BBC Sport
Possible Liverpool FC Managers - Quantitative Analysis

Jurgen Klopp (as comparator)
Xabi Alonso
Ruben Amorim
Julian Nagelsmann
Roberto De Zerbi
Thomas Frank
Thomas Tuchel
Ange Postecoglou

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1. How do the objective performance levels of the head coaches compare with each other?

The table at Exhibit 1 (below) summarises the key quantitative ratings and metrics for a selection of possible head coaches to replace **Jurgen Klopp** (who is also included as a comparator) at Liverpool FC for Season 2024/25 onwards. An explanation of the ratings and metrics is provided in the Glossary to this report.

Exhibit 1: Table outlining the ratings for each head coach, including quantitative metrics indicating relative strengths and weaknesses (as at 20 February 2024)

	Objective Achievement Rating	Strategic Intelligence Rating (Home)	Strategic Intelligence Rating (Away)	Strategic Intelligence Rating	Tactical Command Rating (Home)	Tactical Command Rating (Away)	Tactical Command Rating	Attacking Coefficient (Home)	Attacking Coefficient (Away)	Attacking Coefficient	Success-adjusted Attacking Coefficient (Home)	Success-adjusted Attacking Coefficient (Away)	Success-adjusted Attacking Coefficient	Shot Conversion Rating	Opposition Shot Conversion Rating	Shot Creation Ratio	Possession Goal Conversion (Home)	Possession Goal Conversion (Away)	Possession KME Creation (Home)	Possession KME Creation (Away)	Overall Possession (Home / Away)	Most Used Formation	Overall Rating (Weighted Metrics)
Jurgen Klopp	568.90	42.59	33.33	75.93	3.67	2.72	6.39	13.79	13.79	27.59	11.75	9.20	20.95	43.95	23.98	1.68 : 1	3.94	3.71	11.95	8.44	64 / 60	4-3-3 Offensive	151.0
Ruben Amorim	486.90	46.30	37.96	84.26	3.11	3.47	6.58	13.07	12.07	25.14	11.49	9.82	21.31	40.09	29.68	2.64 : 1	4.69	3.70	10.94	10.86	60 / 61	3-4-3	144.7
Julian Nagelsmann	429.20	67.65	30.39	98.04	2.29	1.47	3.76	10.14	10.34	20.49	13.05	5.88	18.93	40.54	30.76	2.13 : 1	4.43	4.04	12.57	10.03	68 / 63	4-2-3-1	128.0
Thomas Tuchel	511.10	40.86	33.33	74.19	1.94	1.71	3.65	10.46	10.07	20.52	8.23	6.90	15.13	35.26	33.57	2.57 : 1	5.51	3.23	15.29	9.04	61 / 64	4-2-3-1	119.5
Ange Postecoglou	362.70	39.81	32.41	72.22	2.36	2.75	5.11	12.07	11.11	23.18	9.39	7.73	17.11	45.83	33.63	1.61 : 1	3.58	3.97	10.65	8.61	64 / 65	4-2-3-1	116.5
Xabi Alonso	257.60	38.89	36.11	75.00	1.61	3.28	4.89	11.02	11.64	22.65	8.43	8.16	16.59	37.86	23.90	1.60 : 1	4.78	3.31	12.83	8.81	59 / 57	3-4-2-1	106.9
Roberto De Zerbi	283.30	30.56	19.44	50.00	1.72	0.64	2.36	9.91	11.06	20.98	6.34	4.10	10.44	31.91	38.51	1.45 : 1	3.80	2.69	11.45	8.62	63 / 62	4-2-3-1	71.3
Thomas Frank	271.60	23.15	15.74	38.89	1.31	0.11	1.42	10.92	9.15	20.07	5.52	3.18	8.70	34.89	34.56	0.83 : 1	3.35	3.40	11.22	9.33	48 / 40	4-3-3	61.3

	Key Metric - Upper Tier
	Key Metric - Middle Tier
	Key Metric - Lower Tier
	Secondary Metric - Upper Tier
	Secondary Metric - Middle Tier
	Secondary Metric - Lower Tier

