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Guidelines for the Management for Swimming Association of Shenyang City in Liaoning Province, People's Republic of China

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Abstract

Background and Aims: Swimming supports population health and competitive development, yet safe and effective delivery depends on facility access, qualified coaches, and consistent organisational management. This study aimed (1) to develop evidence-informed management guidelines for the Shenyang Swimming Association (Shenyang City, Liaoning Province, PR China) and (2) to propose practical strategies to strengthen association operations using a POIC (Planning–Organising–Implementing–Controlling) structure.

Methodology: A qualitative-dominant guideline-development design was used. Evidence was obtained through document review, POIC-based structured interviews with eight purposively selected experts, IOC validation of the interview guide by three specialists (IOC = 0.67–1.00), a stakeholder suitability assessment (n = 639; population N = 808) using a 5-point rating scale, and a focus group with ten stakeholders to confirm feasibility and contextual fit. Qualitative data were analysed using POIC-aligned content analysis. Ordinal suitability ratings were summarised using Median (Mdn) and Interquartile Range (IQR) to determine agreement and practical suitability.

Results: Interview synthesis generated 44 draft statements, refined and validated into a final 38-item POIC guideline model comprising Planning (9), Organising (10), Implementing (10), and Controlling (9). Domain-level suitability showed consistently high endorsement: Planning (Mdn = 4, IQR = 1), Organising (Mdn = 4, IQR = 1), Implementing (Mdn = 4, IQR = 1), and Controlling (Mdn = 4, IQR = 1). Highest-rated priorities concerned safety governance and incident procedures, coach development and supervision, facility and lane-time coordination, and structured athlete pathways; comparatively lower agreement related to budget expansion and multi-agency coordination.

Conclusion: The 38-item POIC model offers a coherent, implementable management guideline for municipal swimming associations and a basis for strengthening governance, service consistency, and continuous improvement aligned with national fitness goals and for guiding future evaluation and transfer.

Keywords: Swimming; Sport Management; POIC; Management Guidelines

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Introduction

Regular physical activity is a cornerstone of population health because it reduces noncommunicable disease risk, supports mental well-being, and improves physical functioning across the lifespan. Consistent with this evidence base, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that adults accumulate 150–300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week (or 75–150 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity), alongside muscle-strengthening activities on two or more days per week (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). Despite widespread recognition of these benefits, many countries—including China—continue to face challenges related to insufficient activity and rising sedentary time. Recent national surveillance in China reports substantial levels of insufficient physical activity and highlights sedentary, screen-based behaviors as an ongoing concern, reinforcing the need for sustained and system-level promotion of active lifestyles (Ouyang et al., 2025).

In response, China has advanced a policy agenda that positions physical activity as part of national development and public health modernization. The "Healthy China 2030" strategy frames health promotion and healthy lifestyles as national priorities, and later implementation pathways (e.g., the Healthy China Initiative 2019–2030) further operationalize targets through coordinated actions across sectors (Jiang et al., 2021). Complementing this long-term direction, the State Council's National Fitness Plan (2021–2025) emphasizes strengthening national fitness services, expanding access to facilities and venues, improving the organization and delivery of fitness activities and guidance, and developing governance mechanisms that support higher-quality public sport services (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2021). Taken together, these initiatives highlight a clear logic: improvements in participation depend not only on individual motivation, but also on the availability, quality, and management of sport systems and organizations that enable consistent engagement. Within this national context, swimming is a particularly relevant form of exercise for both broad participation and athletic development. Swimming provides a whole-body aerobic stimulus and is widely recognized for improving cardiovascular fitness (Lazar et al., 2013). Moreover, water buoyancy can reduce weight-bearing forces and joint loading relative to many land-based activities, which helps explain why aquatic exercise is often considered attractive across age groups and physical conditions (Kutzner et al., 2017). Population evidence also links swimming participation to favorable health outcomes; for example, cohort findings indicate lower all-cause mortality risk among swimmers compared with sedentary men and some other activity patterns (Chase et al., 2008). Beyond health promotion, swimming is also a performance-oriented sport requiring systematic coaching, safety standards, facility access, and long-term athlete development pathways—conditions that depend heavily on the quality of organizational management.

