



2020 | MIND THE GAP

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ROLES, COMPETENCIES & QUALITY MEASURES

An abstract graphic in the background of the lower half of the page. It features a dark blue curved line at the bottom left, several grey circles of varying sizes, and a network of grey arrows pointing in various directions, suggesting a process or flow.

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1. INTRODUCTION & AIMS

High-quality holistic support can provide professional players with health-related benefits, developmental benefits, social benefits, enhanced future employment prospects and benefits related to the adaptation to life after sport (EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes, 2012). Contrary, a lack of adequate holistic support might lead to professional players, among others, having self-identity issues, experiencing transition difficulties and mental health issues, and dropping out from elite sports (Wylleman & Reints, 2010). As such, Hong and Coffee (2018) and Defruyt et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of competent and tailor-made support services. FIFPro and its partner organisations therefore aim at constantly improving their holistic support to (semi-)professional players, provided by Player Development Managers (PDMs).

The main aim of this report is to provide evidence-based input to enhance the further development of the PDMs across Europe. More specifically, the objectives of this research report are to propose a framework for:

- 1 PDM's generic, basic and desirable roles
- 2 PDM's generic, basic and desirable competencies

The main objective of these frameworks is to further optimize the quality of Player Development Programmes (PDPs). More specifically, through this document, the goals are to:

- Support the process of recruitment, selection, development, and evaluation of PDMs
- Provide direction and inspiration regarding PDPs
- Create consistency between different PDPs
- Enhance the evidence-based practice of PDPs

2. NOTE

The proposed framework should be interpreted as guiding/aiding document that outlines 'best practice' for a PDM function. It is been acknowledged that every national and organizational context is different (e.g. resources, experience, players' expectations, etc.), and thus the role of the PDM may need to be adapted to suit the environment that they are working in. Furthermore, the proposed frameworks are general guidelines that may be implemented at an organisational level. Recognizing that external and internal factors (e.g. resources, experience, player's expectations, national context, etc.) may influence an organisation and its application of certain frameworks, it is not expected a PDM of one specific organisation to fulfil all roles and competencies detailed in this framework. Additionally, a lot of competencies highlighted throughout the framework can be developed by training.



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3. METHOD

The development of the frameworks consisted of a multi-stage process:

- 1 In the context of Work Package 1 (WP1) of the Mind the Gap project, 15 semi-structured interviews with representatives of the project partners and with external experts were conducted. Based on the information gathered through these interviews, a first overview of important roles and competencies was provided.
- 2 Consequently, a focus group with 4 player development experts was conducted. Using the WP1 research report of the project as a basis, the focus group discussion led to a first version of the role- and competency framework.
- 3 Finally, using a Delphi-method with multiple reviews of the expert partners involved in the project, the framework was adapted and finalized.

4. ROLE AND COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

4.1 KEY FOCUS AREAS

Seven key focus areas in providing holistic support to (semi-)professional players were identified during the focus group. These areas are schematically presented in the house metaphor in Figure 1 and will be defined below.

