The Failed Investor Deal in the Bundesliga - A Business Case Study of Stakeholder Theory and Hybrid Organizations in German Football

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ABSTRACT

Title: The Failed Investor Deal in the Bundesliga - A Business Case Study of Stakeholder Theory and Hybrid Organizations in German Football

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Summary: In 2023/2024, the German football league (DFL) pursued a billion-euro deal with a private equity investor. The capital was intended for future investments, particularly to strengthen the league's international competitiveness. Although the required voting majority of clubs was achieved, the process was cancelled after weeks of fan protests. This case study investigates the reasons behind the deal's failure and highlights the challenges organizations face when managing multiple stakeholders with conflicting interests. It illustrates the complexities in hybrid organizations, which must balance financial objectives with non-financial goals, in this case cultural responsibilities.

The case study serves as an educational tool, which may be used in the context of a business ethics course at the master's level. It allows students to apply theoretical frameworks, such as the stakeholder salience model, to a real-world business scenario. By working through the case, students gain a deeper understanding of stakeholder management challenges, particularly in emotionally charged environments.

In order to provide additional insights beyond publicly available information, seven expert interviews were conducted. These experts have extensive experience in the football industry, working for the DFL, sports consultancies or fan organizations. The interview findings indicate that the DFL's inadequate communication, lack of transparency, misjudgment of stakeholder relevance, and insufficient stakeholder participation in decision-making were key factors in the deal's failure.

This case serves as a relevant example of the critical role effective stakeholder management plays in hybrid organizations, particularly within the football industry. The case reinforces the practical applicability of stakeholder theory and hybrid organization models.

Keywords: Stakeholder Theory, Stakeholder Management, Hybrid Organizations, Organizational Challenges, Football, Bundesliga, Investor Deal

RESUMO

Título: O negócio falhado do investidor na Bundesliga - Um estudo de caso empresarial da teoria das partes interessadas e das organizações híbridas no futebol alemão

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Sumário: Em 2023/2024, a Liga Alemã de Futebol (DFL) estava a tentar um acordo de mil milhões de euros com um investidor privado. O capital destinava-se a investimentos futuros, nomeadamente para reforçar a competitividade internacional da liga. Apesar de a maioria necessária dos clubes ter aprovado o acordo, o processo foi cancelado após semanas de protestos dos adeptos. Este estudo de caso investiga as razões do fracasso e destaca os desafios da gestão de múltiplas partes interessadas com interesses contraditórios. Ilustra a complexidade das organizações híbridas, que equilibram objectivos financeiros e responsabilidades culturais.

O estudo de caso serve como ferramenta pedagógica num curso de ética empresarial ao nível do mestrado. Permite que os alunos apliquem quadros teóricos, como o modelo de saliência das partes interessadas, a um cenário empresarial real. Ao trabalharem com o caso, os alunos compreendem melhor os desafios da gestão das partes interessadas, especialmente em ambientes emocionalmente carregados.

Para fornecer informações além das disponíveis publicamente, foram realizadas sete entrevistas com peritos da indústria do futebol, incluindo a DFL, consultorias desportivas e organizações de adeptos. Os resultados indicam que a comunicação inadequada da DFL, a falta de transparência, a avaliação incorrecta da relevância das partes interessadas e a sua participação insuficiente na tomada de decisões foram factores fundamentais para o fracasso do negócio.

Este caso sublinha o papel crucial de uma gestão eficaz das partes interessadas nas organizações híbridas, especialmente no futebol. Reforça a aplicabilidade prática da teoria das partes interessadas e dos modelos organizacionais híbridos.

Palavras-chave: Teoria das partes interessadas, gestão das partes interessadas, organizações híbridas, desafios organizacionais, futebol, Bundesliga, acordo com investidore

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1. Introduction

Over the past decades, professional football in Europe has evolved into a multi-billion-euro industry. Transfer fees, player salaries, and player advisor commissions continued to rise (Figure 1). While the gap between financially stronger and weaker leagues grows ever wider, the English Premier League, in particular, has financially distanced itself from the other top European leagues (Figure 2). To address this development, the Deutsche Fußball Liga (DFL), the governing body of German professional football, pushed for a deal with a private equity investor during the 2023/24 season to secure capital for strategic investments. While the DFL succeeded in gaining the necessary two-thirds majority of club votes in the second attempt, the proposal sparked widespread fan protests. These protests, which included provoked match interruptions, ultimately pressured the DFL to abandon the investor deal.

This real-world case highlights the challenges organizations face when multiple perspectives are strongly represented, as various stakeholders push for different strategic directions, making decision-making processes more difficult and contested. The case also underscores the difficulties for hybrid organizations which not only pursue financial goals but also simultaneously consider non-financial objectives, such as preserving specific cultural values. A scientific investigation of this case is particularly relevant because it highlights a current example that shows the importance of appropriate stakeholder management, especially in hybrid organizations.

The case study first provides all the necessary background information to understand the initial situation. This includes an overview of the football industry and its defining characteristics in Germany, a detailed explanation of the proposed deal, and a timeline of the main events. To enrich the database, seven expert interviews were conducted, with their findings integrated into the case study to provide deeper insights. The theoretical foundation follows, exploring the concept of hybrid organizations, covering both theoretical perspectives and practical models. Furthermore, the origins and evolution of stakeholder theory, alongside frameworks and practical models for its application are presented.

The goal of this case study is to provide students with a relevant real-world example that illustrates the complexities of stakeholder management, particularly in hybrid organizations. It serves as a practical demonstration how issues like inadequate communication, lack of transparency, misjudgment of stakeholder relevance, and insufficient stakeholder participation in decision-making can lead to significant challenges for organizations in achieving their goals, especially in emotionally charged environments. The case also examines the applicability of the used frameworks and models in a real-world business case.

Disclaimer on the use of AI in this dissertation

I hereby ensure that all main ideas, arguments, and conclusions presented in this dissertation are entirely my own and the result of my independent research and analysis. To support my work, I have used two AI tools: DeepL, to assist with translations and refine word choice, and ChatGPT, to optimize the structure and flow of certain paragraphs and for proofreading purposes. I explicitly formulated the prompts for ChatGPT to focus on optimization and fine-tuning, ensuring that nothing substantially new was created.

Explanation of data collection

The dissertation format case study does not typically include a methodology section. However, this part will briefly outline the methodology used to emphasize the scientific rigor of the study and ensure transparency in the data collection and analysis process.

To generate additional insights and expand upon publicly available information, triangulation was applied. This approach involves combining multiple data sources to validate findings and reduce potential biases, thereby enhancing the reliability and depth of the analysis (Rowley, 2012). As part of this process, a total of seven expert interviews were conducted (Table 5). The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing for a balance between consistent data collection and the flexibility to explore emerging topics in greater depth. The interviews took place either face-to-face or virtually via Microsoft Teams. The average duration of an interview was around 48 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. The transcripts were analyzed using the qualitative content analysis approach by Mayring (2014). This method involved systematically coding the transcripts and deriving categories. The resulting categories served to structure and interpret the key insights from the interviews. Key findings from this analysis were incorporated into the dissertation. The interview partners were explicitly informed about the recording and the processing of the resulting material and gave their consent beforehand. The experts were assured that no information traceable to them would be included in the dissertation.

2. Case

Robert, the new CEO of the DFL, sits at his desk, once again deep in thought about the future strategic direction of his organization. For months, he has been reflecting on the events surrounding the failure of the investor deal in 2023/2024. Having been convinced of the potential of such a model back then, and still believing in its merits, Robert reflects on the factors that turned what he considers a highly promising deal into a dead end. Determined to make a renewed attempt at implementing a similar deal, Robert is decisive in avoiding the mistakes of the past. To do so, he begins a detailed review of the events, carefully analyzing all the aspects that must be considered. Together with his team, he decides to start from the very beginning, striving to understand the foundations of German football.

2.1 Description of the football industry

The football industry in Europe has developed significantly over the latest decades. This is reflected in increases in various key figures, such as club revenues, transfer fees and player salaries. Football has developed into a billion-euro business in which many stakeholders are involved and actively participate (Hintermeier, 2024).

The correlation between financial and sporting success

To understand the football industry, it is essential to comprehend a key characteristic of it. Even though most clubs compete as commercial enterprises in their respective competitions, economic success is not their primary objective. Economic success is the means to the end of sporting success. Between these two dimensions strong correlations exists. Financial success makes it possible to buy the best players that increase the likelihood of sporting success. This, in turn, increases financial success, through higher prize money and contractually higher income from sponsors. Additionally, clubs with sporting success are more likely to attract fans, which leads to increased stadium ticket or club merchandise sales. As a result of this cycle, a so-called ‘rat race‘ is taking place in football: clubs spend the money they have at their disposal quickly, mainly on factors that increase the likelihood of short-term sporting success. In practice, this means primarily buying the best players who in turn demand the highest salaries and cost the highest transfer fees. As a result, clubs frequently operate at a loss, and even when clubs generate a profit, it is often minimal. Putting money aside is the exception, not the rule (Tettamanzi, Grazioli, & Murgolo, 2024). This approach can work, but it has already pushed several formerly large clubs into lower leagues and caused lasting damage.

Differences among European leagues

From a financial perspective, the Premier League in particular has increasingly distanced itself from the other top European leagues (Figure 2). This is mainly due to two factors. On the one hand, TV rights revenue, as the most important source of club revenue, is significantly higher than in the other leagues. On the other hand, every Premier League club has an investor, ranging from private individuals to state funds. These investors regularly provide their clubs financial support, such as interest-free loans and debt repayments (New York Times, 2024). As a result, the clubs in England have greater financial leeway, which in turn enhances their sporting competitiveness. The impact of these financial opportunities is also reflected in sporting successes. In the UEFA club coefficient, English clubs have successively collected more points in recent years (UEFA, 2025). The coefficient describes the success in the international competitions of the respective clubs and is often used as an indicator to measure the sporting success of European clubs.

To prevent this financial and sporting gap from widening, the DFL continuously discusses new financing options. To understand the possibilities and limitations of financing options in the German football landscape, an analysis of its structure is essential.

Football governance structure in Germany

The organizer of professional football in Germany is the Deutsche Fußball Liga (DFL). The shareholders of the DFL are the 36 clubs in the Bundesliga and Bundesliga 2 (Figure 3 and 4). The clubs elect the supervisory board of the DFL, which in turn appoints the management board of the DFL. In the DFL, the ‘one club, one vote‘ principle applies. Every club has one vote in voting, no matter how large or successful the club is. Furthermore, officials who actively work in clubs can simultaneously hold an office with the DFL supervisory board or the management board.

The main function of the DFL is to market the rights to broadcast Bundesliga and Bundesliga 2 matches in Germany and abroad (hereafter referred to as ‘TV rights’). This is done in 4-year cycles. The revenue generated is distributed almost entirely to the clubs. This revenue represents an average of 25% of the clubs’ revenues, making it their largest revenue source (DFL, 2024). In the 2023/24 season, the DFL received a total of around 1.4 billion euros from the sale of TV rights. By comparison, the Premier League took in almost 4 billion euros in the same period (Sportschau, 2023a).

