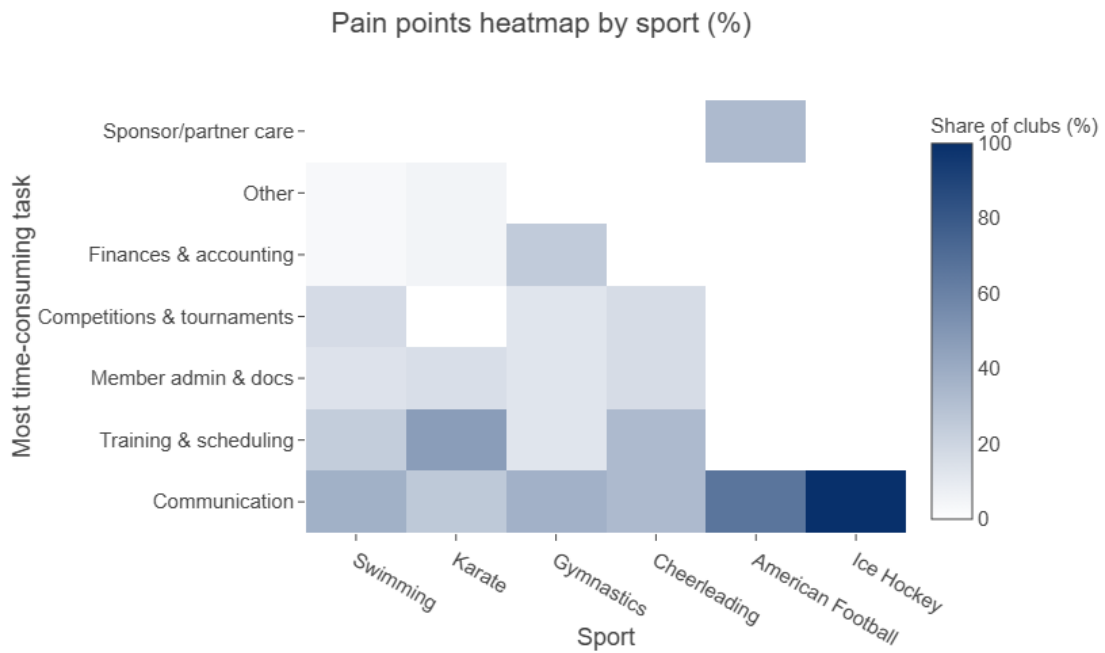


Figure 28. Most time-consuming tasks, heatmap.

Figure 28 compares the most time-consuming tasks across all sports. Communication appears consistently high across disciplines, ranking as the top choice for all clubs except karate. Organizing and scheduling training ranks high in karate, swimming and cheerleading. The multi-sport gymnastics clubs ranked finances high, which is expected, as the many different sports for a single member introduce a complex billing scheme.