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Accordingly, the effectiveness of local swimming associations is a strategic lever for translating policy ambitions into sustainable practice. Well-managed associations coordinate resources (e.g., facilities, budgets, equipment), develop and support coaches, implement athlete development systems, and establish governance processes that protect quality and safety. From an organizational development perspective, improving such systems involves planned change—diagnosing constraints, aligning structures and roles with strategic goals, and institutionalizing routines for monitoring and continuous improvement (Cummings & Worley, 2019). In sport organizations, these processes are commonly operationalized through core management functions—planning, organizing, leading/implementing, and controlling/evaluating—so that strategy is linked to day-to-day delivery and measurable outcomes (Chelladurai, 2014). Therefore, this study develops management guidelines for the Shenyang Swimming Association in Liaoning Province, China. By identifying operational issues and translating evidence-informed management principles into practical guidelines, the study aims to strengthen organizational effectiveness, improve program quality and delivery consistency, and support both mass participation and competitive outcomes aligned with China's national fitness and health agenda.

Objectives

1. To develop evidence-informed management guidelines for the Shenyang Swimming Association in Shenyang City, Liaoning Province, People's Republic of China.

2. To propose practical strategies for strengthening the Association's operations and services in Shenyang City, Liaoning Province, People's Republic of China

Literature Review

Swimming is a technically demanding and safety-critical sport that depends on effective coaching, reliable facility access, and consistent programme delivery. Consequently, swimming associations require clear management guidelines to translate strategic goals—such as participation growth, athlete development, and safety—into daily operations. A management-functions perspective supports this need by linking organisational objectives to operational processes through planning, organising, implementation/leadership, and control/evaluation (Chelladurai, 2014; Robbins & Coulter, 2021).

1. Theory of Management Function Concepts for Swimming (POIC)

Management-function theory explains how organisations convert goals into coordinated action through systematic planning, resource arrangement, execution, and performance control. Early administrative theory identified planning and organising as core managerial responsibilities applicable across organisational contexts (Fayol, 1949/1916). Contemporary management

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literature commonly consolidates managerial work into an iterative cycle—planning, organising, leading, and controlling—emphasising alignment between strategic intent and operational delivery (Robbins & Coulter, 2021). Within sport organisations, this framework is particularly appropriate because sport services are delivered through interconnected subsystems, including facilities, financial resources, human resources (coaches and support staff), event delivery, and stakeholder relationships. From a systems perspective, effective sport management requires these subsystems to be aligned so that objectives are implemented consistently and evaluated against clear standards (Chelladurai, 2014). In this study, POIC (Planning–Organising–Implementing–Controlling) is used as a practical adaptation of the broader POLC logic. Planning focuses on targets, safety and quality standards, and pathway design; organising clarifies roles, processes, and resource allocation; implementing translates plans into coordinated coaching and operational delivery; and controlling provides monitoring, evaluation, and corrective action to strengthen accountability and continuous improvement.

2. Physical Fitness for Swimming

Swimming performance and participation outcomes depend on the integrated contribution of physiological capacity, technical efficiency, and event-specific demands. A key insight from swimming science is that fitness improvements must be interpreted alongside biomechanics and efficiency, because performance gains occur when swimmers can convert metabolic energy into propulsion with minimal technical deterioration under fatigue (Barbosa et al., 2010). Consequently, training requires systematic development of aerobic and anaerobic capacities alongside technical refinement, with conditioning aligned to race-relevant intensity profiles. In addition, neuromuscular qualities—particularly strength and power—contribute to critical determinants such as starts and turns. Evidence from a narrative review indicates that appropriately designed strength training can support swimming performance when it is periodised and integrated with in-water training demands rather than implemented as an isolated conditioning activity (Wirth et al., 2022). At the association level, these findings imply that “physical fitness for swimming” should be operationalised through coherent training standards, coach education, age-appropriate progression, and routine monitoring practices that safeguard athlete welfare while supporting long-term participation and performance.