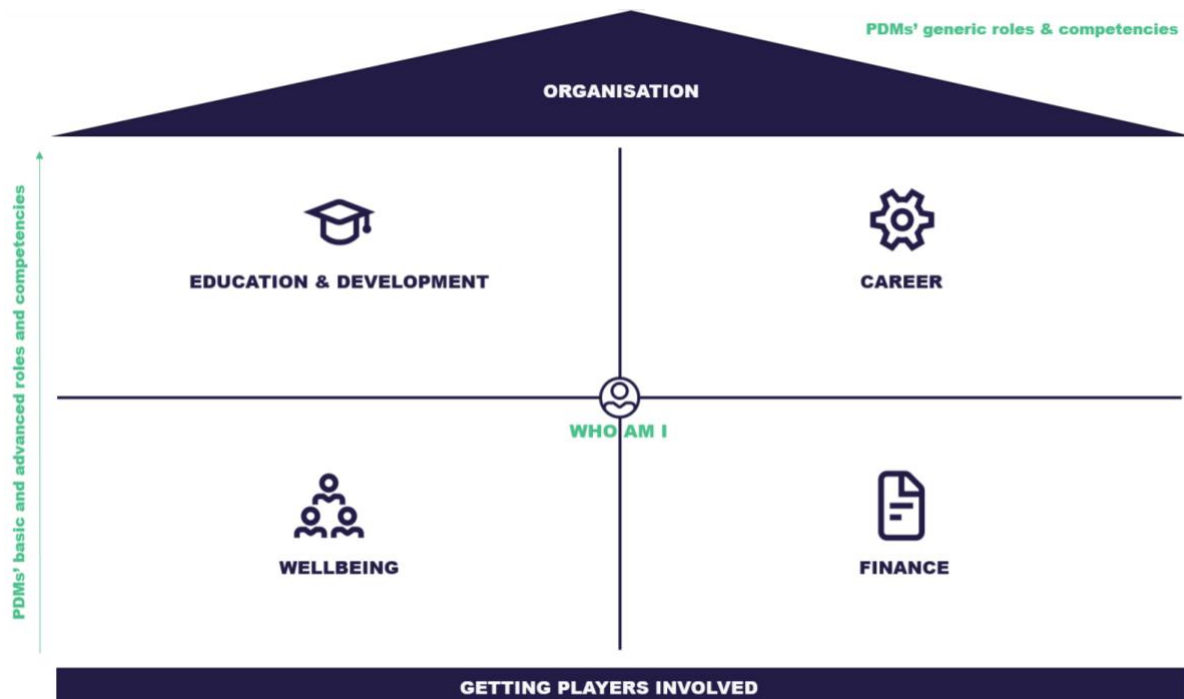


Figure 1. Key areas of focus of a PDM (Mind the Gap Transnational Steering Group, 2019)



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Referring to the house metaphor, the first key area 'getting players involved' is the foundation of the house:

- **Getting players involved:** In order to be able to provide adequate support, the first step is naturally to involve players proactively. Only when you get players on board, the support providing process can be initiated. A needs analysis can help to understand where players currently stand and what type of support is required.

The second key area, the living room of the house, concerns the 'WHO AM I?' pillar:

- **'WHO AM I?':** in this area, PDMs help players understand who they are by understanding their skills and competences. As well as figuring out their future aspirations and the gap in between.

The core of a PDM's provided support concerns four pillars on which the house is built, namely 'Education & Development', 'Career', 'Wellbeing', and 'Finance':

- **Education & Development:** educational support encompasses education in a broad sense and, as such is not limited to providing formal academic opportunities, but also non-formal educational options, vocational education, or coaching qualifications. The development part encompasses supporting players in developing personal competencies in life domains different than football (i.e. life skills).
- **Career:** players should be encouraged to properly prepare and/or plan their post-athletic career and/or be supported in case they want to pursue a dual career pathway (football and employment/education). It includes industry exploration (i.e. knowing what is out there), the assessment of individual preferences, and job readiness (e.g., job requirements, work experience, networking, mentoring).
- **Wellbeing:** players do not only face challenging situations in their sport, they can also face challenges of the field of play e.g., relationships, mental health issues, finances. These challenges can occur on entry to, during and after their professional football career. In order to cope with these challenges, players could benefit from both proactive (e.g. competency training, stigma-reducing workshops) and reactive (emotional support in the face of setbacks) initiatives.
- **Finance:** as the financial circumstances of professional players are quite specific, PDMs should signpost players to people who can offer appropriate advice that takes into account the unique earning curves of professional players. Throughout their footballing careers, players should be encouraged to become financially literate.

The roof of the house represents the key area 'organisation':

- **Organisation:** the organisational aspects necessary to make sure that the pillars can remain valuable. The organizational level encompasses, amongst others, internal and external cooperation, legal awareness and obligations, self-development as a PDM, marketing and resources aspects.