2.   Quantitative Analysis: Headlines

- The table in **Exhibit 1** (above) indicates that **Klopp** is going to be hard to replace at Liverpool.
- Not only has **Klopp** achieved significant success over the last six seasons in terms of results, his individual metrics demonstrate an exceptionally high level of 'football intelligence'.
- For example, his *Strategic Intelligence Rating* (ability to set-up his team to maximise the probability of winning the next match) is very high. His ability to transform matches, within the match itself, to an incrementally better outcome (*Tactical Command Rating*) is even better.
- What is interesting is that **Amorim** and **Nagelsmann** actually have a higher *Strategic Intelligence Rating* than **Klopp**, and **Amorim** also has a higher *Tactical Command Rating* than **Klopp**.
- If one of the objectives of the Liverpool recruitment team is to appoint a manger with a similar attacking style of play as **Klopp** - which could make sense, given that the current squad have become very successful at achieving results under a particular style - then, once again, **Amorim** has a similar *Attacking Coefficient* rating as **Klopp**. Moreover, when you consider the relative success of attacking formations and player positioning within matches (*Success-adjusted Attacking Coefficient*) **Amorim is actually more successful than Klopp**.
- Based on actual results that have been achieved over the last six seasons, incrementally weighted towards the most recent seasons and relative to the strength of the league in which those results have been achieved (*Objective Achievement Rating*), the best three managers analysed in this report are **Tuchel**, **Amorim** and **Nagelsmann** - in that order.
- However, when you further weight the analysis for individual metrics that we have tested objectively as good predictors of transfer of skills to different leagues (*Overall Rating (Weighted Metrics)*), then the order of ranking to replace **Klopp** at Liverpool is as follows:

  1. **Ruben Amorim**
  2. **Julian Nagelsmann**
  3. **Thomas Tuchel**
  4. **Ange Postecoglou**
  5. **Xabi Alonso**
  6. **Roberto De Zerbi**
  7. **Thomas Frank**

- We have broken down a number of the quantitative metrics to give an objective sense of the strengths and weaknesses for each head coach in this paper (see below). Nevertheless, in pure objective terms, if the recruitment teams at Liverpool (or Bayern Munich for that matter) want the best head coach from this list then the quantitative analysis suggests that **Amorim** should be top of their list.

3.   Xabi Alonso: The prodigal son is having an excellent current season but…

- **Alonso** has a completely different style of play to **Klopp**. Not only does **Alonso** play predominantly with **3 at the back**, he is a bit of a 'tinkerman' having used **6** different formations this season alone. **Klopp** by comparison has essentially used slight variations on **1** formation - an **attacking 4-3-3** - which is a formation that **Alonso** has only used **3** times this season (and with relatively low success in terms of match outcomes).
- Similarly, **Alonso** has a significantly lower *Attacking Coefficient* (**-18%**) and *Success-adjusted Attacking Coefficient* (**-21%**) than **Klopp**. This means that the pace and *forward-ness* of **Alonso's** teams are significantly reduced compared to the Liverpool teams under **Klopp**. This might be acceptable if **Alonso** is achieving better match outcomes from his style of play, but the empirical evidence is that **Klopp's attacking style is more successful**.
- *Possession* isn't everything, of course, but it is notable that **Alonso's** overall possession levels (**59% home, 57% away**) are markedly lower than **Klopp's** (**64% home, 60% away)**. Interestingly, the utilisation of that *Possession* to score goals and to create *Key Match Events* is very similar between **Alonso** and **Klopp**, as is the ratio of shots on goal (vs opposition team) - *Shot Creation Ratio* - **1.68:1 for Klopp, 1.60:1 for Alonso**.
- **Klopp** appears more able at setting-up patterns of play (before matches (*Strategic Intelligence*), and within matches (*Tactical Command*)) to convert more shots to goal (*Shot Conversion Rating* **+14%**), and most importantly to adjust the style and nature of the play to retain match winning outcomes.
- It is understandable that there should be speculation around **Alonso** because he is achieving great success with Bayer Leverkusen this season. Not only is he achieving great results, he is demonstrating admirable 'football intelligence' in both setting-up his team (*Strategic Intelligence*) and adjusting his team within matches (*Tactical Command*).
- Nevertheless, these ratings have only been achieved over a very short period of time - and are lower than other managers in this list (and lower than **Klopp** over an extended period of time). Empirical testing suggests that these football intelligence skills are transferable between clubs and leagues, but it is a risk for Liverpool to appoint a manager with such limited experience.
- When you then layer-on a distinct difference in the style of play and approach to 'tinkering' with formations, it becomes a significant risk to appoint **Alonso** - despite the emotional connection with Liverpool, and the 'genius complex' of wanting to be the club that appoints the 'next big thing'.
- In summary, it is not clear that **Alonso** is the next big thing, and the disruption caused to the style of play of the current Liverpool squad poses a further risk to the trajectory that **Klopp** has created this season.