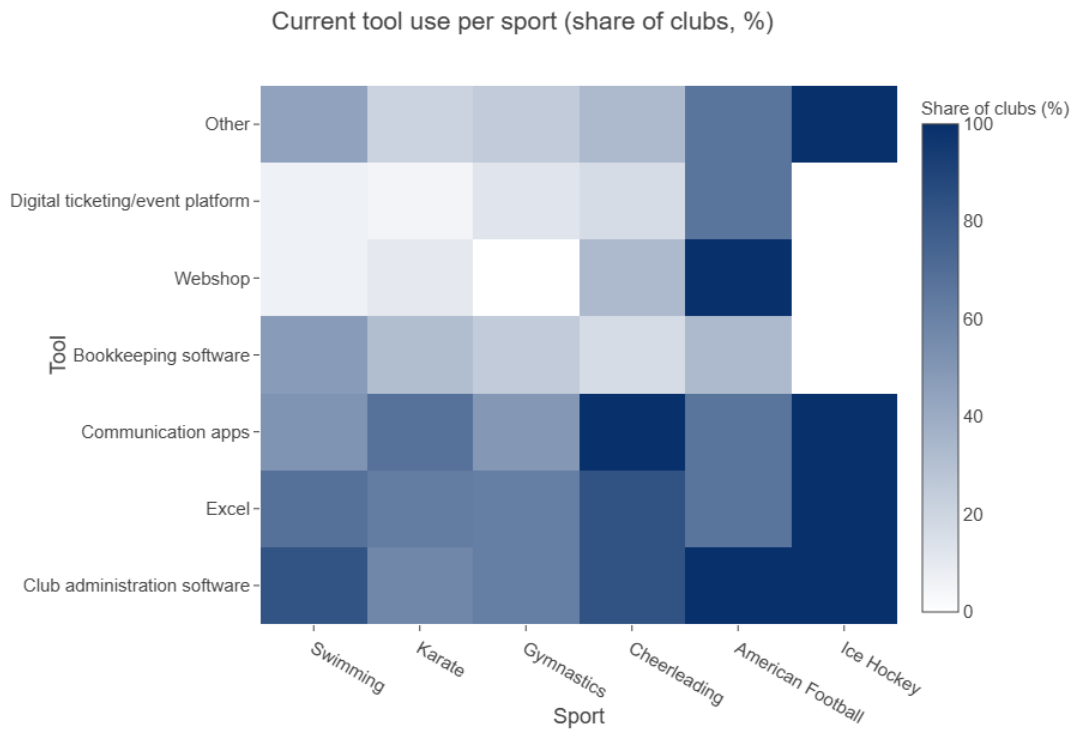


Figure 29. Current software use, heatmap.

Figure 29 compares the current tool use across sports. Club administration software is used widely in all sports, especially swimming and cheerleading. The other consistently high choices were communication apps and Excel use. Messaging app use is common especially in karate and cheerleading, which might indicate that smaller clubs handle their communication in WhatsApp, whereas bigger clubs rely more on emails and other communication channels. Excel use is highest in swimming and cheerleading.

Table 3. Average amount of tools used per sport.

Sport	Avg. tools in use
Swimming	3.1
Karate	2.57
Gymnastics (Turnen)	2.37
Cheerleading	3.66
American football	5
Ice hockey	4

Table 3 presents the average amount of tools in use for each sport. Software use is the least frequent in *Turnvereine*, which is a surprising result considering the large size of these clubs. Karate ranks the second lowest in the number of tools used. Disregarding the small sample sizes, cheerleading has the largest number of tools in use. Cheerleading, American football and ice hockey reported a higher use of sport-specific software, such as ArrangeUs (cheerleading), Huddle (American football) and My Ice Hockey (ice hockey).

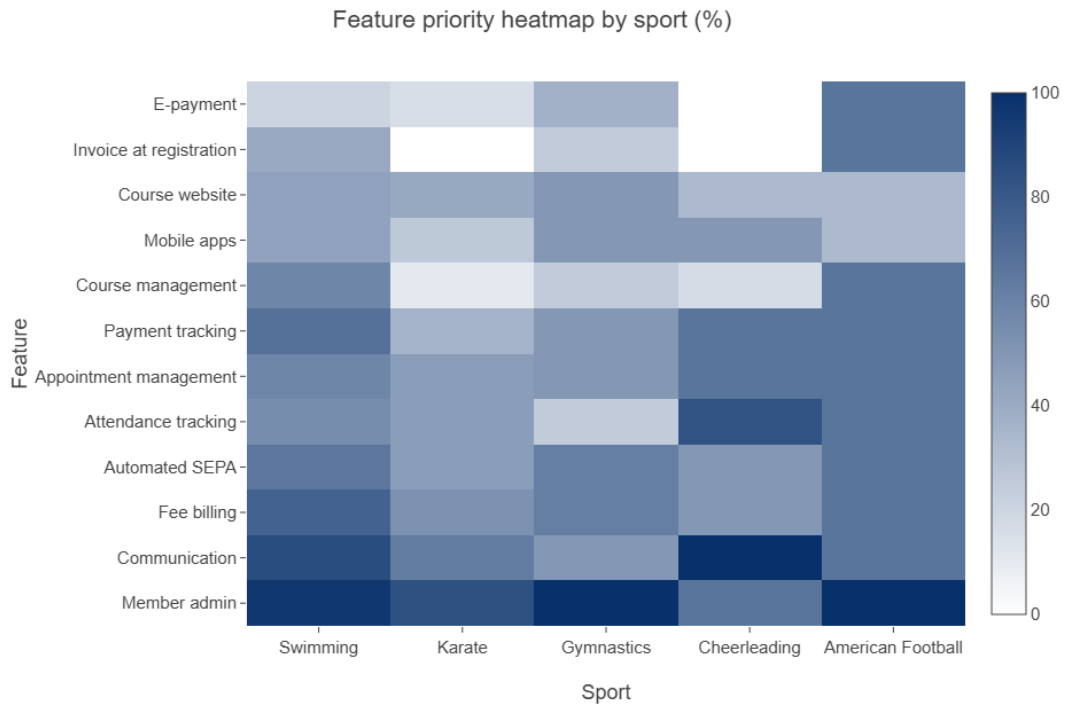


Figure 30. Software feature demand, heatmap.