4.2 PDMS GENERIC ROLES & COMPETENCIES

GENERIC ROLES

GUIDING AND SUPPORTING PLAYERS	Analysing a player's need for support by identifying gaps in personal development.
	Encourage and enhance a player's self-reflection.
	Inform players about developmental opportunities (e.g. life-skill development, financial skills development, workshops, etc.).
	Explore a player's external opportunities in different areas of development (e.g. self-awareness, education and development, finance, career, wellbeing).
	Empower players to make their own responsible choices concerning different domains of development.
	Generate support-specific data (e.g. contact times, progress, etc.) via (online) data collection methods.
CREATING A FACILITATING ENVIRONMENT IN GUIDING AND SUPPORTING PLAYERS	Building effective and meaningful relationships with individuals, groups and/or communities.
	Develop and provide training and material (e.g. workshops, distance learning, online courses, information session, events, etc.) based on general identified gaps.

Table 1. A PDM's generic roles

In order to support players, PDMs should focus on trying to perform a set of generic roles which can be applied to every level of the metaphorical house. The possession of some generic competencies (i.e. knowledge, skills, attitudes and experience) may help PDMs in fulfilling those roles formulated in Table 1.



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GENERIC COMPETENCIES

KNOWLEDGE	Understanding of a high-performance/sport/football environment
	Understanding of the possible difficulties in combining personal development outside of sport with professional sport
SKILLS	Communication skills (e.g., reflective listening, interacting in a professional and confidential way, having constructive conversations)
	The ability to reflect on the delivered guidance and to adapt the approach if needed
	Coaching skills
	The ability to know your own boundaries
	The ability to educate or signpost players to providers who can educate players in different areas of development (i.e., self-awareness, education & development, finance, career, wellbeing)
	Motivating and encouraging skills
	The ability to enhance players' personal skills (e.g. time management, self-development, etc.)
	The ability to refer players appropriately if additional help is necessary
	The ability to build relationships/networks and maintain them
	ATTITUDES
Open Minded	
Empathy	
Sensitivity	
Confidential	

Table 2. A PDM's required generic competencies

4.3 PDMS AREA-SPECIFIC ROLES & COMPETENCIES

Apart from generic roles, there might be area specific roles that a PDMS should try to perform. The competences that may help PDMs in fulfilling those roles might be different from the general competences. Therefore, per area specific role a list of competences is created following the below framework.

<p style="text-align: center;">CORE ROLES</p> <p>The essential roles that should be covered by a PDM.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">OPTIONAL ROLES</p> <p>The roles that, depending on the specific context (e.g., resources, national regulations), could be an added value in guiding/supporting (semi-) professional players.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">CORE COMPETENCIES</p> <p>The skills, knowledge, attitudes and experience helping PDMs to execute the basic roles in a proper way.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">OPTIONAL COMPETENCIES</p> <p>The skills, knowledge, attitudes and experience helping PDMs to execute the optional roles.</p>