Compared to England, the shareholder structure in German football is significantly different. This is due to the principle of the ‘eingetragener Verein’ and the ‘50+1 rule’. In German football, the legal form ‘eingetragener Verein’ (registered association), abbreviated ‘e.V.’, is significant as it forms the foundational structure for the clubs. In such a legal form, almost everyone can become a member based on relatively simple conditions. These conditions include accepting the club’s statutes and paying the annual membership fee. From a certain age, usually 18 years, the member is entitled to vote. Members can vote on certain matters at the annual general meetings, the highest decision-making body in the e.V.. Every few years, elections are held for the presidium of the e.V., in which members may also run for. The election of the presidium is viewed as the members’ greatest and most important democratic means.

The statutes of the DFL allow clubs to enter the Bundesliga and Bundesliga 2 either in the legal form of a e.V. or as a corporation, such as a stock corporation or a limited liability company. Until 1998, clubs could only enter the league as an e.V.. This rule was eventually overturned to allow clubs more funding flexibility, for example, by selling shares in the respective corporation to external investors. Selling shares is not possible within an e.V.. As a result, many clubs outsourced their football departments to corporations. In order to continue to guarantee the democratic participation of the e.V., the so-called ‘50+1 rule‘ was introduced. This rule stipulates that the voting majority in club corporations must be at least 50% plus an additional vote for the e.V.. This ensures the ability to make decisions through democratic structures and limits the influence of external investors. Over the years, loose discussions about the abolition of the 50+1 rule have emerged. However, the DFL never seriously considered this option. Maintaining this rule has been the top priority for many club members and fans since its introduction.

German fan culture

As a result of the particular governance structure of German clubs, the fan culture in Germany is quite special. The clubs belong to its members, which attach great importance to preserving the German fan culture. This culture includes certain values and traditions. First and foremost, this includes maintaining the 50+1 rule and thus preventing an investor in the club from taking over the majority of votes in the club. In addition to the preservation of the 50+1 rule, some issues exits that have been defended by fans for years, although these points possess great financial potential for the league and the clubs. These issues include the retention of the matchday fixtures. At the moment, the matches are scheduled from Friday evening to Sunday evening. Up to five games are played simultaneously on Saturday at 3:30 pm, in the so-called 'matchday conference'. If no matches were scheduled parallel to each other, as is the case in Spanish La Liga, for example, fans would be able to watch football more often. This would allow the league to generate significantly more revenue due to the increased marketable broadcasting time. In Spain and England, many matches are also held during the week, which also offers increased marketing potential. Weekday games are pretty consistently dismissed by the German fans. For them, the Bundesliga belongs exclusively on weekends. The selling of the league's naming rights is another issue. The French Ligue 1 sold its naming rights. The official name of the league in the 2024/25 season is 'Ligue 1 McDonald's'. For this naming right, Ligue 1 receives around 30 million euros a year from McDonalds. According to estimates, a sale of the Bundesliga naming rights would also bring in up to 30 million euros a year. Ticket prices are also a recurring subject. Compared to the other top leagues, the Bundesliga has very low ticket prices. These prices are consistently demanded by the fans. Increasing ticket prices has great financial potential for the clubs, as it is generally that demand for tickets would not fall significantly even if prices were to rise. Moreover, it is repeatedly speculated that the 'Supercup' (match between the champion and the cup winner of the previous season) could be staged abroad. La Liga has already been staging the Supercup in Saudi Arabia for years and receives around 30 million euros per year for doing so (Reuters, 2024).

Fans often criticize the DFL for prioritizing its economic goals and for considering financial measures that, in their view, are not compatible with the values of German football. The fans argue the DFL should generate money for the clubs, but not at any price. The topics just described often lead to heated discussions between members and the club's management at the annual general meetings. Also in the stadiums, the active fan scenes regularly express their opinions on various topics. As the fan scenes are well organized among themselves, protests are often carried out by both home and away fans, regardless of any lack of mutual sympathy.

The challenge for the DFL is to unite both objectives, the necessity to maximize the revenue for the clubs, and the preservation of the German football culture which is the primary goal of many fans. This task is considered to be "very, very difficult" (Expert 2, 2025), as the German football culture is regarded "as a kind of religion that is very sensitive to change" (Expert 2, 2025).

2.2 The deal and its motivation

Investment needs

In 2023, the DFL communicated several identified areas in which it saw needs for investment. The primary purpose of addressing these investment needs was to ensure the future international competitiveness of the league both in economic and sporting terms. A fundamental consensus existed among all clubs on the need for investment, especially in the areas of internationalization and digitalization. In terms of international TV revenues and the international presence and reach of the league, the Bundesliga is clearly not only behind the Premier League, but also behind La Liga (Sportschau, 2023b). Therefore, several measures should be implemented to increase the international attractiveness of the Bundesliga. In the area of digitalization, the DFL recognized a change in the media usage behavior of the younger generation. In order to keep the younger generation interested in the Bundesliga, the DFL considered it necessary to invest in the league's digital business model.

In addition to the two areas mentioned, a few other points indicated a need for investment. First, TV rights revenue declined. In the cycle from the 2017/18 to 2020/21 season, revenue amounted to 1.159 billion euros per season. From the 2021/22 to 2024/25 season, it amounted 1.1 billion euros per season. This decline corresponds to around 5% (Figure 5). This was the biggest percentage decline in over 20 years. Clubs feared that this decline could intensify in the future. Another point was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis showed how vulnerable the football business was, not only in Germany but throughout Europe. Thirteen out of 36 clubs in Germany were threatened with insolvency just a few weeks after the outbreak of the pandemic and the resulting break in play ordered by the government. Although this insolvency did not happen and all of them survived the pandemic, the lack of income from back then is still a burden on some of the clubs today. One consequence of this was an increased awareness that other financial options should be developed in the future (Handelsblatt, 2021).

Financing options

Since the 50+1 rule restricted investors as a financing option for German clubs, the DFL discussed alternative forms of financing. The DFL refused to take on debt, such as a bank loan. If had taken out a bank loan, the DFL would have had to make regular, obligatory repayments to the bank without knowing how much revenue would actually be generated in later years. If revenue fell, for example due to falling demand, the payments to the bank would still have been due. In the worst case, the repayments could no longer have been serviced. Additionally, the interest charges would have been excessively high for the DFL, as banks considered the DFL's business model highly risky and would have demanded significant rates (Expert 7, 2025).

The financing alternative chosen was a so-called ‘strategic partnership‘ with a private equity investor[1], as already existed in Spain and France. The idea was to found a new subsidiary of the DFL to which the marketing of the TV rights would be outsourced. The investor would receive a specific share of the revenues of this subsidiary for a limited period and a seat on the decision-making body of the new subsidiary. In return, the investor would provide the league with a substantial amount of capital. The advantage of this model was that it did not involve fixed payments such as repayments or interest. The payments are a fixed percentage of the revenue from TV rights. If the revenue had increased, the payments to the investor would have increased. If the revenue had decreased, the payments would have decreased.

Capital usage

The DFL expected to raise around 2 billion euros through this deal. In return, an investor would have received 12.5% of the subsidiary's revenues for 20 years. 40% of this capital would have been used to drive forward the internationalization and digitalization of the league. This should be achieved in particular through the development of streaming and video platform, with the aim of attracting a younger and more international audience. The other 60% of the money was to flow to the clubs. A portion of this money would have been earmarked for infrastructural measures, such as modernizing stadiums or training centers. Another part, around 300 million euros, would have been freely available to the clubs, which they could spend on player salaries or transfer fees. This money was to be distributed to the clubs according to a certain distribution key. According to this key, the more successful clubs in recent years, especially the larger clubs, would have received significantly more money than the less successful clubs, especially the smaller clubs. The last part of the money would flow to the clubs to make up for the lack of income from the 12.5% of the TV rights in the first few years, which would then go to the investor.

[1] Private equity firms invest significant capital, primarily in non-publicly traded businesses across diverse industries. These firms are considered to be highly profit oriented. Their goal is to increase the value of the acquired company within a certain timeframe and subsequently sell it at a profit. These firms are often known for implementing sometimes radical changes within the acquired companies, as long as such changes contribute to increasing the company's value.

In the best-case scenario, all these measures would have increased the value of the Bundesliga to such an extent that future TV revenues would increase and, in relative terms, exceed the share of revenues that would be transferred to the investor.

2.3 Chronology of events

On December 7, 2022, the DFL and its CEO Donata Hopfen parted ways due to differences of opinion regarding the strategic direction of the organization. The following day, Axel Hellmann, board member of Eintracht Frankfurt, and Oliver Leki, board member of SC Freiburg, were appointed as a CEO interim solution until June 30, 2023. The chairman of the supervisory board of the DFL at this time was Hans-Joachim Watzke, the CEO of Borussia Dortmund (Figure 6).

On February 3, 2023, the DFL working group "Future Scenarios" has agreed on guidelines for advancing German football and exploring a potential strategic partnership at the league level. The working group consisted of representatives from Bayern Munich, Eintracht Frankfurt, SC Freiburg, and SV Darmstadt 98. The group emphasized the need for sustainable investment to support league growth, especially in the areas internationalization and digitalization.

On February 9, 2023, the DFL management board and supervisory board unanimously agreed to take next steps toward a potential strategic partnership. The decision was grounded on the recommendations of the working group and the need for investment in certain areas jointly identified by the clubs. The next step in the process was to prepare for a bidding process. Key points of the partnership should be presented to the clubs for a decision at an extraordinary DFL members' meeting. Preliminary indicative offers from several interested partners were received, and initial economic highlights were shared with the clubs. The partnership concept would be presented to the clubs in two informational meetings to gather final feedback. Once finalized, the clubs would decide in May whether to proceed to the next phase.

On May 24, 2023, the clubs voted on whether to enter into negotiations. This required a two-thirds majority, that is 24 supporters. The results reflected 20 clubs vote in favor, 11 against, 5 abstentions. The necessary majority was therefore not achieved, and Watzke declared the project finished.

In the days after the election, it subsequently emerged that the DFL granted the investor a veto right on important decisions, without defining exactly what important meant in this context. Several club representatives were outraged and criticized the DFL's communication and transparency as inadequate, stating that they had not been properly informed about this matter. As a result, the relationship of trust between some clubs and the DFL was damaged.

Moreover, some clubs criticized the overall timeline of the process. They stated that being informed only a few weeks before the scheduled vote left insufficient time for a thorough examination of such a significant decision, which created pressure. The clubs had the impression that the DFL choose this timing deliberately to minimize extensive discussions and prevent broader debates from emerging. This view was strengthened by statements from experts, indicating that the DFL did not provide enough, but only very superficial information, not only for the clubs but the public in general, especially about the concrete use of the capital (Expert 2, 2025). In addition, some clubs, especially smaller clubs and those from the second division, stated that they also saw a need for investment, but not for the reason of remaining internationally competitive. For these clubs, the main objective is to gain promotion to the first division or to secure their position within it. Participation in international competitions is not a relevant consideration for them (Expert 1, 2025).