Figure 30 compares feature demand across sports. The strongest and most consistent demand appears in member administration. Finance-related features are strongly requested by *Turnvereine* and swimming clubs, which makes sense, as clubs in these sports are the biggest and most complex. Communication is a necessary feature especially for swimming, karate and cheerleading.

4.8 Interviews

The interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of club pain points. This section presents these findings for each sport.

4.8.1 Swimming

Swimming clubs described a very high administrative load driven by courses, constant group changes, and time-intensive communication with parents. The sport's daily operations (many beginners/children, limited pool time, frequent absences, and required certifications) create a lot of coordination work that current tools don't handle well. Most clubs mentioned the following pain points and challenges:

- Tool fragmentation
 - Clubs use many tools (Excel/Word, member software, separate finance tools, WhatsApp, email, and event tools). These tools are not integrated, which causes double work, information loss, and a higher risk of human error.
- Manual course and group management
 - Waiting lists, assigning children to groups, frequent moves between levels, and tracking who is in which group (and why).
 - Changes and absences require quick replacements, but there is no live overview and no simple “move/drag & drop” workflow.
- Communication overload and lack of a structured channel
 - Parent communication and internal coordination run via email and WhatsApp/Signal, which is hard to track and sometimes rejected due to GDPR/privacy concerns.
 - No central platform with roles/permissions, task assignment, or shared documentation.
- Manual attendance tracking
 - Attendance is tracked via Excel or paper and is not mobile—yet it is important because absences should free up spots quickly.
- Inefficient payment and finance processes
 - Missing SEPA automation; a mix of cash and bank transfers; contribution collection partly manual; accounting often done in Excel or separate tools.
- No central tracking of swimmer development and staff qualifications
 - Missing digital tracking of children's progress (in Germany, progress is tracked via badges such as Seepferdchen, Bronze, Silver, etc.).
 - Missing tracking of trainer certificates and renewals.
- Reporting and statistics

- Clubs want member statistics, development reports, and outputs for internal management and association reporting (e.g., DSV), but data is difficult to extract.

Other challenges mentioned were the high workload of organizing competitions and events, a strong dependence on single key volunteers for maintaining lists and tracking progress, trainer scheduling difficulties, and scarce pool time that requires ongoing coordination and negotiation with other clubs.

4.8.2 Karate

Karate clubs described a high administrative burden caused by manual belt-exam management, fragmented communication, and weak integration with federation (DKV) processes. Daily operations often rely on a few volunteers. Many processes still run on paper or Excel, which makes growth difficult. Most clubs mentioned the following pain points and challenges:

- Tool fragmentation
 - Clubs use a mix of Excel/Word, paper forms, WhatsApp, external platforms (e.g., Sportdata), email, and custom-made tools. These tools are not integrated, which creates double work and information loss.
- Manual member administration and federation reporting (DKV)
 - Member data management and annual reporting are handled manually, often by the department head alone.
 - Missing exports or interfaces lead to duplicate data entry and extra work.
- Communication overload and lack of a structured channel
 - Communication runs through multiple WhatsApp groups, email, and social media, without a clear structure.
 - No central system for cancellations, updates, or transparent training/event information.
- Manual belt exam planning and tracking of student progress
 - Belt exams are coordinated via Excel/paper: invitations, eligibility, participant lists, and fees are time-consuming.
 - Clubs lack systematic tracking of training attendance and readiness for exams, even though attendance is often a prerequisite.
- No central event and course management
 - Training schedules, seminars, self-defense courses, internal events, and changes are managed inconsistently across channels, causing confusion.
- Manual payments for exams, equipment, and extras

- One-off payments (belt exams, belts, suits) are often handled via cash, transfers, or Excel-based tracking, creating unnecessary admin work.