Table 1. Structure of area-specific role- and competency frameworks



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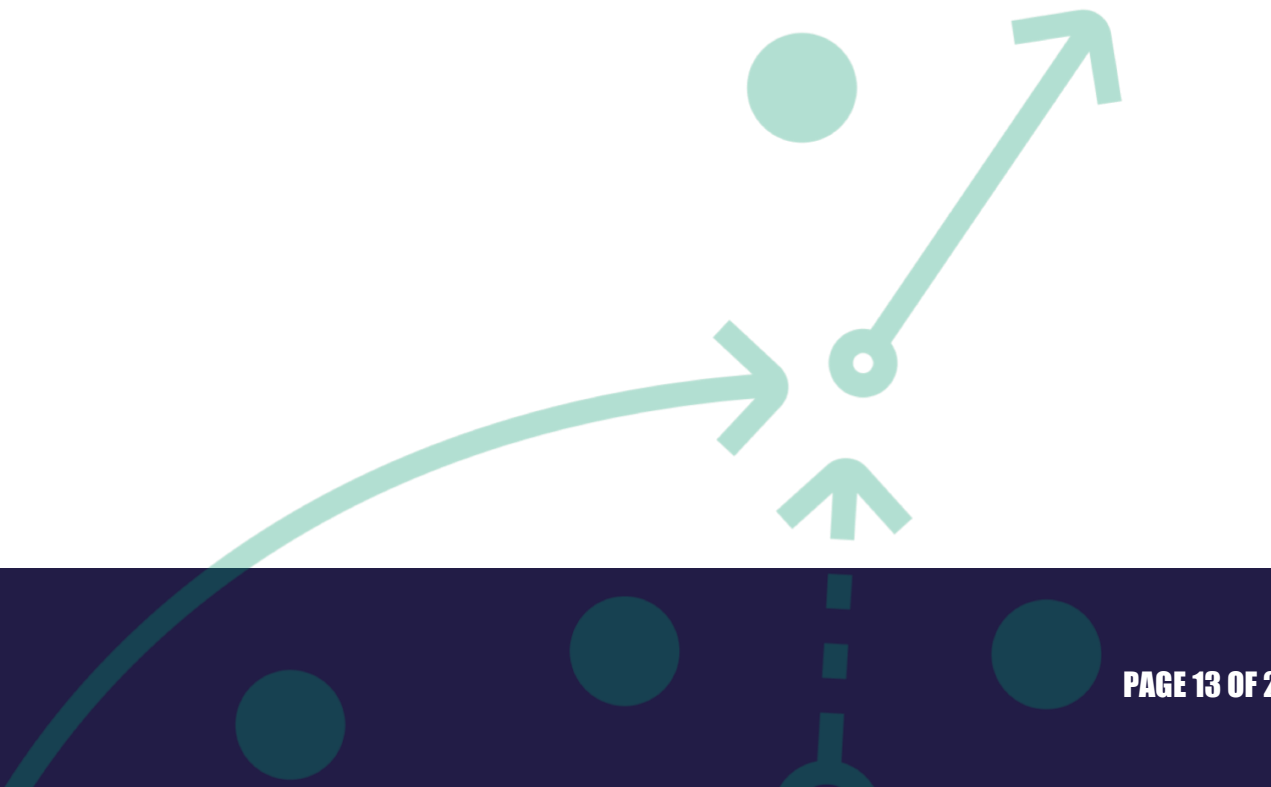


4.4 THE FOUNDATION: GETTING PLAYERS INVOLVED

ROLES	
CORE	OPTIONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an awareness among players about the importance of personal development to life outside of football. • Inform players about the career support provided by the players' association via conducting club visits, locker room visits, group presentations and one-to-one meetings. • Update communication channels with adequate information, upcoming events and workshops (e.g. social media, website). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-to-one meetings with players concerning their personal development. • Embedding personal development in the club activities.

COMPETENCIES	
CORE	OPTIONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to speak to a group. • The ability to give presentations. • The ability to work independently. • The ability to adapt to different situations. • The ability to inspire and persuade. • Enthusiast and positive attitude. • Approachable and accessible attitude. • Open-minded. • Understanding of online applications and social media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to set up constructive meetings with players' entourage and club staff.

Table 2. PDM's roles and required competencies within the 'Getting players involved area'



4.5 THE LIVING ROOM: WHO AM I?

ROLES	
CORE	OPTIONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a career development plan with players (e.g., players’ experiences, skills, knowledge, goals, motivations, challenges, interests and personality). • Gaining insights in what areas players want/need support. • Manage expectations of support. • Review and summarize discussions and plans. • Refer to other support if necessary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of psychometric tools. • In-depth coaching sessions to bring a player to an increased self-awareness and to enhance his/her self-development.