On June 8, 2023, Steffen Merkel and Marc Lenz (Figure 7) are appointed new CEOs of the DFL, effective July 1, 2023. Both had previously worked for the DFL for years and have no club background. Later, on August 21, 2023, Watzke expressed that he could imagine reviving the project again under modified conditions.

On November 14, 2023, the DFL announced that a revised strategic partnership proposal would be decided upon by the 36 clubs on December 11, 2023. This decision followed an extensive review of the first process initiated by the management board. The DFL proposed new guidelines for a potential deal based on feedback from the discussions between the DFL and the clubs during the review. In this context, the DFL organized so-called ‘regional conferences‘. The DFL traveled to several regions of the country to discuss the new deal in person with the clubs. The aim was to involve the clubs more in the decision-making process and share information in order to increase transparency. Clubs were able to ask questions and express concerns. In addition, the DFL uploaded a Q&A to their website to provide fans with answers to their concerns, explaining the so-called ‘red lines‘ that would exist between the DFL and an investor. The Q&A emphasized that the decision-making authority in such a constellation remained with the DFL and the clubs, and not with the investor. This measure aimed to allay the concerns that many fans had by providing a detailed description of the strategic partnership.

The revised conditions proposed selling 6% to 9% of TV rights revenue for 20 years in exchange for 800 million to 1 billion euros. In the best-case scenario, the DFL would get 1 billion euros. Of this sum, 600 million would have been used to develop a streaming platform. 300 million would have been used to compensate for the clubs' lower income from TV rights in the first few years. The remaining 100 million would be used to create a remuneration system that rewards clubs that travel abroad for marketing activities. Unlike the first model, this new model did not include an amount to be allocated to the clubs for transfers or players' salaries.

On December 11, 2023, the clubs voted again. This time the clubs approved the proposal with 24 votes in favor, 10 against and 2 abstentions. Immediately afterwards, the voting behavior of Hannover 96's CEO Martin Kind caused speculation. Kind was suspected of having voted in favor against the instructions of his club, which were legally binding. Even after public pressure, he had not provided any information about his voting behavior. As it was a secret ballot, nothing could be proven against Kind. In a talk show, Kind was asked whether he had voted for or against. He replied he had "a different understanding of democracy" (ARD, 2024) and left the question unanswered.

After the announcement, weeks of unprecedented protest started. Massive protests were staged by fans in almost every stadium. Initially, these protests were characterized by protest banners in the fan stands and verbal protests, including insults against the DFL. After a short time, another form of protest emerged. Fans started throwing tennis balls during the football matches, which led to the first match interruptions. The tennis ball quickly became the symbol of the protests. During the following weeks, the protests became increasingly creative. In addition to tennis balls, remote-controlled cars and remote-controlled airplanes were also used to interrupt matches (Figures 8 to 13). The longest interruption of a match occurred during the Bundesliga 2 game between Hertha BSC and Hamburger SV. This match was interrupted for more than half an hour and came close to being called off. In the course of the protests, the fans managed to gain sympathy points from the public. Through the peaceful and, above all, creative protests, they managed to get large parts of the public behind them and thus support the protests indirectly (Expert 6, 2025).

The fans' feared that an investor would put pressure on the DFL to use the financial levers that the fans have been defending for years. Primarily, the fans were afraid that the investor would campaign for the 50+1 rule to be abolished. Furthermore, the fans were concerned that the matchday could be split up, that stadium ticket prices could be increased or that the Supercup could be staged in other countries. Fans argued that a private equity investor would only have financial interests and would be willing to implement any measure that would result in higher returns for the investor. Furthermore, the protests were directed against Martin Kind's voting behavior and the assumption that the result of the vote was unjust.

By January 17, 2024, the DFL had narrowed down potential strategic partners to two, Blackstone and CVC. Further negotiations in the process would proceed with these two candidates. At the same time, several club presidents, including those of Union Berlin, VfB Stuttgart and VfL Osnabrück called for a new and this time transparent vote. Hansa Rostock's CEO Robert Marien described the voting process as embarrassing, particularly in view of Martin Kind's case. These public club statements reinforced the fan protests. In the meantime, the DFL published a statement addressing the protests and emphasized that this deal could help the entire league in the long term. As the investor would not be able to exert any significant influence, the fans' interests would be safeguarded. Furthermore, the DFL invited fan representatives to joint talks.

On February 9, 2024, Watzke expressed regret over the absence of invited fan representatives from a planned dialogue. He emphasized that open dialogue is essential and assured that previous criticisms from fan groups were not ignored. Watzke noted that the December decision differed significantly from the one in May, with many concerns addressed and clubs thoroughly informed. He remained open to continued dialogue with fan representatives.

On February 13, 2024, Blackstone withdrew from the bidding race, citing the ongoing fan protests and the DFL's lack of a decisive response to them. Blackstone perceived this missing response as a sign of a lack of support from the DFL (Expert 7, 2025). Finally, on February 21, 2024, the DFL decided to halt the process entirely. Watzke stated that "in view of the current developments, a successful continuation of the process no longer seems possible" (Tagesschau, 2024). By current developments, he referred to the fan protests and the lack of broad acceptance for the deal among several clubs, regarding the voting behavior of Martin Kind. To avoid further operational and legal disruptions, the DFL chose not to proceed with the partnership. After this announcement, the protests in the stadiums stopped. Fans celebrated the collapse of the process in the stadiums and on social media (Figure 14).

Afterwards, Watzke pointed out publicly that trust in some clubs had been lost in the process. This loss of trust was mainly caused by the fact that a few days before the vote, the DFL spoke to all the clubs' boards again to ask for their approval. On this occasion, 29 clubs pledged their support, which would have clearly achieved the required two-thirds majority. If these 29 clubs had actually voted in favor, the DFL would have had a much stronger position against the critics. The speculation surrounding Martin Kind would also have been of secondary importance (Expert 4, 2025).

Following the failure, many experts within and outside the DFL analyzed the process. The DFL acknowledged that they clearly underestimated the power of the fans. The fans were left out at many points in the decision-making processes, which in retrospect was a substantial mistake (Expert 5, 2025) (Expert 6, 2025). The DFL emphasized that they were under time pressure to conclude the deal, which prevented them from realizing more extensive communication measures. The time pressure was to conclude the investor deal before the next TV rights tender. The aim was to give the rights buyers an understanding of the expected future positive development of the Bundesliga through the investments made (Expert 7, 2025). Furthermore, the DFL should have made more intensive efforts, pushing the clubs to engage more actively with their fans and members to create an additional communication platform (Expert 3, 2025). Fan representatives were disappointed that the communication between the DFL and fan organizations, which had developed very positively for several years, did not really occur in this process, especially at the beginning (Expert 6, 2025).

2.4 Deals in other European leagues

While the implementation of the strategic partnership was unsuccessful in Germany, similar models were implemented in the Spanish and French leagues.

In 2021, La Liga reached an agreement with CVC. La Liga received 1.9 billion euros, while CVC is entitled to 8.25% of the TV rights revenue for the next 50 years. Here, the financial consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic were a decisive reason for many clubs to agree. The majority of the moneys flows into club structures, while around 15% can be used by the clubs to offset losses or pay off debt. Real Madrid and FC Barcelona, the two largest clubs in the country, are not participating in this deal. Both clubs even took legal action against the deal, eventually losing the case. Madrid and Barcelona did not receive any money from the deal, still also not losing any rights either. This separation is still causing tensions within the league today. No fan protests took place on a comparable scale to those in Germany.

In 2022, CVC secured a revenue share in a newly founded subsidiary of Ligue 1, which has since been responsible for the marketing of the TV rights. Ligue 1 secured 1.3 billion euros, while CVC is guaranteed 13% of the income from TV rights on a permanent basis, i.e. without an end date. The deal came about against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced French football into massive financial difficulties. In addition to the direct financial injection, the clubs hoped to increase their TV rights revenue with the help of CVC's experience and expertise. In addition to football, CVC is also active in Formula 1 and rugby and therefore already has proven experience in the sports industry. The league aimed to secure around one billion euros per season from the next TV contract. However, the new TV contract concluded in 2024 amounts to only around 500 million euros per season, making it the lowest since 2005, when no investor was involved.

Table 3 shows an overview of the conditions of the planned deals in Germany and implemented deals in Spain and France.

3. Literature review

3.1 Hybrid organizations

3.1.1 Theoretical background

Hybrid organizations have been a subject of research for decades, as these organizations challenge traditional organizational structures by integrating multiple, often conflicting logics. Various definitions exist, but a central characteristic of most of them is that hybrid organizations must balance competing goals. As Pache and Santos (Pache & Santos, 2010, p. 471) describe, "organizations increasingly adopt hybrid forms that draw from and try to integrate sometimes competing logics. An example is the increasing integration of social goals by commercial enterprises and of commercial goals by organizations with a social mission.". More recent definitions emphasize sustainability aspects and explicitly highlight the integration of environmental objectives. For instance, Santos, Pache, and Birkholz (2015, p. 37) define hybrid organizations as "organizations that run commercial operations with the goal of addressing a societal problem, thus adopting a social or environmental mission.".

Hybrid organizations face several challenges due to their need to balance competing objectives. Decision-making within in hybrid organizations is often marked by tensions, as decision-makers must navigate competing priorities to determine the most appropriate course of action. Another major difficulty in type of organization can be resource allocation. Many hybrid organizations have to divide their resources between measures to achieve their financial and non-financial goals. Unlike single-purpose firms, they cannot solely focus on profit maximization, leading to potential inefficiencies. Additionally, aligning economic and non-economic objectives poses a challenge, as prioritizing one objective can limit the ability to fully meet the expectations of stakeholders and resource providers. Lastly, managers often struggle to accommodate all stakeholder interests, which can lead to trade-offs that weaken stakeholder trust and the organization's ability to effectively achieve its mission. These challenges highlight the complexity of managing hybrid organizations and the need for careful strategic balancing between competing demands (Mitchell, Weaver, Agle, & Carlson, 2016).

3.1.2 Hybrid sectors

Some sectors exist that are particularly relevant regarding research about hybrid organizations, as they must navigate between divergent objectives. Examples for these sectors are higher education institutions and the healthcare sector. In universities, a tension between educational goals and financial goals exists. Universities want to provide high-quality education, promote research and innovation and support student development. However, they also need to ensure financial sustainability through income from tuition fees, grants, and scholarships. This dual focus can lead to conflicts, such as the pressure to increase student numbers, which could compromise the quality of education. Similarly, the need for significant research investment can put a strain on financial resources. As a result, university leaders must navigate these tensions to balance their commitment to education with the financial realities. Research has gathered evidence that successful stakeholder relationships, especially trough knowledge sharing, mutual trust and active participation in decision-making processes can lead to enhanced value for universities (de Freitas Langrafe, Barakat, Stocker, & Boaventura, 2020).