4.   Ruben Amorim: Even better than the real thing?

- OK. We need to make allowances for the fact that **Amorim's** experience is in a less competitive league - and we have done this by applying a quantitative weighting in his *Objective Achievement Rating* (**486.90 vs 568.90 for Klopp**).
- Nevertheless, **Amorim's** *Strategic Intelligence Rating*, *Tactical Command Rating*, *Success-adjusted Attacking Coefficient* and *Shot Creation Ratio* are **all higher than Klopp**. **Amorim** also has a broadly equivalent *Shot Conversion Rating* and overall levels of *Possession*.
- There is a difference in favoured formations - with **Amorim** preferring to play with **3 at the back**, and often playing with a **3-4-3** formation. However, it is not especially difficult to transition between a **3-4-3** and **4-3-3** formation (or vice versa) and the current Liverpool squad should have the requisite level of adaptability.
- **Amorim's** *Shot Creation Ratio* (**2.64:1**) is **substantially higher than Klopp's** (**1.68:1**), but this is explained, to a certain extent, by the objective levels of clubs in their respective leagues.

- Even so, **Amorim** is a manager that has demonstrated a very high level of objective performance over a number of seasons, with an approach to setting-up teams and transforming play within matches that is **equal or better than Klopp**. When you also factor-in a style of play that is suited to the current <u>Liverpool</u> squad - and supporter expectations - **Amorim** becomes a very compelling option as the next <u>Liverpool</u> manager.

5. Julian Nagelsmann: Hype, headaches and a patient 'genius'

- There are perhaps more column inches devoted in the German media to **Nagelsmann** than any other head coach (with the possible exception of **Alonso** at present). He is certainly well hyped, but does the objective analysis support this hype?
- Probably.
- He has the **highest** *Strategic Intelligence Rating* (**98.04**), and it is over **14% higher** than the next best head coach in the list (**Amorim**, **84.26**). Moreover, his *Strategic Intelligence* is over **250% higher** than **Frank**. There are likely to be very few head coaches in world football at present (if any) that are better at setting-up their team to maximise the probability of winning the next match.
- However, his *Tactical Command Rating* is much more modest (**3.76**), and it is possible that **Nagelsmann's** unique strategic playing methods and style (see below) require a very high degree of focus by the players (which is difficult to deliver during matches), and which might cause an equally high level of frustration and contention within the team itself if strategic plans are not executed as envisaged by **Nagelsmann**.
- **Nagelsmann** certainly has a unique style of play. He has a **very low** *Attacking Coefficient* (**20.49**) which indicates a defensive style of play, but he does make this work for his teams - he has a good level of *Success-adjusted Attacking Coefficient* (**18.93**).
- This is then combined with a **very high** *Shot Creation Ratio* - **2.13:1** - and a **good** *Shot Conversion Rating* (**40.54**).
- **Nagelsmann** has the **highest** average *Possession* levels (**68% at home, 63% away**), and he is good at creating *Key Match Events* and/or creating goals from these exceptionally high levels of *Possession*.
- This illustrates a very methodical, patient and probing style of play - to create *Key Match Events* and goal scoring opportunities in a manner that is, in equal measures, unique and effective.
- Headaches? Some of the column inches in the media have focused on **Nagelsmann's** 'interpersonal skills', and a perceived breakdown in relationships with the players and club ownership. This is something that any club recruitment team would need to investigate fully, but the quantitative analysis does not indicate any particular weakness in **Nagelsmann's** performance levels that could exacerbate discontent in the playing squad.
- **Nagelsmann's** style of play was also reported by supporters to be too 'laboured and flat', and this can become a challenge if the team is not winning matches. It is also noticeable from the quantitative analysis that **Nagelsmann** has a relatively high (lower the better) *Opposition Shot Conversion Rating*, which indicates that his team's defensive *Possession* style was not impregnable and it can be very frustrating for supporters to witness goals being conceded from 'excessive' *Possession* in defensive zones.
- These couple of quantitative weaknesses are what are keeping **Nagelsmann** from ranking in first place in this study, and if these are remedied then his strengths are at such an exceptional level that he could be projected with potential to be one of the Top 5 head coaches in the world.