3. Model Building Methods and POLC Theory

Developing implementable management guidelines requires explicit model-building methods so that concepts are coherent, actionable, and suitable for evaluation. Conceptual framework development involves systematically identifying and synthesising key concepts into an integrated structure that can guide decision-making and practice (Jabareen, 2009). In applied organisational research, model development can be strengthened through iterative processes

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that refine constructs and relationships using empirical evidence, an approach consistent with case-based theory building (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Where guideline content depends on practice expertise and contextual judgement, structured expert consensus techniques—most commonly the Delphi method—are widely used to converge expert opinion through iterative feedback and revision (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). In addition, logic models are frequently used to connect inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes, strengthening implementation planning and evaluation by specifying the programme's results chain (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004). Within this methodological context, POLC theory (planning, organising, leading, controlling) provides the organising architecture for the guideline model by specifying how strategies are designed, operationalised, delivered, and evaluated in a continuous improvement cycle (Robbins & Coulter, 2021). In the present study, the closely aligned POIC structure is used to ensure that guideline components are logically distributed across planning (direction and standards), organising (structures and resources), implementing (delivery mechanisms), and controlling (monitoring and corrective action). This integration ensures the guideline set is not merely descriptive but operational, measurable, and ready for adoption in swimming association contexts.

Conceptual Framework

This study adopts the management-functions framework POIC (Planning, Organizing, Implementing, and Controlling) to guide the development of management guidelines for the Shenyang Swimming Association, Liaoning Province, China. Planning defines objectives and standards; organizing allocates roles and resources; implementing ensures coordinated delivery of programs and services; and controlling establishes monitoring and continuous improvement mechanisms to sustain quality, safety, and accountability (Chelladurai, 2014; Robbins & Coulter, 2021). (Figure 1)

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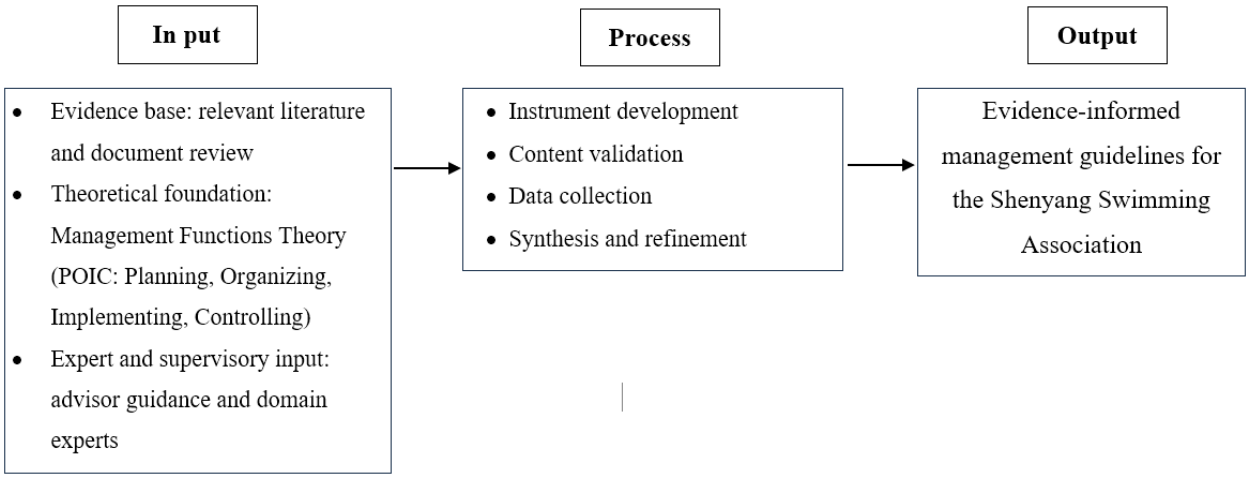


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative-dominant, guideline-development design to examine current management practices and to formulate evidence-informed management guidelines for the Shenyang Swimming Association, Shenyang City, Liaoning Province, People's Republic of China. The study was structured using the management functions framework (POIC: Planning, Organising, Implementing, and Controlling), which guided instrument development, data collection, and synthesis of the proposed guideline components.

Population and Sample

The population consisted of stakeholders directly involved in the Association's operation and service delivery (N = 808), including association executives, head coaches, swimming instructors/coaches, swimmers/athletes, and relevant associated persons. For the stakeholder confirmation stage, the Krejcie and Morgan approach was used to estimate the minimum sample size required for representativeness; for a population close to 800, the minimum recommended sample is approximately 260–261 (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). To strengthen subgroup representation, the study used stratified sampling and collected data from a substantially larger sample (n = 639), distributed as follows: association presidents/executives (10), head coaches (10), swimming instructors/coaches (150), swimmers/athletes (334), and related persons (135).