COMPETENCIES	
CORE	OPTIONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question and encourage reflection • Encourage players to speak and elaborate • Recap and summarize what players want 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced assessment skills (e.g. psychometric skills, statistical skills)

Table 3. PDM's roles and required competencies in the 'WHO AM I' area



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4.6 PILLAR 1: EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT

ROLES	
CORE	OPTIONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research professional players' educational options (incl. formal, non-formal, academic, vocational, coaching qualifications). • Assess the time availability and ability to pursue education with the player. • Assess how flexible a course/education programme might be. • Inform players of what is possible (in general terms). • Build relationships with educational institutions to explore flexible options. • Encourage players to develop personal skills such as self-management, time-management, etc. • Signpost players to personal development skill training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up with players if additional learning is necessary. • Enable access to study skills groups and training. • Provide financial and other support that enables players to pursue education. • Provide information to signpost players to funding agencies. • Provide training and education (e.g. workshops, online courses, distance learning). • Provide training and material on personal skill development.
COMPETENCIES	
CORE	OPTIONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the educational systems/frameworks. • Ability to empower the player to reflect realistically on his/her options. • Advocacy and cooperation skills to build networks and advocate flexibilities for players. • Having realistic expectations with regard to flexibilities and cooperation. • Awareness of which programmes could be challenging in combining sport and education. • Ability to motivate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to maintain relationships with other educational support providers to follow-up players closely (e.g., regular meetings with the student counsellor of the university). • Language skills.

Table 4. PDM's roles and required competencies in the 'Education & Development' area

4.7 PILLAR 2: CAREER

ROLES	
CORE	OPTIONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help players to research dual career/post football career options based on their career development plan (see “Who Am I”) • Support players in investigating opportunities, developing a plan and taking preparatory steps. • Educate players in vocational opportunities, if appropriate (and break down false expectations). • Support players in improving qualifications/job training. • Support with CV, job applications, job interviews, LinkedIn, etc. • Signpost to employment support professionals if necessary. • Build a network with companies/employers to offer work experience opportunities to players. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research for flexible options for job training. • Arranging work experiences and internships. • Encourage players to do job training. • Provide support in entrepreneurship. •

COMPETENCIES	
CORE	OPTIONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of the labour market, business areas and career paths. • Understanding of the current job market situation. • Spot gaps between job expectations, competence and job preferences. • Help players to understand the impact of certain competencies they mention on a C.V. • Help players to sell themselves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of job providers, employers and employment agencies. • Ability to promote the employment of active and former (semi-)professional players, help business partners to see what is in it for them to employ or provide internship opportunities for players. • Business-minded.

Table 5. PDM's roles and required competencies in the 'Career' area



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4.8 PILLAR 3: WELLBEING

ROLES	
CORE	OPTIONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase players' awareness of the importance of wellbeing (physical, mental, emotional). • Inform players about options to monitor or improve wellbeing (e.g., workshops, videos, career counselling). • Awareness of the player's current situation (e.g. injury). • Recognize possible signs of wellbeing problems. • Signpost players to appropriate persons in mental health network or encourage players to seek further help if needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide material or workshops on wellbeing (e.g., addiction, relationships, injury, resilience, nutrition, sleep, rest and recovery, etc.). • Support and show empathy to players going through a mental health problem. • Build a cooperation network with mental health professionals (e.g. counsellors, therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, faith-based practitioners, etc.).
COMPETENCIES	
CORE	OPTIONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to show empathy. • Ability to build a trust-based relationship with players. • Ability to adapt your language and approach. • Awareness of the possible stressors and transitions of players. • Ability to notice possible signs of mental health issues. • Knowledge of the different avenues for mental health referrals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to mentally prepare players for a specific transition.

Table 6. PDM's roles and required competencies in the 'Wellbeing' area

4.9 PILLAR 4: FINANCE

ROLES	
CORE	OPTIONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make players aware of unique earning curve to maximize their earnings and be equipped for their eventual transition from football. • Encourage players to shop around financial options and institutions. • Coordinate referral to financial experts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic budgeting advice.

COMPETENCIES	
CORE	OPTIONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of potential resources of funding. • Basic understanding of a player’s unique earning curve. • Financial literacy: understanding payslip, taxes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial research and planning skills. • Knowledge of the financial system.