Other challenges mentioned were the strong dependence on a few key volunteers (risk if they step back), limited budgets due to low membership fees and membership numbers (making software pricing critical), and sport-specific needs such as support for teaching content (e.g., kata videos, technique libraries).

4.8.3 Gymnastics (*Turnen*)

Turnen (gymnastics) clubs described a very high administrative load, caused by many courses/camps, complex coordination between trainers and participants, and fragmented systems. Even clubs with existing apps still face heavy manual work and unclear processes. Clubs mentioned the following pain points and challenges:

- Tool fragmentation
 - Clubs use several systems (e.g., Excel, banking/accounting tools, Teams/Signal, club apps, and separate course booking and member software). These tools are not integrated, causing double work, information breaks, and errors.
- Manual member administration and process breaks
 - Membership sign-up is not end-to-end: online forms exist, but data is still processed manually.
 - No reliable link between course participation and membership status, which can lead to unpaid participation.
- Communication overload and lack of a structured channel
 - Internal coordination is spread across email, Teams/Signal groups, and apps, with no single source of truth.
 - Email communication is inefficient (exports to Excel, manual sending), and there is little transparency in who knows what.
- Course/camp booking and waiting list management is inefficient (core sport-specific theme)
 - High effort to set up and manage holiday programs, camps, duplicates, and waiting lists.
 - Existing booking tools are perceived as hard to administer and not connected to member data.
- Trainer coordination and payment processes are time-consuming
 - Trainer accounting/expense payments require manual steps (often individual transfers), and substitution planning is unstructured.
- Payment and finance gaps

- Missing or limited e-payment options for camps/courses and manual payment follow-ups increase workload.

Other challenges mentioned were the dependence on external bookkeeping/tax advisors (slower processes and less overview) and, in one case, an extreme workload with signs of burnout due to unclear role division and constant availability expectations.

4.8.4 Cheerleading

Cheerleading clubs described a high administrative load from competition operations, many external registrations, and fragmented tools used by different people. Limited budgets and digital skills make management difficult. Clubs mentioned the following pain points and challenges:

- Tool fragmentation
 - Clubs use many tools in parallel (Excel/Sheets, Drive, GoodNotes, ArrangeUs, WhatsApp, email, and member software), with no single system. This scatters information and creates double work.
- Manual member administration and eligibility tracking
 - High effort for member data maintenance, age checks, and attendance tracking (relevant for insurance and competition eligibility).
 - Payment status, attendance, and communication are stored in different places, making oversight difficult.
- Communication overload and lack of a structured channel
 - Communication with athletes and parents runs across WhatsApp, other similar apps and email, without a central channel.
- Competition planning and registrations are highly manual (core sport-specific theme)
 - Competition preparation is time-consuming (music, choreography, coordination).
 - Registrations require repeatedly entering the same athlete data for multiple bodies (e.g., CCVD), with no export/transfer.
- Course and facility scheduling lacks transparency
 - No clear overview of hall usage, course distribution, and special dates; planning is decentralized and hard to coordinate.
- Payments and revenue processes are weak
 - E-payment/invoicing is not standardized, and payments can be irregular; clubs also mentioned limited resources (low fees, lack of sponsors) and the need to actively apply for funding.

Other challenges mentioned were practical logistics that are specific to cheerleading such as mat logistics and difficulty switching halls due to specialized equipment.

4.8.5 American Football

The American football club described a very high administrative load in game-day operations, complex scheduling across age groups, and communication pressure concentrated on a few key volunteers. The match-day requirements (many roles, logistics for opponents, tight timelines) make coordination and task management a central challenge. Key pain points and challenges mentioned were:

- Tool fragmentation
 - Clubs use many separate tools (club software, SpielerPlus, Huddle, Excel, Eventim, WhatsApp), with no integration. This creates double work, scattered information, and a lack of overall visibility.
- Communication overload and lack of a structured channel
 - Parents, members, and coaches often contact club leadership directly, creating constant interruptions and bottlenecks.
- Manual scheduling and coordination complexity
 - Training and match scheduling overlaps (e.g., U16 and U20 teams play on the same day) are managed manually in Excel, increasing the risk of errors.
- Game-day planning is highly demanding
 - Organizing game days requires detailed planning, staffing, and logistics for the guest team. Tasks are manual and time intensive.
- Volunteer overload and lack of successors
 - The club relies on intensive weekly effort from volunteers, with too few people available to share responsibilities.