Experts for Instrument Validation

Experts for interviews (Round 1). A purposive expert sample (n = 8) was selected based on direct experience with swimming-association management and competitive swimming development: association president/executive (1), head coaches (2), swimming coaches/instructors (2), champion athletes (2), and a current athlete (1).

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Experts for IOC validation. Before fieldwork, the interview protocol was examined for content relevance and alignment with study objectives using an Index of Item–Objective Congruence (IOC) procedure by an expert panel (n = 3) representing complementary expertise areas: swimming association management, head coaching/leadership, and champion athlete experience (Rovinelli & Hambleton, 1976).

Experts for focus group confirmation. A focus group (n = 10) was convened to confirm the feasibility, coherence, and contextual fit of the proposed guideline. It comprised two representatives from each group: association executives/presidents (2), head coaches (2), swimming coaches (2), champion athletes (2), and current swimmers (2). This structure is consistent with focus group guidance that emphasises purposive composition and topic-relevant experience (Krueger & Casey, 2014).

Trustworthiness criteria

To strengthen qualitative rigor, trustworthiness was addressed using credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Strategies included: (a) triangulation of sources (documents, interviews, focus group, stakeholder ratings), (b) peer debriefing with the advisor during instrument and codebook refinement, (c) maintaining an audit trail (coding notes, revisions, decision logs), and (d) providing a thick description of context and stakeholder roles to support transferability.

Data Collection

Data collection proceeded in sequential stages: 1) Document and literature review to establish operational context and initial POIC indicators. 2) IOC content validation of the interview protocol, revising items to ensure alignment with POIC objectives (Rovinelli & Hambleton, 1977). 3) Round 1: Expert interviews (n = 8) to elicit current practices, constraints, and recommended management actions within each POIC domain. 4) Drafting guideline statements from interview findings and administering the stakeholder questionnaire (n = 639) to assess appropriateness and practical suitability. 5) Focus group confirmation (n = 10) to resolve ambiguities, prioritize actions, and finalize the guideline structure.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis. Interview and focus group data were analysed using qualitative content analysis combining deductive coding (POIC domains) and inductive coding for context-specific subthemes (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The coding procedure followed four explicit steps: 1) Preparation: audio management and verbatim transcription; repeated reading for familiarisation. 2) Open coding: initial coding within POIC domains; creation of a preliminary codebook. 3) Categorisation and abstraction: merging codes into subthemes and actionable guideline components; mapping

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to POIC. 4) Verification: peer review of code definitions, comparison of interpretations, and finalisation of thematic outputs.

Quantitative analysis. Stakeholder questionnaire ratings were summarised using Median (Mdn) and Interquartile Range (IQR) to represent central tendency and agreement for ordinal data. Descriptive summaries supported decisions about retaining and refining guideline statements, and interpretation bands were applied to present the practical meaning of rating levels for guideline refinement.

Results

This study developed and confirmed management guidelines for the Shenyang Swimming Association, Shenyang City, Liaoning Province, People's Republic of China, using the POIC management functions (Planning, Organizing, Implementing, Controlling). Results are presented in five parts: Part 1: Participant Characteristics, Part 2: Instrument Validation and Round 1 Expert Interviews, Part 3: Round 2 Suitability Assessment, Part 4: Focus Group Confirmation, and Part 5: Finalized Management Guidelines.

Part 1: Participant Characteristics

Expert interview panel (n = 8). Eight experts were purposively selected to reflect leadership, coaching systems, and athlete-performance perspectives: association executives (2), head coaches (2), swimming coaches/instructors (2), a champion athlete (1), and current athletes (1). Suitability assessment sample (n = 639; population N = 808). Stakeholders assessed guideline suitability across five groups: association presidents/executives (10), head coaches (10), swimming instructors/coaches (150), swimmers/athletes (334), and related persons (135) (total n = 639). Focus group (n = 10). Two representatives from each stakeholder category participated: executives (2), head coaches (2), coaches/instructors (2), champion athletes (2), and swimmers (2).