In the healthcare sector, organizations like hospitals often face the challenge of competing objectives. On the one hand, hospitals aim to provide the highest possible standard of patient care. On the other hand, hospitals must operate within financial constraints that can limit investments in staff and equipment, potentially lowering the quality of care. This conflict highlights the complexity of value creation in the health care sector (Spanò, Massaro, & Iacuzzi, 2023). Existing research suggests that, in addition to the involvement of all stakeholders, which often include public, private and non-profit organizations, the exchange of knowledge in the healthcare sector is of particular importance in the decision-making processes. The treatment of patients often requires close cooperation between different stakeholders. Only through the effective exchange of medical knowledge, research results and patient data can well-founded decisions be made and treatment errors avoided. If this knowledge is inadequately shared or communicated, treatment errors can occur, important information can be lost and the quality of care can be significantly impaired, which in the worst case can compromise patient safety (Dal Mas, Garcia-Perez, José Sousa, & Lopes da Costa, 2020).

3.1.3 Practical models

In addition to theoretical descriptions, practical and applicable models have been developed in academia to address the various situations typically encountered in hybrid organizations. Since this dissertation describes a case with a substantial internal conflict in a hybrid organization, a model is introduced focusing particularly on this type on conflict. Pache & Santos put forward a model that consciously deals with the internal dynamics in organizations during conflict situations. The models aim is being able to better predict the reactions of organizations to those conflicts and to create an opportunity to act in anticipation. The model emphasizes that the level of internal representation and the nature of the conflict significantly affect the organizations chosen response (Pache & Santos, 2010).

Internal representations in hybrid organizations refer to the variety of different views that stakeholders in an organization hold about particular matters. These representations can be categorized into three types: absence of representation, single representation, and multiple representations. Absence of representation occurs when conflicting institutional demands are not internally represented. In this case, organizational members remain relatively impartial to the dispute, as no strong internal pressures exists to advocate for one side over the other. Single representation arises when only one side of a conflict is internally represented. In such cases, internal groups actively support and defend a specific demand, leading to a higher commitment to resolving the conflict in favor of the internally supported logic. Multiple representations occur when competing institutional demands are simultaneously represented within the organization. Different internal groups advocate for opposing logics, leading to internal competition and potential tensions. When multiple perspectives are strongly represented, conflicts become more complex, as various stakeholders push for different strategic directions, making decision-making processes more difficult and contested.

Furthermore, organizations can face two main types of conflicts: conflicts over means and conflicts over goals. Conflicts over means occur when disagreements arise regarding the methods or strategies used to achieve a shared objective, such as differing views on resource allocation. These conflicts are generally more negotiable and flexible. Organizations may lean towards compromise or avoidance if internal representation is absent. If only one perspective is strongly represented, avoidance or defiance is more likely. However, if multiple perspectives exist, the response depends on the power balance. Manipulation may occur if one side dominates, whereas a compromise is more likely when power is evenly distributed. In contrast, conflicts over goals arise when differing priorities or visions exist as to what the organization should aim to achieve. These conflicts tend to be more rigid and less negotiable. In the absence of representation, the likely response is avoidance or defiance. When one side is strongly represented, avoidance, defiance, or manipulation may occur. If multiple perspectives are present, manipulation is likely. However, if both sides hold equal power, this can lead to organizational paralysis or, in extreme cases, even a breakup.

Depending on the nature of the conflict and the level of internal representation, the beforementioned four response strategies are likely to be employed. First, when organizations compromise, they strive to achieve partial conformity with conflicting demands, aiming to satisfy all stakeholders involved. Compromise can maintain stakeholder relationships but may result in diluted standards or expectations, potentially frustrating some stakeholders. An example is a hospital negotiates with both regulatory bodies and patient advocacy groups to balance financial constraints with the need for improved patient care services. Second, avoidance occurs when organizations attempt to evade the necessity of conforming to conflicting demands, often through symbolic compliance. This approach can lead to temporary relief from conflict but risks long-term legitimacy issues if stakeholders discover the discrepancies between stated policies and actual practices. As an example, educational institutions may adopt a new curriculum superficially to meet state requirements while maintaining previous teaching methods behind the scenes. Third, organizations engage in defiance when they explicitly reject institutional demands they find inappropriate or damaging. While this can galvanize internal support and reinforce identity, it may provoke backlash from funders or regulatory bodies, potentially jeopardizing funding or legal standing. For instance, an environmental non-profit organization publicly denounces a government policy that contradicts its core mission of sustainability, refusing to comply with new regulations. Finally, manipulation refers to organizations actively seeking to alter the content of institutional demands and influence their proponents. Successful manipulation can lead to favorable regulations and support for the organization's objectives, but it risks reputational damage if perceived as unethical or self-serving. As an example for this, a business coalition lobbies for changes in legislation that favor their industry, utilizing political capital to sway public opinion and policymakers.

Table 4 provides an overview of all response strategies and their respective likelihood of occurrence. This model can be practically applied to assess how an organization is likely to respond to internal conflicts. With sufficient lead time, it may be possible to intervene and prevent negative outcomes from occurring.

3.2 Stakeholder theory

3.2.1 Origins

The first recorded discussions of the term ‘stakeholder‘ date back to 1963, when an internal memo from the Stanford research institute approached the subject (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). Nevertheless, it was in the 1980s, Robert Edward Freeman laid the foundation for later and still ongoing discussions about stakeholders by the so-called ‘stakeholder theory‘. Freeman defined stakeholders as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives” (Freeman R. E., 1984, S. p. 46). The core idea of stakeholder theory is to integrate all stakeholders and their respective interests into an organization's decision-making processes, even if these interests are not of a purely economic nature. The stakeholder theory stands in contrast to the back then widespread shareholder theory. According to this theory, the primary goal of an organization is to generate value for its shareholders, meaning it should operate in a way that maximizes profits. Other interests held by stakeholders were considered secondary (Friedman, 1970).

For this inclusion of stakeholders, it is important to identify and categorize them. Freeman defined several options for identifying and categorizing stakeholders. One of these options is the distinction between internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders are individuals or groups within the organization who are directly involved in its operations and decision-making processes. Examples include employees, managers, and shareholders. External stakeholders are individuals or groups outside the organization who are affected by its actions or can influence its actions. These can include customers, suppliers, government agencies, and the public. Furthermore, Freeman categorizes stakeholders into primary and secondary. Primary stakeholders are individuals or groups with a direct and essential relationship to an organization. Their involvement is critical to the organization’s operations. The organization may have special duties towards them. Examples are shareholders, employees, and customers. Secondary stakeholders, on the other hand, have a less direct connection. However, these stakeholders can still influence or be influenced by the organization's actions, often affecting its reputation, regulatory environment, or long-term strategy. The organization has no specific duties concerning it, yet the company may have certain moral duties towards them. Here, examples are media, government agencies, non-governmental agencies and the society (Freeman R. E., 1984).

3.2.2 Developments in the course of time and practical models

Based on Freeman's foundation, stakeholder theory has been further developed over time and scholars established several models. A model that is still used today for possible categorizations of and targeted interaction with stakeholders is the ‘stakeholder salience model‘. This model classifies stakeholders according to the three attributes power, legitimacy and urgency. Power describes the ability of a stakeholder to influence organizations' decisions. Legitimacy refers to the degree to which the stakeholder's demands are justified. Urgency describes the timeliness and importance of the stakeholder's concerns. (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). Stakeholders are categorized based on the number of attributes they strongly possess. Those stakeholders with only one attribute are classified as ‘latent‘ stakeholders. Those with two attributes are referred to as ‘expectant‘ stakeholders. Those possessing all three attributes are considered ‘definitive‘ stakeholders. The more attributes a stakeholder strongly possesses, the more significant they are to the organization (Figure 15). Consequently, the organizations management should prioritize these stakeholders, and their involvement in the organizations decision-making processes should be greater (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). This interaction of organizations with their stakeholders is referred to as ‘stakeholder management‘.

Freeman also revised his theory from 1984. In 2010, a version appeared that focused more on the challenges of management in the 21st century. A key aspect of this revision is the stronger integration of ethical and social aspects within the framework of organizational management. The aim is to show how companies manage to be both financially and socially successful. According to Freeman, the social objectives of the company must become an integral part of the organizational strategy and not be seen as separate from the business objectives (Freeman, et al., 2010).

The definition of the word stakeholder has also evolved. Scholars presented new and adapted definitions. An appropriate one for this dissertation is that of McGrath and Whitty, who define stakeholder as “an entity with a stake (an interest) in the subject activity” (McGrath & Whitty, 2017, p. 730).

Over time, many scientists have also been practically examined and regularly confirmed these theoretical assertions. Researchers collected evidence that seems to suggest that appropriate stakeholder management can have a positive effect on the competitiveness of companies (Freeman, Harrison, & Wicks, 2007) (Freeman, et al., 2010). Especially in difficult times and crises, active stakeholder management can be a strategic tool that can have a positive impact on surviving the respective situations. (Choi & Wang, 2009) Further studies have concluded that companies practicing excellent stakeholder management tend to achieve superior performance. (Sisodia, Sheth, & Wolfe, 2014) This can mainly be explained by the fact that companies with excellent stakeholder management are more attractive to customers, partners, or investors who value stakeholder-conscious companies. This attractiveness leads to more sustainable relationships, which in turn provide a competitive advantage (Bosse, Phillips, & Harrison, 2009). Recent studies also reconfirm the positive relationship between stakeholder engagement and corporate financial performance (Ioannou & Serafeim, 2019).

3.2.3 Latest scientific findings

Stakeholder theory is a widespread and dynamic field of research. It has become considerably more important in science in recent years. The extensive amount of work on many different aspects of this topic reflects this development (Kujala, Sachs, Leinonen, Heikkinen, & Laude, 2022). Stakeholder theory has been increasingly integrated into interdisciplinary areas such as sustainability management (Hörisch, Freeman, & Schaltegger, 2014), corporate social responsibility (Awa, Etim, & Ogbonda, 2024), digitalization (Bocken, Ritala, Albareda, & Verburg, 2019), sustainability-oriented business models (Lüdeke-Freund, Freudenreich, Saviuc, Schaltegger, & Stock, 2017), and business-model innovation (Aagaard, Lüdeke-Freund, & Wells, 2021). The literature contains numerous other practical applications of stakeholder theory to many selected industries, business models, and business cases.

3.2.4 Measures for effective stakeholder management

Stakeholder management offers numerous measures and implementation options for effectively shaping relationships with stakeholders and creating long-term value for all stakeholders involved. A central approach is the integration of stakeholder perspectives into organizational processes such as decision-making and strategic planning. Organizations should actively involve their stakeholders in the dialog in order to contribute their ideas and knowledge. This participation is made possible through regular interaction and targeted involvement in decision-making processes and strategic planning. This can be achieved, for example, through workshops or co-determination committees in which all relevant stakeholders are represented. Another essential aspect of effective stakeholder management is maintaining targeted communication. This includes sharing information and collecting feedback to gauge satisfaction and identify potential gaps. Feedback mechanisms, such as surveys and interviews, are tools for measuring perceived value and systematically monitoring stakeholder management (Esper, Barin-Cruz, & Gond, 2024).