Other challenges mentioned were the high cost and effort of integrating video analysis tools (Huddle) into daily coaching workflows, and limited practical support or integration options from the federation for licensed tools.

4.8.6 Ice Hockey

The ice hockey club described a high administrative load driven by ice-time scarcity, player pass management, and constant coordination across teams, parents, and the federation/city. Because ice allocation is tied to player passes and capacity is limited, accurate data and fast communication become critical. Key pain points and challenges mentioned were:

- Tool fragmentation
 - Clubs use a mix of MyIceHockey, Excel, email, and WhatsApp, with no central platform. Information is scattered and processes are duplicated.
- Communication overload and lack of a structured channel
 - Communication between board, teams, parents, and associations is time-intensive, largely handled through email and WhatsApp without clear workflows.
- Manual player pass management
 - Player passes are essential for securing ice time, but pass administration is still manual and spread across systems, creating extra workload and risk of errors.
- Limited ice time and facility capacity
 - Clubs have too few ice slots and depend heavily on the city and federation. Allocation is strongly influenced by the number of registered player passes, increasing pressure to maintain up-to-date pass data.
- Manual tracking of member volunteer duties
 - Required volunteer hours/services are tracked and controlled manually, including reimbursement/penalty handling when duties are not fulfilled.
- Missing operational modules
 - No central solution for attendance tracking, training management, or video analysis; these tasks remain manual or unsystematic.

Other challenges mentioned were the lack of a structured web shop for merchandise sales and the seasonality of the sport (mainly October–April), which makes off-season planning and summer training coordination more difficult.

5 Analysis

Across all sports, the results show a clear pattern: volunteers spend the most time on coordination work rather than on sport itself. Survey results show that communication is the most time-consuming task overall (Figure 4, Figure 28). Interviews explain why: communication is spread across multiple channels, and many everyday processes, such as schedule changes, attendance updates, and member questions, are handled through WhatsApp messages or emails instead of structured channels.

Most common pain points across all clubs (universal themes)

- **Tool fragmentation**
Clubs typically combine club software, Excel and messaging apps instead of having processes fully in one system (Figure 5–6, Figure 29; interviews). This creates double work, inconsistent data, and reliance on individuals who own certain spreadsheets or channels. The average number of tools (Table 3) shows that fragmentation is common, not an exception.
- **Communication overload and lack of a structured channel**
WhatsApp and email remain dominant for day-to-day coordination, but information gets lost and responsibilities are unclear (Figure 4, Figure 28; interviews). Communication is unstructured, and clubs report a clear need for a communication channel (Figure 30).
- **Member administration as a core pressure point**
Member administration is the most consistently demanded feature across sports (Figure 7, Figure 30). In practice, clubs struggle with keeping member data clean, role-based access, and linking membership to actual participation (courses, teams, eligibility, etc.).
- **Scheduling and coordination work stays manual**
Training schedules, event dates, substitutions, and facility planning often require manual handling, especially when multiple groups or age categories overlap (Figure 4 and Figure 28; repeated in interviews).
- **Finance and payments cause high manual effort**
Many clubs describe missing automation (e.g., SEPA handling, one-off payments, reminders), and the surveys show strong demand for finance-related features in several sports (Figure 7 and Figure 30).

While the themes above are universal, each sport has its own challenges as well:

- Swimming: Heavy workload from managing courses and waiting lists, frequent group changes, and constant parent communication. Clubs also need to track badge progress and trainer certificates. Limited pool time increases pressure to keep data accurate.
- Karate: Main workload comes from organizing belt exams and tracking who is ready (attendance, eligibility, fees). DKV reporting is manual, and communication relies heavily on WhatsApp. Budgets are often tight.
- Gymnastics (*Turnen / Mehrsportvereine*): Many courses and camps create complexity. Booking systems and member management are often separate, causing double work and sometimes unpaid participation. Trainer payments and internal coordination take time.
- Cheerleading: Competition preparation and registrations to multiple organizations are very manual. Choreography/music coordination adds extra planning. Clubs use many tools and often struggle with irregular payments and limited funding.
- American football: Workload peaks around game days (many tasks, volunteers, and guest team logistics). Scheduling across age groups is complex. Video analysis tools add cost and integration issues.
- Ice hockey: Ice time is scarce, so player pass management becomes critical because it affects allocation. Clubs also track mandatory volunteer duties manually, and the seasonality makes planning harder. Communication remains time intensive.