Part 2: Instrument Validation and Round 1 Expert Interviews

IOC content validation (n = 3). The POIC-based interview protocol was reviewed by three experts. IOC values ranged from 0.67 to 1.00, indicating acceptable alignment with objectives. Minor revisions improved clarity and reduced redundancy. Round 1 expert interviews (n = 8). Interviews produced a structured set of management issues and recommended actions within each POIC domain. The findings were synthesized into 44 draft guideline statements (Planning = 10, Organizing = 12, Implementing = 11, Controlling = 11). After internal editing to remove overlap and improve operational wording (without changing meaning), the pool was refined to 38 statements for suitability assessment (Planning = 9, Organizing = 10, Implementing = 10, Controlling = 9).

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Part 3: Round 2 Suitability Assessment

The 38 guideline statements were evaluated using a 5-point rating scale. Consistent with the methodology, results were summarized using mean (M) and standard deviation (SD). Overall, the guideline set was rated as highly appropriate, with strong agreement across domains: 1) Planning: M = 4.32, SD = 0.55 2) Organizing: M = 4.28, SD = 0.57 3) Implementing: M = 4.35, SD = 0.53 4) Controlling: M = 4.26, SD = 0.58 5) Overall (38 items): M = 4.30, SD = 0.56 Item-level patterns were also plausible and internally consistent. The highest-rated items typically addressed (a) safety governance and incident procedures, (b) coach development/CPD and supervision, (c) facility and lane-time coordination, and (d) clear competition and athlete pathway planning. Items with relatively lower—but still acceptable—means most often concern budget expansion and multi-agency coordination, reflecting perceived implementation complexity rather than disagreement with the principle.

Part 4: Focus Group Confirmation

The focus group confirmed that the POIC structure was coherent and suitable for association operations. Participants agreed that the guideline statements were feasible when implemented with phased priorities—beginning with safety, facility coordination, and core coaching systems, followed by expanded stakeholder partnerships and resource development. The focus group's recommendations focused on clarifying responsibility (who leads/supports each item), standardizing terminology (e.g., "program quality review," "incident reporting"), and specifying evidence for monitoring (e.g., audit logs, attendance records, competition reports). These refinements improved usability without changing the 38-item structure.

Part 5: Finalized Management Guidelines

Following suitability assessment and focus group validation, the guidelines were finalized as a 38-item POIC model: 1) Planning (9 items): goals/targets, annual plans, safety planning, facility access planning, competition calendar planning, coach development planning, athlete pathway planning, resource planning, stakeholder communication planning. 2) Organizing (10 items): structure/roles, workflows, lane-time/facility coordination, equipment readiness, staffing/coach assignment, program structure (learn-to-swim to performance), athlete registration/selection, event organization procedures, budget/resource allocation, safeguarding system organization. 3) Implementing (10 items): training delivery progression, coaching supervision, safety protocol implementation, communication routines, event delivery (time trials/competitions), CPD mentoring delivery, athlete support delivery, operational problem-solving routines, stakeholder engagement implementation, performance pathway implementation. 4) Controlling (9 items): incident monitoring, program quality review, athlete progress tracking, coach performance/CPD

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monitoring, compliance checks, budget tracking, KPI evaluation, stakeholder feedback systems, continuous improvement actions.