Moreover, stakeholder management should follow an iterative process. This means adapting to feedback collected at periodic intervals to align with evolving stakeholder needs. In challenging situations, proactive measures, such as regular updates and structured follow-ups after discussions, can help to build or rebuild trust and confidence among stakeholders. For partially controversial projects that may face criticism, organizations can demonstrate determination, such as through public statements supporting the project, and help align perceptions with the organization's stakeholders and their interests (Mari & Pirozzi, 2024). Another element can be the promotion of innovation through stakeholder engagement. Organizations can actively involve stakeholders in certain processes in order to jointly develop innovative solutions and promote creative approaches. This often takes place in co-creation processes in which organizations and stakeholders jointly design new products or services (Kujala, Sachs, Leinonen, Heikkinen, & Laude, 2022).

3.2.5 Existing criticism

When examining a dynamic and complex subject area such as stakeholder theory, it is essential to consider existing criticisms of it. One of the primary critiques is that the theory traditionally assumes a positive and cooperative interaction between stakeholders. This perspective is based on the premise that stakeholders act in ethically and morally sound ways, fostering collaboration rather than conflict. However, this assumption can be misleading. Conflicts of interest, power struggles, and competing priorities are common in organizational settings but are often underrepresented in stakeholder theory research. As a result, some scholars argue that future research should place greater emphasis on these potential negative aspects, to create a more realistic framework (Kujala, Sachs, Leinonen, Heikkinen, & Laude, 2022). Other critics also question the applicability of existing models, such as the stakeholder salience model. Critics argue that although this model provides a solid conceptual framework for stakeholder management, it falls short in practice. Scholars highlight that the model often oversimplifies the complexity of real-world stakeholder dynamics. The model fails to account for the diverse and individual realities across industries, cultures, and organizational contexts. As a result, its practical usefulness may be limited (Mahajan, Lim, Sareen, Kumar, & Panwar, 2023).

3.2.6 Stakeholder theory in football

The application of stakeholder theory to football has led to a consensus that fans are considered a key stakeholder within the football landscape (Winskowski, 2022). This evaluation is primarily driven by the passion fans have for their clubs. This passion often translates into strong motivation and energy when issues directly affect them and their clubs. Their emotional attachment has the consequence that fans are often highly engaged and also capable of influencing decisions within football organizations. In certain circumstances, they can even obstruct management decisions of organizations. This case is more likely, when the fans excluded from the organization’s decision-making processes, particularly in situations where the organization’s stakeholder management is insufficient due to a lack of communication or participation opportunities (Hernández-Hernández, Londoño-Pineda, Cano, & Gómez-Montoya, 2023).

Given the significant influence fans can exert, current academics emphasize future research should studying “particularly fans, who, due to their emotional connection with football teams or clubs, could play a crucial role in achieving organizations objectives” (Hernández-Hernández, Londoño-Pineda, Cano, & Gómez-Montoya, 2023, p. 14). Furthermore, existing research points out that the topic football in general “requires refinement and development through empirical research, to validate existing theoretical findings and especially test the degree of application to this specific environment” (Yiapanas & Thrassou, 2022, p. 248). This dissertation addresses these research needs. It explores the role of different stakeholders, especially fans, in influencing decisions within football organizations and the respective implications.

4. Teaching notes

4.1 Learning objectives

This case study enables students to analyze a real-world example of stakeholder dynamics within a hybrid organization. It provides an understanding of how stakeholder management and organizational conflicts intersect in shaping strategic decisions. Through the analysis of the failed investor deal in the Bundesliga, students will gain insights into the complexities of organizations balancing economic goals with cultural values. The case also introduces students to key theoretical concepts, hybrid organizations and stakeholder theory, and challenges them to apply the respective frameworks to the case. After studying this case, students will be able to:

1. Understand the characteristics of the German football landscape and the organizational structure of the DFL as a hybrid organization.
2. Critically assess the conflicting goals of a hybrid organization and their implications for decision-making.
3. Apply theoretical frameworks such as Pache and Santos' (2010) conflict management model and stakeholder salience model to practical scenarios.
4. Evaluate the DFL's stakeholder management during the investor deal process.
5. Appreciate the importance of recognizing and engaging relevant stakeholders in decision-making processes.

4.2 Recommended readings

The literature needed to answer the questions is provided in the literature review, so additional readings are not strictly necessary. However, further exploration of the topics of hybrid organizations and stakeholder theory can be beneficial. In particular, the works of Pache and Santos (2010), 'When Worlds Collide: The Internal Dynamics of Organizational Responses to Conflicting Institutional Demands' and Freeman (1984), 'Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach' are recommended for deeper insights.

4.3 Class plan

Prior to working on the discussion questions, students should thoroughly read the case and the literature review. Additionally, students should review all appendices. The objective is to familiarize themselves with the developments depicted, as well as to get to know the names of the clubs and key characters. Moreover, the images of the protests are intended to provide a visual impression that sets the stage for the discussion questions. During the preparation, students are encouraged to reflect on the material and take initial notes.

The case is best taught in an interactive format, incorporating open discussions, individual analyses, and group discussions. A full lecture session is allocated for the discussion of the case. While the professor is facilitating the debate, the substantive input should come from the students. The structure of the lecture follows the order of the discussion questions (DQ).

Activity	**Time allocated**	**Teaching format**
Introduction / Learning objectives	5 minutes	-
DQ1: Deal motivations and financing model	10 minutes	Open discussion
DQ2: DFL as a hybrid organization	10 minutes	Open discussion
DQ3: Conflict characteristics	20 minutes	Individual analysis/ Open discussion
DQ4: Stakeholder classification and attribution	20 minutes	Individual analysis/ Open discussion
DQ5: Stakeholder management assessment	10 minutes	Group discussion/ Open discussion
Open topics / Extra time	5 minutes	-

Table 1: Recommended schedule for case discussion (own illustration)

4.4 Discussion questions

The discussion comprises five questions. The first question aims to determine whether the case and the initial situation have been understood. The second and third question focus on applying the theory of hybrid organizations and its respective model to the case. The last two questions deal with the application of the stakeholder theory and its practical models to the case and an evaluation of the stakeholder management in the case. The possible answers to the questions do not claim to be exhaustive. Students are encouraged to add further answer possibilities as long as they are reasonably justified.

4.5 Analysis

4.5.1 Discussion question 1 – Deal motivations and financing model

Questions: Why did the DFL push for such a deal? What were the motivations behind it? Why did the DFL choose this specific financing model?

The DFL pursued the private equity deal for several reasons. The primary reason was to maintain international competitiveness, concerning both sporting and economic competitiveness. The clubs agreed on the need for investment, particularly in the areas of internationalization and digitalization (Chapter 2.2). This was in particular regarding the Premier League, with its significant financial resources largely driven by club investors. In order to prevent this gap from widening, particularly in European sporting competition, the DFL discussed new financing options (Chapter 2.1). Another reason was the decline in national TV revenue during the current cycle and the clubs fears, that this trend could continue in the future. Furthermore, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic showed of the fragility of the clubs, and, as a result, raised the awareness for further financing options (Chapter 2.2).

The DFL management rejected a bank loan as a financing option due to its regular obligatory repayments and high interest charges, necessitating an alternative. As a result, the DFL preferred the model with a strategic partner as no repayments and interest payments would be required (Chapter 2.2).

4.5.2 Discussion question 2 – DFL as a hybrid organization

Questions: Explain why the DFL can be viewed as a hybrid organization and which conflicting goals the DFL is pursuing. How did the deal exacerbate the conflicting goals?

The DFL can be viewed as a hybrid organization because it must balance competing objectives, in this case, economic and cultural goals. On the one hand, the DFL operates as a commercial entity, aiming to generate as much revenue as possible for its clubs, particularly through the marketing of TV rights in Germany and abroad (Chapter 2.1). On the other hand, the DFL is an association composed of football clubs that are owned by their members who place great emphasis on preserving German football culture. This culture primarily includes maintaining the 50+1 rule, ensuring member influence within clubs through democratic structures (Chapter 2.1). This fact implies that German fans are generally sceptical of financial investors, as they often pursue purely financial interests in clubs. Consequently, the DFL must always consider the interests of clubs and their members alongside its economic objectives. For the DFL, achieving these competing goals is widely considered to be very difficult (Chapter 2.1). Thus, the DFL, with its challenge of achieving competing goals, has similar characteristics to organizations whose sectors are also considered hybrid, as the education and healthcare sector (Chapter 3.1.2).

The failed investor deal highlighted and exacerbated the conflict between these competing goals, serving as an extreme example. The league could have had potential incomes in the billions, which could have enabled significant investments, particularly to strengthen the Bundesliga's position in the international market. The deal aimed to secure financial resources by selling a share of future TV revenue to an investor, but it also came with conditions, such as granting the investor a seat on the new subsidiary's decision-making body. This arrangement, potentially would have allowed the investor to influence key decisions, raised concerns among fans and some clubs. Uncertainty prevailed about the nature of this influence and whether it could endanger the values of German football (Chapter 2.3). Speculation arose that an investor might support the abolition of the 50+1 rule, heightening fears about a potential loss of members influence. Besides the 50+1 rule, fans feared that investors might also be considering other aspects to financially boost the league and thus increase its revenue share. These aspects were the preservation of matchday fixtures, stadium ticket prices or the staging of the Supercup in Germany, among others (Chapter 2.3). The following massive fan protests underscored the conflict between financial objectives and the cultural values that characterize German football. The protests highlighted that, while the DFL's pursuit of financial goals is legitimate, these goals cannot be achieved at the expense of the values of German football culture (Chapter 2.1).

4.5.3 Discussion question 3 – Conflict characteristics

Questions: Using Pache and Santos' Model: What are the natural consequences of the underlying conflict? What is the level of internal representation? What reaction strategies of the DFL were to be expected? Explain.

The conflict in this process can be argued to be both a conflict over goals and a conflict over means, depending on the perspective. The conflict can be described as a conflict over goals due to the significantly differing objectives of the various stakeholders. Larger clubs primarily aimed to remain internationally competitive, which was the primary purpose of the proposed deal. In contrast, smaller clubs, especially second-division teams with no involvement in international competitions, had different priorities. These clubs primarily focused on securing promotion to the first division or avoiding relegation to the third division. For them, bringing an investor on board to strengthen international competitiveness was not a goal they supported (Chapter 2.3). The natural consequence of a conflict over goals is that such goals are typically less negotiable. The willingness to compromise is often low, and the outcomes of disagreements can be intense. If one opinion is more dominant within an organization, this often leads to behaviors such as defiance or manipulation by the stronger party. When opinions are equally balanced, it can result in organizational paralysis (Chapter 3.1.3). The DFL demonstrated a willingness to compromise by modifying the deal conditions after the first vote, particularly regarding the usage of capital. Initially, the proposal aimed to allocate money directly to the clubs based on a distribution key, which would have favored larger clubs over smaller ones. Following criticism from many smaller clubs regarding the distribution model, the idea of allocating funds directly to the clubs was abandoned in the second vote (Chapter 2.3).