6.   Roberto De Zerbi: We might as well take the manager from Brighton as well…

- However, that would appear to be a mistake.
- There is no doubt that **De Zerbi** has created an impression for a 'passionate' style of play, and Brighton have achieved a relatively high level of success during his tenure. The question is whether there is a direct correlation between the manager's objective abilities and these results.
- With the exception of **18 matches** as manager of Shakhtar Donetsk, **De Zerbi's** clubs have been firmly mid-table, and so there is not a lot in an assessment of his results that suggests he can win the Premier League with Liverpool.
- So the question then is whether any of his individual objective metrics might demonstrate a level of ability that can be transferred to Liverpool to achieve success at Liverpool?
- Well, none of his metrics are a match for **Klopp**. Indeed he is significantly lower across the board - *Strategic Intelligence*, *Tactical Command*, *Attacking Coefficient*, *Shot Conversion*.
- **De Zerbi** has slightly higher *Possession* levels away from home than **Klopp**, but **De Zerbi** does little to translate that *Possession* into goals or *Key Match Events*. Indeed, **De Zerbi** has a very low *Attacking Coefficient* (**20.98, vs 27.59 for Klopp**) which suggests that, like **Nagelsmann**, a lot of the *Possession* is in defensive zones.
- However, unlike **Nagelsmann**, **De Zerbi** has not demonstrated the requisite objective levels of 'football intelligence' required from a Liverpool manager, with a **very low** *Strategic Intelligence* (**50.00, vs 98.04 for Nagelsmann**). Similarly, **De Zerbi's** *Tactical Command Rating* (**2.36, vs 6.39 for Klopp**) falls well short of what might be expected for a manager seeking to win the Premier League with Liverpool.
- **De Zerbi** has certainly created headlines in the UK (as has Brighton as a club generally), but a fully objective analysis of his performance levels (rather that a subjective view of his approach and personality) illustrates that he falls short significantly (in every key metric) from what is required for the next Liverpool manager.

7.   Thomas Frank: "Well, I suppose he plays 4-3-3"

- It is difficult to determine - from his objective performance levels - how **Frank** might succeed at Liverpool.
- From an ownership perspective there is nothing in the quantitative metrics for **Frank** to suggest that he has a sufficiently high level of *football intelligence* (compared to the alternative head coaches). He has the lowest *Strategic Intelligence Rating* (**38.89**) of any of the head coaches, and his *Tactical Command Rating* (his ability to transform matches, during the match, to an incrementally better outcome) is exceptionally low (**1.42**).
- If you compare this *Tactical Command Rating* to **Klopp** (**6.39**), **Frank** looks well short in achieving the expectations of club ownership.
- From a supporter perspective **Frank** has an *Attacking Coefficient* that is the lowest of any of these managers (**20.07, vs 27.59 for Klopp**) and it has not proved to be particularly successful (with an exceptionally low *Success-adjusted Attacking Coefficient* of **8.70**).
- This is then compounded further by **Frank** having the **lowest** *Shot Creation Ratio* of any of these head coaches. Indeed, it is essentially a negative *Shot Creation Ratio* (**0.83:1**), meaning that **Frank's** teams create less shots on goal than the opposition team.
- **Frank** has the lowest *Overall Possession* (**48% home, 40% away**), and it appears the only metric in **Frank's** favour is that his preferred formation is **4-3-3** which, on the face of it, is the same as **Klopp**. However, there is a plethora of differences in how this is implemented with **Klopp** positioning players in a much more attacking formation than **Frank**.

- Observers can certainly admire **Frank** for what he has achieved at <u>Brentford</u>, but there is no objective evidence to suggest that he can achieve the objectives of <u>Liverpool</u> as their next manager.