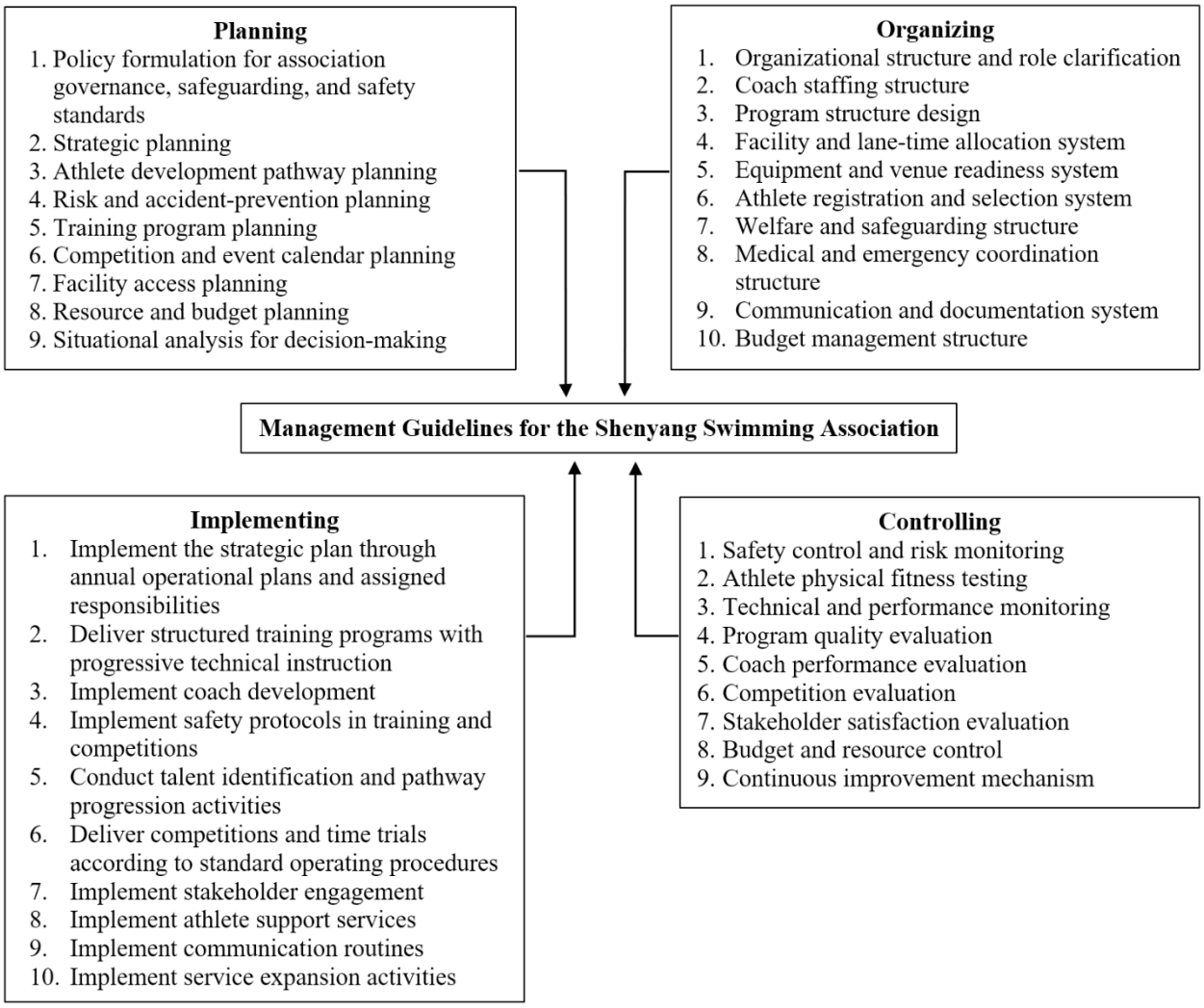


Figure Conceptual Framework Aligned with Management Guidelines (POIC Format)

Discussion

This study set out to (1) develop evidence-informed management guidelines for the Shenyang Swimming Association and (2) propose practical strategies to strengthen association operations and service delivery using a POIC structure. Overall, the findings indicate that a POIC-based guideline model is coherent and implementable for swimming association management because it links strategic intent (participation growth, athlete development, and safety governance) to operational systems and measurable control mechanisms. This aligns with sport-

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organization perspectives emphasizing the interdependence of planning, organizational structure, delivery processes, and evaluation for sustainable sport development (Chelladurai, 2014; Robbins & Coulter, 2021).

1. Planning

The results support planning as a foundational management function because it establishes direction, standards, and priorities that shape downstream operations. In management-function theory, planning includes goal setting, policy development, resource forecasting, and procedural design to guide organizational action (Robbins & Coulter, 2021). In swimming, planning must integrate sport development and risk governance, given the safety demands of aquatic environments. Therefore, planning components emphasizing safety and incident prevention, facility access, competition scheduling, and coach development are defensible and practically necessary. Including situational tools (e.g., SWOT/TOWS) is also appropriate because local associations often face constraints in facility access, staffing capacity, and budget flexibility; structured situational analysis helps align internal capacity with external expectations (e.g., stakeholder demand, event requirements, and performance pathways) (Chelladurai, 2014). These planning outcomes address Objective 1 by specifying a strategic and policy-level blueprint that can be translated into operational guidelines for the Association.