On the other hand, the conflict can also be interpreted as a conflict over means. The natural consequence of a conflict over means is that some level of compromise is typically achievable, and the consequences of differing opinions are less severe than in conflicts over goals (Chapter 3.1.3). This compromise was evident in the deal process. Many small clubs discussed and criticized the distribution of capital in the first vote. After the DFL adjusted the respective conditions, some clubs voted in favor of the deal in the second vote. This change in the voting results shows that some clubs were concerned with the means and not the goal this deal tried to achieve (Chapter 2.3).

Regardless of whether the conflict is defined as one over goals or means, the internal representation of opinions was clearly multiple. While some of the larger clubs were strongly in favor of the deal, others, especially the smaller clubs and the fans, were clearly opposed. A few neutral opinions were also evident, reflected in clubs that abstained from voting. The power balance within the organization can be formally described as balanced, as the ‘one club, one vote‘ principle ensured equal representation for all clubs, regardless of their size or success (Chapter 2.1).

According to Pache and Santos’ model, the type of conflict influences the expected response strategies of the organization. In a conflict over means, compromise is the most likely outcome, provided that the power balance between stakeholders is relatively even (Table 4). In this case, the formal balance of power among clubs contributed to the likelihood of a compromise, which materialized in the form of the second vote with adjusted terms. This second round of voting, when some previously opposing clubs shifted their stance, highlights the expected response of compromise in a conflict over means. The observed reaction align with Pache and Santos' model, depending on how the conflict type is interpreted.

4.5.4 Discussion question 4 – Stakeholder classification and attribution

Before answering, please review Appendix 16 for additional relevant information.

Questions: Briefly explain the basics of stakeholder classification according to Freeman and the stakeholder salience model. For answering the following questions, please focus on the stakeholder groups clubs, fans and investors. How can these stakeholders groups be classified according to Freeman? According to the stakeholder salience model, which attributes can be assigned to the stakeholders? How can they be categorized based on their attributes? Creating a table may be useful to provide a structured overview.

To identify the involved stakeholders in the failed investor deal from the DFL perspective, different frameworks from the stakeholder theory can be apply. According to Freeman, stakeholders can be categorized as primary and secondary, as well as internal and external stakeholders. Primary stakeholders have a crucial, direct relationship with the organization, whereas secondary stakeholders have an indirect relationship but can still exert certain influence on the organization. Internal stakeholders are directly involved in the organization, while external stakeholders are outside the organization but can be affected by or influence the organization (Chapter 3.2.1). Furthermore, the stakeholder salience model is a model for classifying stakeholders based on the three attributes power, legitimacy and urgency. Power reflects the stakeholder's ability to influence organizational decisions. Legitimacy is indicating the justification of their demands. Urgency is describing the timeliness and importance of their concerns. Stakeholders are categorized as latent if one of the three attributes is pronounced, as expectant with two attributes pronounced, and definitive with all three attributes pronounced. The significance of the respective stakeholder increases as more attributes are pronounced (Chapter 3.2.2).

The following table provides a compact overview of a possible stakeholder classification based on the respective frameworks and models. The classifications are explained in detail below.

Stakeholder	Primary/Secondary	Internal/External	Attributes (Salience model)
Clubs	Primary	Internal	Power, Legitimacy, Urgency → Definitive stakeholders
Fans	Primary	External	Power, Legitimacy, Urgency → Definitive stakeholders
Investors	Primary / Secondary	External	(Power), Legitimacy → (Latent) Expectant stakeholders

Table 2: Stakeholder classification and attribution (own illustration)

Clubs are internal and primary stakeholders. The clubs are the shareholders of the DFL, which makes them an integral part of the organization (Chapter 2.1). Formally, the clubs had the sole power to decide the outcome of the process through their vote. They were therefore essential stakeholders in both voting processes. The clubs influenced the process not only formally through their vote but also by publicly opposing it after the second vote, with several club presidents calling for new elections. These statements reinforced the fan protests (Chapter 2.3). This influence shows that the attribute of power is pronounced. The legitimacy of their claims was also justified. A deal would have had direct effects on the financial situation of the clubs for the next 20 years. Supporting or opposing such an undertaking is legitimate. Urgency is also evident, as this deal would have an immediate and direct impact on the clubs (Appendix 16). With three distinct attributes, the clubs qualify as definitive stakeholders.

Fans are external stakeholders, since they are not a direct part of the organization and cannot formally influence decisions. This fact might lead to the assumption that fans should be classified as secondary rather than primary stakeholders. Regarding the investor deal, their ability to influence the process was evident. Fan protests were the primary reason the deal failed. The process showed that fans have substantial power, even if this power is not of a formal nature. This indicates the fans to be primary stakeholders. The demands of the fans to interfere in this deal were considered legitimate. The fans are the basis of the Bundesliga. If the DFL is planning changes for the Bundesliga on such a scale like in this case, fans are allowed to speak out, especially as these protests were peaceful. Since the vote was taking place soon, the fans' concerns had to be seen as urgent. Trying to undo a deal that has already been implemented would probably have been pointless. Acting in this moment was the only option for the fans

(Appendix 16). Therefore, fans exhibit all three attributes and, alongside the clubs, qualify as definitive stakeholders.

Investors are not a direct part of the DFL, meaning they can be considered external stakeholders. However, the investors were an essential component of the deal, as an agreement would not have been possible without their involvement and the financial resources they were prepared to provide. This is the reason why investors can be classified as primary and secondary stakeholders. On the one hand, the power of the investors can be regarded as high, as they were an integral part of the deal. At the same time, they were apparently unable to influence the course of the process. At no time did the investors initiate any measures to influence the process. The perspective determines whether the investors could be said to have any power. The investors' intention to pursue such a deal was considered legitimate, as these deals are an integral part of the business model of private equity firms. Following this business model is a legitimate course of action. However, no urgency existed for this undertaking. Private equity firms have diverse investment opportunities, and the urgency to invest in the Bundesliga was not considered pressing (Appendix 16). In summary, investors exhibit power depending on the perspective, legitimacy, and a lack substantial urgency. Therefore, investors can be classified as latent or expectant stakeholder.

This classification implies, that the DFL, according to the stakeholder salience model theory, should prioritize clubs and fans in their stakeholder management, since these two stakeholder groups have the highest number of distinct attributes.

4.5.5 Discussion question 5 – Stakeholder management assessment

Questions: How can the stakeholder management from the DFL during the process be assessed? What were the positive aspects, what could have been improved? What measures could the DFL have used to increase the likelihood of a successful deal?

The clubs criticized the DFL for not being transparent enough during the initial voting process. Not all clubs were aware that the investor had apparently been given a veto right over important decisions. The clubs also had the impression that the DFL deliberately did not want to provide comprehensive information in order to avoid major discussions with the aim of pushing the deal through quickly. Following criticism from smaller clubs regarding the initial distribution key, which favored larger, more successful clubs, the DFL abandoned this approach in the second proposal. Here, the DFL heard and implemented the interests of stakeholders.

Overall, the DFL intensified the communication with the clubs in the second process. The regional conferences held increased transparency and ensured greater involvement of the clubs in the decision-making processes (Chapter 2.3).

The DFL should have involved the clubs more intensively in the processes from the outset. This should have been an iterative process in which the DFL is in regular exchange with the clubs. This was not possible in the first process due to the time constraints with which the DFL acted. The small clubs could have been involved more intensively from the outset, for example in the existing committees. First-division clubs were considerably overrepresented in the working group and on the management board (Chapter 2.3). A more even distribution of first and second-division clubs might have helped here. To this end, all relevant information should be shared. Information such as the veto right of the investor should have been shared transparently. The importance for hybrid organizations of fully disclosing all relevant information and knowledge to the stakeholders, was already shown by scholars focusing on other hybrid sectors (Chapter 3.1.2). Feedback from the clubs should also have been obtained and integrated in the run-up to the first vote. This would have made it possible, for example, to avoid discussions about the distribution key.

Both, the DFL and the fans considered the DFL's stakeholder management regarding the fans as a major weakness in the process. The fans were left out at many points in the decision-making process, which in retrospect was seen as a substantial mistake by the DFL. The fans were not involved in the initial decision-making process and were not adequately informed during the first vote. The fans described this as particularly regrettable because communication between the DFL and the fans has visibly improved in recent years. The fact that the fans were apparently not seen as a relevant stakeholder by the DFL disappointed the fan representatives Communication with the fans has changed for the better during the second vote. The Q&A the DFL provided addressed the fans' concerns an investor could approach certain financial levers. The DFL also extended invitations to talks with fan representatives (Chapter 2.3). However, some fans considered these invitations from the DFL for discussions to be too late. The DFL emphasized that they were under time pressure to conclude the deal. The time pressure was to conclude the investor deal before the next TV rights tender. The aim was to give the rights buyers an understanding of the expected future positive development of the Bundesliga through the investments made. This time pressure prevented the DFL from realizing more extensive communication measures.

The literature shows that fans are a key stakeholder in football. Their passion towards their clubs is often expressed through a high level of engagement with issues that fans consider important. This engagement can lead to influencing decisions made in football. This engagement is more likely in the absence of prior communication or participation opportunities. The case of the massive fan involvement in this process confirms these theoretical findings (Chapter 3.2.5). This apparent lack of classification of the fans as relevant stakeholder is particularly interesting, as it is generally known how skeptical the German football landscape is towards investors (Chapter 2.1). The DFL could have involved the fans in the decision-making processes from the outset in order to share information. As with the clubs, this should have happened iteratively. The DFL could have informed fans from the outset, for example in workshops, and invited them to co-determination committees in order to adequately represent their voices (Chapter 3.2.4). This importance for hybrid organizations of actively involving stakeholders in decision-making processes, was also demonstrated by scientists conducting research in other hybrid sectors (Chapter 3.1.2).

The DFL's interaction with the investors also revealed areas for improvement. Blackstone withdrew from the bidding process due to DFL's lack of a decisive response to the fan protests. This gave the impression that the DFL was not fully supporting the deal (Chapter 2.3). Organizations demonstrating determination in such conflict situations can be important to give the stakeholders, in this case the investors, the feeling of continuing to support the deal and thus continuing to support the investors' interests (Chapter 3.2.4).

The case shows that the fans as a stakeholder were prioritized far less by the DFL than they should have been according to the stakeholder salience model. Prior attribution of the stakeholders could have helped the DFL to prioritize the fans appropriately.