Overall, the findings show that clubs do not need more tools – they need one tool to centralize administration. The main issue is that tasks and processes are split across Excel, messaging apps, and standalone systems, so clubs have to do a lot of manual work, often duplicate, to keep data and processes up to date. Club software like Clubway creates value by connecting the administration of members, events, finances, and communication into a structured, centralized and transparent system.

6 Sales strategy for Clubway

The results show that clubs do not lack digital tools. Instead, they struggle with fragmented workflows: core tasks are split across club software, spreadsheets, messaging apps, and finance or booking tools. This creates duplicate work, unclear responsibilities, and manual entries. Clubway's sales strategy should therefore focus on reducing the tools and connecting the main administration workflows (members, events, finances, and communications) into one system.

6.1 Core message across all sports: Not just “one more tool”

Tool fragmentation is the strongest cross-sport pain point and should be the focus of Clubway's market positioning. The central message could be:

When a club gets Clubway, they are not getting one more tool – they are getting many less.

The results support this angle: even clubs that already use club software still rely heavily on Excel and messaging apps (Figure 6). The sales narrative should consistently highlight that Clubway replaces the multiple tools (Excel, WhatsApp, separate finance and booking tools) with one connected workflow, reducing double work and the risk of human error.

6.2 Rethinking communication – The Challenger Sale

Survey results indicate a strong demand for communication features in club software. Communication is also the most time-consuming task across all responses. Clubway should answer this demand, but not by positioning itself as a messaging app, which it is not. Instead, communication should be reframed through a Challenger Sale approach. Challenger Sale is a consultative sales method where the seller teaches, reframes, and leads the customer toward a better understanding of the problem, rather than simply responding to the feature request (Dixon & Adamson 2013).

According to the results, clubs think that messaging is an essential part of the daily communication of clubs. Communication is also the most time-consuming task across all responses. The strategy is to change this common view and teach the customer that a lot of time can be saved by reducing messaging to a minimum. The core reframing is:

- Instant messaging (e.g., WhatsApp) is often **failed** communication, not successful communication.
- Most messages need to be sent only because information is missing, non-transparent, not updated automatically, or only known by one person.

- When schedules, responsibilities, attendance, payments, and updates are transparent, the need for constant messaging drops or disappears.

Clubway's communication promise should therefore be framed as structured transparency (automated notifications, automatic updates, comments under events, information available to members via self-service, etc.). In a transparent and automated system, messaging becomes the exception rather than the default.

6.3 Sports-specific sales angles

Tool fragmentation and difficult communication are universal, but each sport also has specific features that affect the sales strategy and provide strong entry points.

6.3.1 Swimming

Daily operations focus on courses, frequent group changes, and parent communication. The strongest sales entry points are:

- **Course and group management** (waiting lists, fast reassignment when children are cancelling, clear group overviews)
- **Progress and badge tracking** (Seepferdchen/Bronze/Silver etc.) and **trainer qualification tracking** (first aid, lifeguard)
- **Payments and finance automation** (SEPA and course payments to reduce cash, receipts, and manual follow-up)

6.3.2 Karate

Main challenges are belt exams, belt prerequisites, and federation reporting. Key entry points are:

- **Belt exam planning and exam history** (eligibility, invitations, participant lists, fees)
- **Attendance tracking linked to exam readiness**
- **DKV reporting/export** to reduce duplicate entry

6.3.3 Gymnastics (Turnen / Mehrsportvereine)

The main driver is course-heavy operations with process breaks between booking, membership, and payments. Key entry points are:

- **End-to-end onboarding** (online registration → member record → payment)

- **Linking course participation and membership status** to prevent unpaid participation
- **Trainer coordination and payouts** with clearer workflows

6.3.4 Cheerleading

Cheerleading is competition-driven and involves repeated registrations and eligibility checks across multiple organizations. Key entry points are:

- **Competition preparation workflows** (coordination, eligibility, attendance, age checks)
- **Reducing repeated data entry** for registrations (e.g., CCVD and other bodies)
- **Central planning for facilities and special dates**, reducing last-minute chaos