2. Organizing

The organizing findings highlight that swimming association performance and safety depend on system structure: role clarity, lane-time allocation routines, equipment readiness, safeguarding/welfare processes, and standardized documentation. Organizing translates plans into workable systems of responsibility, communication, and resource deployment (Robbins & Coulter, 2021). For swimming, facility and lane-time coordination is especially consequential because access is a core bottleneck influencing training frequency, athlete retention, and program growth. The prominence of welfare/safeguarding and emergency coordination likewise reflects a realistic operational requirement: associations must have clear protocols, accountable roles, and consistent documentation to maintain safe service delivery. Formalizing athlete registration/selection systems and program structures (learn-to-swim through performance squads) also supports transparent pathways, improving fairness and predictability for athletes and stakeholders. These organizing elements operationalize Objective 2 by proposing concrete mechanisms through which the Association can stabilize delivery and reduce avoidable variability across venues and programs.

3. Implementing

Implementation findings center on translating plans into consistent coaching delivery, safety protocol execution, event delivery routines, and stakeholder engagement. In a management-

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functions lens, implementation (often conceptualized within "leading") concerns coordinated action, capability building, and adherence to agreed standards (Robbins & Coulter, 2021). For swimming, implementation quality is inseparable from performance and safety because technical efficiency and workload tolerance are developed through repeated, well-supervised practice. The emphasis on structured training progression and coach development is consistent with performance science: fitness contributes to swimming outcomes when it supports efficient technique and stable execution under fatigue (Barbosa et al., 2010). Moreover, integrating strength and power development through appropriately designed programs is supported by evidence that well-planned strength training can contribute to performance when integrated with swimming demands (Wirth et al., 2022). Therefore, emphasizing coordinated coaching systems, progressive instruction, and consistent supervision is a key strength because it links operational management to credible performance determinants. Collectively, these implementation outcomes support Objective 2 by identifying delivery strategies the Association can begin adopting (e.g., standard session structures, safety briefings, event SOPs, and CPD routines).

4. Controlling

The controlling results are consistent with the view that control functions as a continuous feedback mechanism monitoring outcomes against standards and triggering corrective action (Robbins & Coulter, 2021). In swimming, controlling should include (a) safety monitoring and incident reporting, (b) program quality review, (c) athlete progress tracking (fitness, technical markers, performance times), (d) coach performance/CPD monitoring, and (e) financial accountability. Including stakeholder feedback systems is also appropriate because perceived service quality often depends on communication, clarity of pathways, and confidence in coaching and safety systems. Importantly, the controlling domain strengthens the guideline model by ensuring that planning and implementation are evaluated through evidence (logs, audits, progress data, review meetings) and improved through structured follow-up. This completes the objective logic: Objective 1 is satisfied through a structured guideline set, while Objective 2 is strengthened by monitoring and continuous improvement routines that sustain implementation over time (Chelladurai, 2014; Robbins & Coulter, 2021).

In summary, the POIC guideline model derived from expert input and stakeholder suitability assessment provides a plausible, actionable framework for strengthening the Shenyang Swimming Association. Key implications include prioritizing safety governance and facility coordination as early stabilizers; institutionalizing coach development as a capacity multiplier; formalizing pathway structures to support participation and performance; and embedding monitoring systems to drive continuous improvement. Collectively, these findings offer a credible management

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response to the research objectives and a transferable template for comparable municipal-level swimming organizations.

Recommendation

1. The Shenyang Swimming Association should implement the POIC-based management guidelines in phases, prioritizing safety governance and incident procedures, lane-time and facility coordination, coach development, and a structured athlete pathway while establishing clear responsibilities and monitoring indicators to support consistent program delivery.

2. Model transfer and comparative validation: Future studies should apply the POIC-based swimming association guideline model in other cities or aquatic organizations and evaluate outcomes such as participation rates, athlete progression, coaching quality indicators, safety/incident trends, stakeholder satisfaction, and organizational effectiveness to determine generalizability and comparative impact.

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