Overall, the DFL fell short in managing with the stakeholder groups, clubs, fans and investors. Communication and transparency with the clubs was inadequate, especially during the first voting process. The DFL apparently did not see fans as relevant stakeholders, equally to clubs and did not integrate them into the decision-making process to any significant extent. The communication with the fans, which increased towards the second process, came too late. After the protests began, the DFL did not convey to one of the potential investor that it was still clearly behind the deal. The stakeholder management has improved from the first to the second process. Overall, however, this improvement was not enough to prevent the deal from failing.

5. Conclusion

This case study explored the failed investor deal in the Bundesliga. The deal aimed to secure substantial financial investments, particularly to enhance the Bundesliga's international competitiveness. However, protests from key stakeholder groups, particularly fans, ultimately led to its collapse. As a recent example from the business world, the case highlighted how inadequate communication, lack of transparency, misjudgment of stakeholder relevance, and insufficient stakeholder participation in decision-making contributed to the deal's collapse. It also underscored the substantial role of fans as key stakeholders in German football, whose strong emotional connection to their clubs enables them to significantly influence organizational decisions.

By applying theoretical frameworks such as the hybrid organization framework by Pache and Santos and the stakeholder salience model, the analysis demonstrated the complexities of managing diverse stakeholder groups in an emotionally charged environment. This part of the case also serves as a valuable learning tool for students, offering a real-world example of how theoretical frameworks can be applied to analyze and address practical management challenges. Moreover, the dissertation reinforces the applicability of the chosen models.

While this case provides valuable insights, its focus on the Bundesliga and reliance on seven expert interviews limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could explore stakeholder management challenges in other leagues or industries and examine strategies for integrating fan engagement into decision-making processes. Additionally, revisiting the DFL in a few years could provide valuable insights into how the organization’s stakeholder management practices have evolved over time and whether lessons from this failed deal have been successfully implemented.

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List of appendices

Appendix

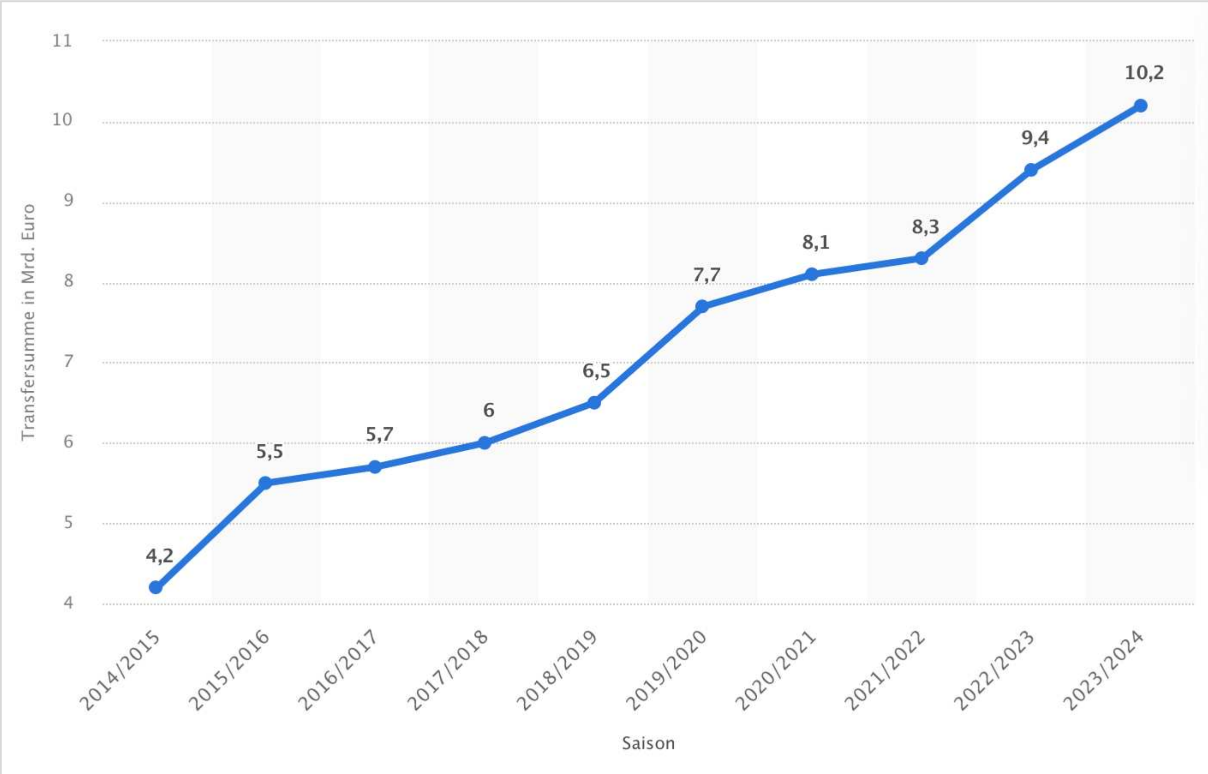

Figure 1: Global transfer expenditure for football players from the 2014/2015 to 2023/2024 season (in billion euros) (Statista, 2024b)

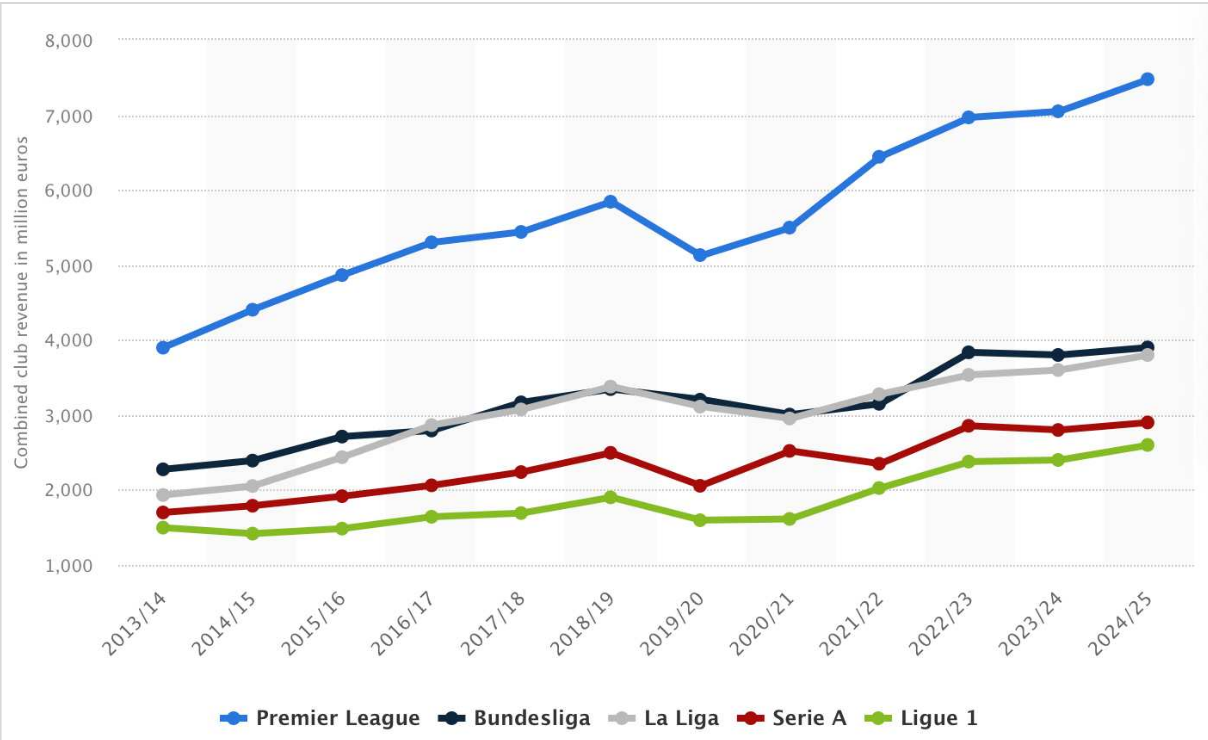

Figure 2: Combined club revenue development of the five largest European leagues from the 2013/14 to 2023/24 season, with a forecast for 2024/25 (Statista, 2024a)

PL.		TEAM	SP.	S	U	N	TORE	DIFF.	PUNKTE
1	—	Bayer 04 Leverkusen	34	28	6	0	89:24	65	90
2	↑	VfB Stuttgart	34	23	4	7	78:39	39	73
3	↓	Bayern München (M)	34	23	3	8	94:45	49	72
4	—	RB Leipzig (P)	34	19	8	7	77:39	38	65
5	—	Borussia Dortmund	34	18	9	7	68:43	25	63
6	—	Eintracht Frankfurt	34	11	14	9	51:50	1	47
7	—	TSG Hoffenheim	34	13	7	14	66:66	0	46
8	↑	1. FC Heidenheim (N)	34	10	12	12	50:55	-5	42
9	↑	Werder Bremen	34	11	9	14	48:54	-6	42
10	↓	SC Freiburg	34	11	9	14	45:58	-13	42
11	↓	FC Augsburg	34	10	9	15	50:60	-10	39
12	—	VfL Wolfsburg	34	10	7	17	41:56	-15	37
13	↑	1. FSV Mainz 05	34	7	14	13	39:51	-12	35
14	↓	Bor. Mönchengladbach	34	7	13	14	56:67	-11	34
15	↑	1. FC Union Berlin	34	9	6	19	33:58	-25	33
16	↓	VfL Bochum	34	7	12	15	42:74	-32	33
17	—	1. FC Köln	34	5	12	17	28:60	-32	27
18	—	SV Darmstadt 98 (N)	34	3	8	23	30:86	-56	17

Figure 3: Final table of the Bundesliga of the 2023/24 season (Kicker, 2024a)

PL.		TEAM	SP.	S	U	N	TORE	DIFF.	PUNKTE
1	—	FC St. Pauli	34	20	9	5	62:36	26	69
2	—	Holstein Kiel	34	21	5	8	65:39	26	68
3	—	Fortuna Düsseldorf	34	18	9	7	72:40	32	63
4	—	Hamburger SV	34	17	7	10	64:44	20	58
5	—	Karlsruher SC	34	15	10	9	68:48	20	55
6	—	Hannover 96	34	13	13	8	59:44	15	52
7	—	SC Paderborn 07	34	15	7	12	54:54	0	52
8	↑	SpVgg Greuther Fürth	34	14	8	12	50:49	1	50
9	↓	Hertha BSC (A)	34	13	9	12	69:59	10	48
10	—	FC Schalke 04 (A)	34	12	7	15	53:60	-7	43
11	—	SV Elversberg (N)	34	12	7	15	49:63	-14	43
12	—	1. FC Nürnberg	34	11	7	16	43:64	-21	40
13	↑	1. FC Kaiserslautern	34	11	6	17	59:64	-5	39
14	↓	1. FC Magdeburg	34	9	11	14	46:54	-8	38
15	↓	Eintracht Braunschweig	34	11	5	18	37:53	-16	38
16	—	SV Wehen Wiesbaden (N)	34	8	8	18	36:50	-14	32
17	—	Hansa Rostock	34	9	4	21	30:57	-27	31
18	—	VfL Osnabrück (N)	34	6	10	18	31:69	-38	28