6.3.5 American football

American football has a game-day peak workload and high complexity across roles and age groups. Key entry points are:

- **Game-day planning** (task lists, role assignments, checklists, guest team logistics)
- **Conflict-aware scheduling** across teams
- **Payment follow-up** for SEPA returns and reducing volunteer admin load

6.3.6 Ice hockey

Ice hockey administration is shaped by ice-time scarcity and pass-based allocation logic. Key entry points are:

- **Player pass management** as a lever for ice-time allocation
- **Central coordination** across board/teams/parents to reduce communication overhead
- **Volunteer duty tracking** with transparency and fewer manual controls

7 Conclusion

This thesis studied management digitalization in German sports clubs and identified the main pain points based on 66 survey responses and 21 interviews across six sports.

The results show two clear patterns: communication takes the most time, and processes are fragmented across too many tools. Communication is time-consuming mainly because information is spread across many channels and systems. Most clubs use a combination of club software, Excel, and WhatsApp/email, which leads to double work, outdated data, and dependence on a few key people. Even clubs that already have “club software” still rely heavily on Excel and messaging apps, meaning that software often adds another layer instead of simplifying processes.

Across sports, the strongest needs are member administration, communication, and payments/finances. At the same time, each sport has its own drivers: swimming is course-heavy and needs progress tracking; karate needs to control belt exams and DKV reporting; *Turnvereine* manage many courses and complex billing; cheerleading is competition-heavy; American football peaks around game days; and ice hockey depends strongly on player passes and ice-time allocation.

For Clubway, the main sales implication is that the strongest value is reducing tool fragmentation. Clubway should be positioned as an all-in-one system that replaces several tools by connecting member data, scheduling, attendance, and payments. Communication should be sold as transparency and automation, not as more chat: when information is available and updated in one place, the need for constant messaging drops. The need for messaging is a signal of failed communication.

Overall, clubs do not need more tools. They need fewer tools, better-connected workflows, and simple automation that reduces manual work for volunteers. This way, clubs can focus more on the thing that matters – sport.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Typeform questionnaire

1 → Welche Sportart wird in Ihrem Verein betrieben bzw. sind Sie aktiv beteiligt?*

Bitte nur eine Option auswählen. Falls Ihr Verein mehrere Sportarten anbietet, wählen Sie diejenige aus, mit der Sie sich am besten auskennen oder am meisten zu tun haben.

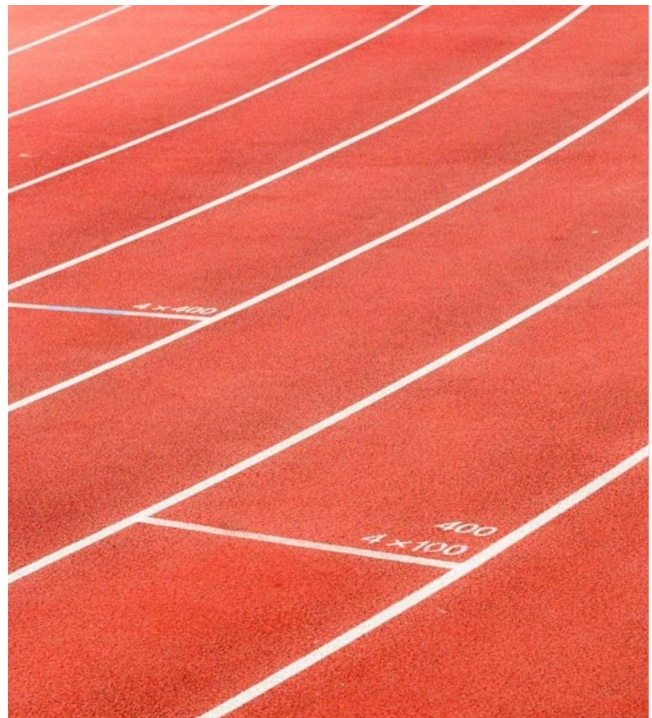
- A Eishockey
- B American Football
- C Cheerleading
- D Schwimmen
- E Turnen
- F Karate

[Add choice](#)

2 → Wie heißt Ihr Verein? *


zum Beispiel "TV Musterstadt", "Karateschule XY", "TSV Beispielvein"

[Gib hier deine Antwort ein ...](#)



3 → Wie viele Mitglieder hat Ihr Verein?*

Description (optional)

- A Weniger als 50
- B 50-100  
- C 101-250
- D 251-500
- E 501-1.000
- F Über 1.000

[Add choice](#)

4 → Wie finanziert sich Ihr Verein hauptsächlich?*

Hier können Sie mehrere auswählen.