Table 7. PDM's roles and required competencies in the 'Finance' area



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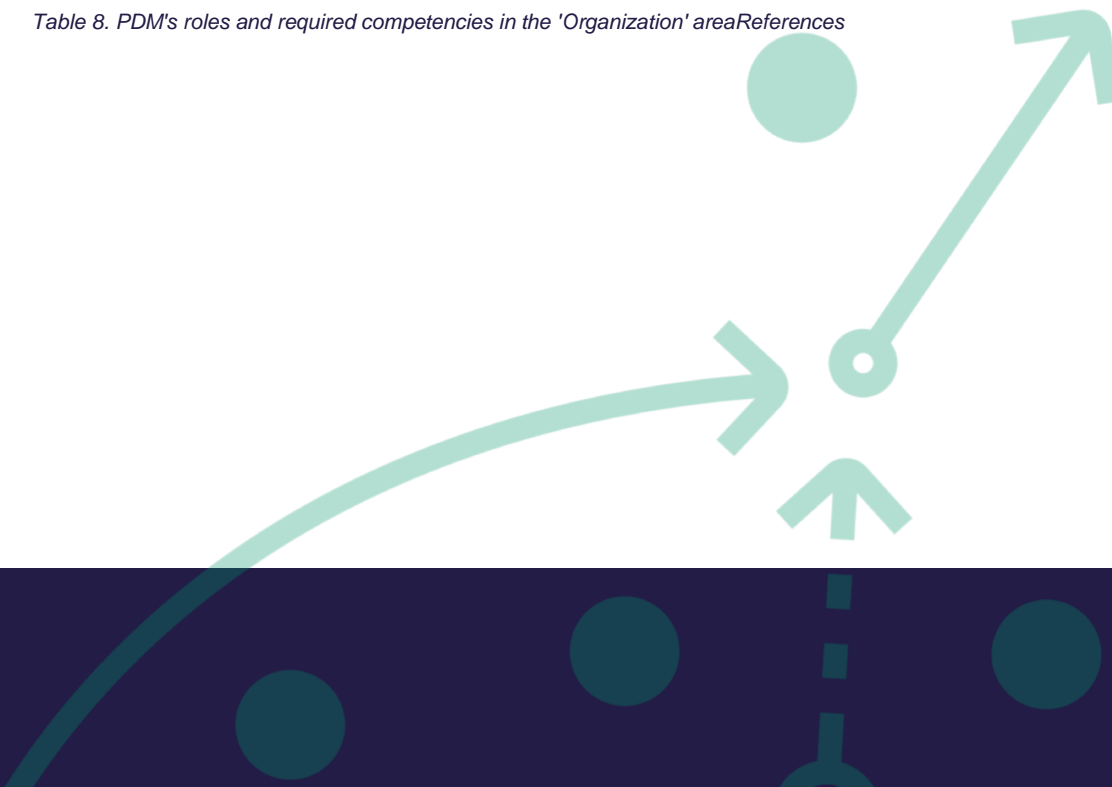




4.10 THE ROOF: ORGANISATION

ROLES	
CORE	OPTIONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a coordinated approach to Player Development in line with club or national PDP. • Set up a referral network to help with all elements of the PDP. • Develop and maintain a close working relationship with the team management (i.e., coach, manager, CEO, medical team) making them aware of issues that may affect a players' on field activities whilst always maintaining consideration of the privacy of the player. • Communicate needs of players with other departments to align strategy. • Self-reflection, self-development and self-evaluation as a practitioner. • Adherence to legal obligations (e.g., GDPR, confidentiality). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide input to other departments and national PDP programme (where appropriate) • Cooperate with federations and clubs. • Research funding options.
COMPETENCIES	
CORE	OPTIONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to sell/promote benefits of a PDP (e.g. through ambassadors, case studies, etc.). • Ability to analyse and use data collection measures and outcomes. • Knowledge of funding options. • Awareness of the importance of self-development. 	

Table 8. PDM's roles and required competencies in the 'Organization' areaReferences



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