Figure 4: Final table of the Bundesliga 2 of the 2023/24 season (Kicker, 2024b)

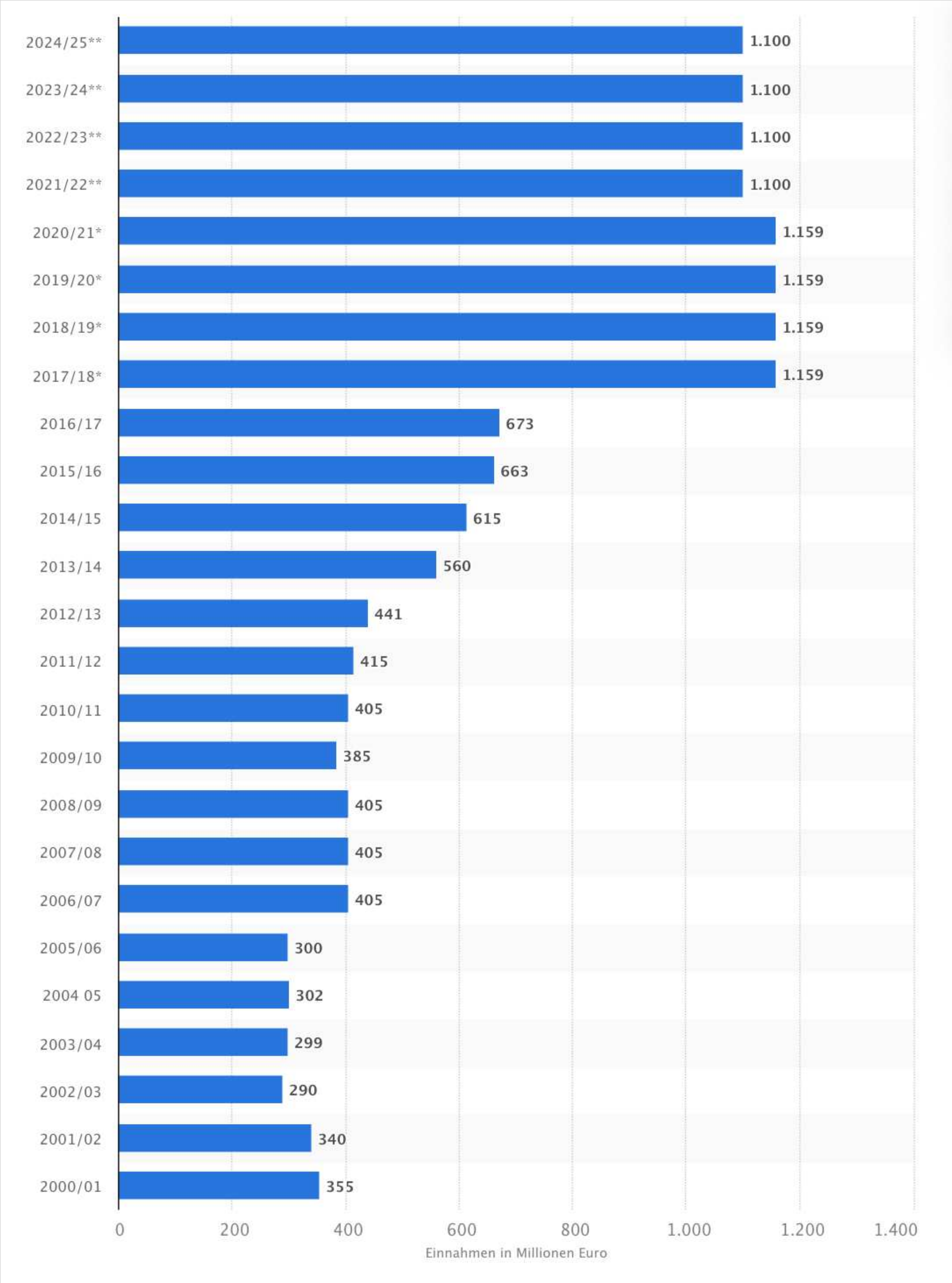

Figure 5: Development of revenue from the marketing of national TV rights in Germany from the 2000/01 to 2024/25 season (Statista, 2024c)

Figure 6: Axel Hellmann, Hans-Joachim Watzke and Oliver Leki (from left to right) (Rundschau-online, 2023)

Figure 7: Steffen Merkel and Marc Lenz (from left to right) (WEB, 2024)

Figure 8: Match interruption due to tennis balls on the pitch in Bochum (RTL, 2024)

Figure 9: Protest banners in Dortmund (Fußballeck, 2023)

Figure 10: Remote-controlled cars with smoke grenades in Rostock (RP-Online, 2024)

Figure 11: Bayern Munich fans protesting "No to the investor!" (ZDF, 2024)

Figure 12: Remote-controlled airplane in Freiburg (Sportbuzzer, 2024a)

Figure 13: Hannover 96 fans with a message to potential investors: "Blackstone & CVC - Hands off our football!" (NDR.de, 2024)

Figure 14: Union Berlin fans after the deal officially failed: "Game, Set and Match!" (Sportbuzzer, 2024b)

Football league	Amount paid by investor	Investors' revenue share	Duration
Germany (1st vote)	€2B	12.5%	20 years
Germany (2nd vote)	€800M - €1B	6% - 9%	20 years
Spain	€1.9B	8.25%	50 years
France	€1.3B	13%	Permanent

Table 3: Overview of the deal conditions in Germany, Spain and France (own illustration)

DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT		PREFERRED RESPONSE STRATEGIES			
Nature	**Representation**	**Compromise**	**Avoidance**	**Defiance**	**Manipulation**
Means	Absence	**High**	**High**	Low	Low
Means	Single	Low	**High**	**High**	Low
Means	Multiple	**High** (balanced power)	Low	Low	**High** (unbalanced power)
Goals	Absence	Low	**High**	**High**	Low
Goals	Single	Low	**High**	**High**	**High**
Goals	Multiple	Low	Low	Low	**High***

** The more balanced the power structure the higher the likelihood of organizational paralysis or breakup*

Table 4: Model of responses to conflicting demands (Pache & Santos, 2010, p. 35)

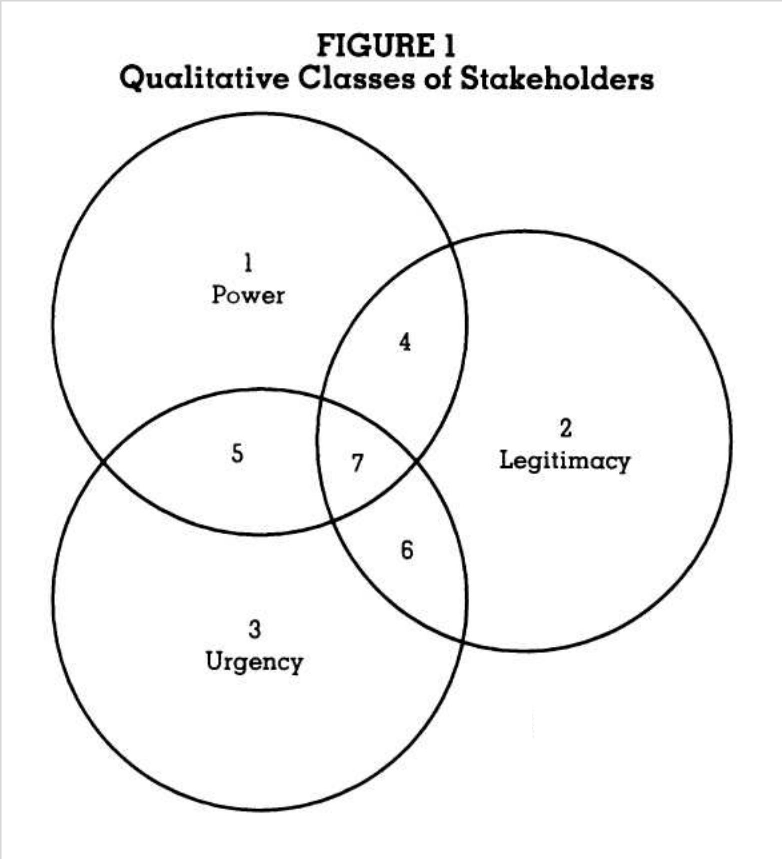

Figure 15: Qualitative classes of stakeholders (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997, p. 872)

Expert #	Position / Expertise	Date	Format	Duration
1	Chief Financial Officer of medium-sized company that was the main sponsor of a former Bundesliga team for several years / Active member of Bundesliga club	19.01.25	Online	52:20 min
2	DFL employee / No further information due to high confidentiality	23.01.25	Face-to-face	46:25 min
3	Head of a consulting and research institution specializing in the German football business / Member of the board of trustees of a national football association	31.01.25	Online	53:39 min
4	DFL employee / No further information due to high confidentiality	12.02.25	Face-to-face	41:10 min
5	Journalist specialising in German professional football / Presenter of german football shows on public television	12.02.25	Online	41:56 min
6	Chairman of an umbrella fan organisation that very actively influenced the process / Public appearances during the process	13.02.25	Online	59:18 min
7	DFL employee / No further information due to high confidentiality	16.02.25	Online	42:55 min

Table 5: Profiles of the interviewed experts (own illustration)

Additional insights from expert interviews

In addition to the findings from the expert interviews already integrated in the case, further insights are provided here that relate specifically to the case regarding the stakeholder management. These information are relevant for answering the teaching notes. The majority of the experts, both on the part of the DFL and on the external side, agreed on the following points:

The experts consensus was that the clubs' power to influence the process was high. The clubs were formally the only stakeholders who could vote on the decision. Furthermore, the legitimacy was given. Clubs expressed their opinions, which was in principle perfectly acceptable, regardless of whether the deal was favored or not. Furthermore, a certain urgency existed. Clubs who were in favor of the deal felt that such a deal should happen now and not in a few years' time, as the investments that should be initiated now would also take time to work.

The fans also had a great deal of power, even if it was not of a formal nature. They showed their power through the protests and the fact that the process was terminated due to the protests. Their demands were also considered legitimate, as the deal would have directly affected their clubs. As members are indirect shareholders of their clubs, which makes their demands legitimate from a legal point of view. The urgency was given as well, as it was necessary to protest in this very moment, and not after a deal had been successfully implemented. In this case, it would have been more difficult to reverse a deal.

The investor's concern to push for such a deal was seen as clearly legitimate, as this is a normal business for a private equity investor. An urgency was not given. From the investor's point of view, a deal could presumably still be implemented, for example in five years' time. Disagreement prevailed over the power of the investor. On the one hand, a potential investor was absolutely necessary for the implementation of such a deal. Without an investor, a deal would not have come about. At the same time, the investors were apparently unable to influence the process in a positive way. No public statements or similar measures were taken that could have prevented the failure. Accordingly, the investors' power is a question of perspective.

Appendix 16: Additional insights from expert interviews