8.   Thomas Tuchel: Wins matches, but defensive in every sense of the word

- With the exception of **Klopp, Tuchel** is probably the best of this group of head coaches in demonstrating the ability to win matches at the requisite level, and over extended periods, in recent years.
- The term 'recent years' is important because it is more instructive in determining the probability of this winning trait continuing over a future period (e.g. the next three full seasons).
- **Tuchel's** *Objective Achievement Rating* (**511.10**) is second only to **Klopp**, and on this basis he possibly should be a consideration as a replacement for **Klopp** at <u>Liverpool</u>.
- **Tuchel** also rates well for setting-up his teams to maximise the probability of winning the next match (*Strategic Intelligence Rating* of **74.19**, which is broadly equivalent to **Klopp** (**75.93**)), but he begins to fall well short of **Klopp** in his ability to transform matches to an incrementally better outcome (*Tactical Command Rating* of **3.65, vs Klopp (6.39)**).
- Likewise, a big challenge for **Tuchel** as a consideration for becoming the next manager at <u>Liverpool</u> is his *Attacking Coefficient* (**20.52**). He has a very similar defensive style of play as **Nagelsmann** in this regard, and that could prove to be a challenge for <u>Liverpool</u> supporters and for maximising the attacking coefficients of the current <u>Liverpool</u> players.
- Indeed, as with **Nagelsmann**, **Tuchel** has a reputation for reaching points of acrimony with players and club ownership after a period of time. This might be a symptom of frustration on the part of **Tuchel** in believing that players are not adequately executing the strategic plans for a match, and this could be a substantial issue at <u>Liverpool</u> where the player (and supporter) expectations of a style of play are almost diametrically opposed to the preferred style of play of **Tuchel**.

9.   Ange Postecoglou: Attack, attack, attack… or is it?

- On the face of it there are some strong similarities between **Postecoglou** and **Klopp** - *Strategic Intelligence*, *Tactical Command*, and *Shot Creation Ratio* are broadly equivalent (**although all are lower than Klopp**), as is *Overall Possession*.
- If this is combined with a 'subjective' perception that **Postecoglou** has a very attacking style of play, then it is no surprise that **Postecoglou** is a potential consideration as a replacement for **Klopp**.
- However, that perception is not borne-out by objective analysis. **Postecoglou's** *Attacking Coefficient* (**23.18**) is **16% lower than Klopp (27.59)**, and **Postecoglou's** *Success-adjusted Attacking Coefficient* (**17.11**) is **18% lower than Klopp (20.95)**.
- This indicates a less progressive style of play by **Postecoglou**, and the defensive elements of that style of play are also less successful with **Postecoglou** having a much higher (lower the better) *Opposition Shot Conversion Rating* (**33.63**) than **Klopp** (**23.98**).
- The question is whether **Postecoglou** could adapt his style of play and *Attacking Coefficient* to match or exceed **Klopp** if he managed the <u>Liverpool</u> team? There is perhaps not a huge gap between the coefficients for **Postecoglou** and **Klopp**, and whilst **Postecoglou's** preferred formation at

Tottenham is **4-2-3-1**, he has actually achieved more objective success at Tottenham with an **attacking 4-3-3** formation (i.e. the same as **Klopp** at Liverpool).

- **Postecoglou's** *Objective Achievement Rating* (**362.70**) is significantly lower than **Klopp's** (**568.90**) reflecting the league level of experience of **Postecoglou** over the last six seasons, but he has won a number of those leagues and also now has some Premier league experience.
- **Postecoglou** is not perhaps the [subjective] 'slam dunk' fit for Liverpool based on perceived attacking mentality and success, but when you analyse beyond that subjective perception and consider some of the fundamental metrics that indicate, empirically, transferable success traits, he becomes a serious consideration as the next Liverpool manager.
- However, there are probably even better candidates listed in this report.

10. Glossary

Objective Achievement Rating

This is a unique quantitative measure of overall ability. It is based on the premise that the primary objective of a manager/head coach is to win football matches, and the Objective Achievement Rating (OAR) is an assessment of his success in this regard over the last six seasons. Whilst we can determine a manager's OAR over a longer period (if necessary), we have calculated that the most accurate and predictive indicator of success for a manager is based on his prior six seasons, with an incremental weighting towards the most recent seasons.

The OAR is also weighted for the level of the league in which the manager has operated at any point in time during the last six seasons. We apply a significance metric based on the level of data population for the last six seasons (the lower the figure the better), and which could be impacted, for example, by periods of inactivity within that period. Finally, as a means of comparison, we have also worked on a club specific premise that the club would want their next manager to guide the club to a particular position in the league and other relevant competitions (e.g. Champions League) at the conclusion of Season 2024/25.