- A Mitgliedsbeiträge
- B Sponsoren
- C Ticketverkäufe
- D Merchandising/Shop-Verkäufe
- E Kurs- und Trainingsgebühren
- F Öffentliche Fördermittel
- G Sonstiges

[Add choice](#)

5 → Welche Rolle/n haben Sie im Verein?*

Description (optional)

- A Vorstandsmitglied
- B Trainer/in
- C Vereinsmitglied
- D Ehrenamtliche/r Helfer/in
- E Verwaltungs-/Abteilungsmitarbeiter/in
- F Sonstiges

[Add choice](#)

6 → Wie viele Stunden pro Woche investieren Sie in Vereinsarbeit?*

Dazu zählen Training, Vorbereitung und administrative Aufgaben.

- A 0-5 Stunden
- B 5-10 Stunden
- C 10-20 Stunden
- D Über 20 Stunden

[Add choice](#)



7 → Welche Ihrer Aufgaben nehmen die meiste Zeit in Anspruch?*

Wähle den zeitintensivsten Bereich aus.

- A Organisation von Trainings & Spielplänen
- B Kommunikation mit Mitgliedern, Eltern oder Trainern
- C Verwaltung von Finanzen & Rechnungen
- D Sponsoren- und Partnerpflege
- E Mitgliederverwaltung & Dokumentation
- F Wettkampf- & Turnierorganisation
- G Sonstiges

[Add choice](#)

8 → Welche digitalen Tools nutzt Ihr Verein derzeit?*

Description (optional)

- A Excel
- B Vereinsverwaltungssoftware
- C Digitale Ticketing-/Eventplattform
- D Apps Mitgliederkommunikation (WhatsApp)
- E Buchhaltungssoftware (z. B. Lexware, sevDesk, Datev etc.)
- F Webshop
- G Sonstiges

[Add choice](#)

9 → Wenn es eine Software speziell für Ihre vorher ausgewählte Sportart gäbe – welche Funktionen müsste sie unbedingt enthalten?

Was sollte diese Software konkret übernehmen oder erleichtern, damit sie Ihren Vereinsalltag spürbar unterstützt?

Gib hier deine Antwort ein ...

Um einen Absatz einzufügen, drücke **Shift** + **Enter**

10 → Welche der folgenden Funktionen sind für Ihren Verein besonders wichtig in einer Vereinssoftware ? *

Description (optional)

- A Mitgliederverwaltung
- B Mitgliederberichte
- C Kursverwaltung
- D Kurs- und Termineinbettung in die Vereinswebsite
- E Terminverwaltung
- F Rechnungsstellung direkt bei Terminanmeldungen
- G Anwesenheitskontrolle
- H Mitgliederkommunikation
- I Zahlungsverfolgung
- J Beitragsabrechnung
- K Automatisiertes SEPA-Verfahren

11 → **Benötigt Ihr Verein eine automatisierte Verbindung zu den folgenden Plattformen?**

Wählen Sie die benötigten aus.

[Add column](#)

	Ja
Deutsche Karate Verband (DKV) Datenbank	<input type="radio"/>
Sportdata	<input type="radio"/>
AFVD (American Football Verband Deutschland)	<input type="radio"/>
Spielbetriebssysteme wie Ligamanager.de oder TeamZone	<input type="radio"/>
DAFVD Lizenzdatenbank	<input type="radio"/>
DEB (Deutscher Eishockey-Bund)	<input type="radio"/>
DTB (Deutscher Turner-Bund)	<input type="radio"/>

12 → **Gibt es noch etwas, das Sie mir gerne mitgeben möchten?**

Zum Beispiel besondere Herausforderungen in Ihrem Vereinsalltag, Erfahrungen mit digitalen Tools oder Wünsche an zukünftige Softwarelösungen.

Gib hier deine Antwort ein ...

Um einen Absatz einzufügen, drücke **Shift** + **Enter**