Overall Rating (Weighted Metrics)

This provides an overall rating score for each head coach, and is based not only on the actual achievements of the head coach over the prior six seasons but also takes account of individual quantitative metrics. These individual metrics are (i) weighted for the league in which they coached during each of these seasons and (ii) weighted for importance and transferability of each of the individual metrics between leagues. It provides the best prediction of relative future success.

Strategic Intelligence Rating

This measures the manager's ability to prepare and set his team, and analyse the opposition, to maximise the chances of the team winning the next match. The higher the figure, the better. We consider this to be a very important metric because a manager who is able to achieve a high probability of a successful match

outcome through a combination of understanding the objective performance abilities and form of his/her [available] players, and their players' contributions to to successful outcomes from pitch positions and formations, increases the probability of achieving a higher league position at the conclusion of the season. This metric also includes manager ability to adjust for the same objective indicators in the opposition players (in various formations and combinations).

Tactical Command Rating

This is a measure of the manager's ability to transform a match (during the match), and, in particular, to develop a winning position for the team from various match scenarios. The Key Match Events (KMEs) are those events within a match that lead to a goal being scored; could lead to a goal being scored; lead to a goal being conceded; or could lead to a goal being conceded. This part of the analysis assesses how the probability of each and every specific KME is altered within each and every match to transform a leading, equal, or deficient scoreline into a win (or, as a secondary measure, a draw). A match loss will lead to a weighted negative assessment, based on the preceding scoreline position within every match. The Tactical Command Rating is a 'per match' rating, the higher the figure the better.

Attacking Coefficient
Success-adjusted Attacking Coefficient

The attacking coefficient measures the manager's propensity to play an attacking style of football - the higher the figure, the more attack minded is the manager. We have also measured the relative impact of the manager's attacking coefficient on the success of the team winning matches - again, the higher the figure the better. Success is not wholly related to a manager's attacking coefficient, but an attacking style of play, married to the team winning football matches, might be a consideration for the Club.

Team Shot Conversion Rating
Opposition Shot Conversion Rating

This is an extract of one of the KMEs. Based on the premise that the primary objective of the Club is to win matches, in order to achieve the specific target of guiding the Club to a particular position in the league and other relevant competitions at the conclusion of Season 2024/25, this is a key metric that highlights a team's ability to increase the probability of winning matches. There are a whole series of impact metrics that measure and rate the contribution to KMEs, but this is a useful metric to extract both in terms of its overall objective influence, and as an illustration of attacking efficiency. We have also included the requisite metric for the opposition teams from each of the matches, to give a relative sense of attacking and defensive efficiency. It is preferable for the Team Shot Conversion Rating to exceed the Opposition Shot Conversion Rating.

Shot Creation Ratio

It is obvious that a shot on goal significantly increases the team's opportunity of scoring a goal, which in turn significantly increases the team's chances of winning the match. It is a statistically significant exercise to assess the comparative ratio of shots on target, between the team and the opposing team, as an indicator of propensity for winning matches. In the ratio above, the manager's team is listed first. It is sometimes preferable that his figure should exceed the opponent's figure, but the key factor, of course, is the conversion of a shot on goal to an actual goal (as per the Shot Conversion Rating above).

Possession - Goal Conversion Rating (Home)
Possession - KME Creation Rating (Home)
Possession - Goal Conversion Rating (Away)
Possession - KME Creation Rating (Away)

Possession is a metric that is often referenced and debated - and misapplied. Possession is a good base for KMEs - if the team has possession at a specific point in time, then it is highly unlikely that a goal will be conceded at that point in time (unless it is an own goal) - and equally the team is only likely to score a goal if it has possession (again, a specific type of own goal being an exception). However, football provides an immensely fluid data population with a myriad of time points, and so it is vital to identify the key points (in relation to possession) that have the highest relative impact on winning matches. The Possession Goal Conversion Rating assesses the positive impact of possession at key points within each and every match, that lead to a goal being scored - a high figure indicates a more effective conversion of possession by the team, rather than possession for the sake of possession. Likewise a high Possession KME Creation Rating indicates a positive utilisation of possession to improve the quantity of KMEs that lead, or could lead, to match winning scenarios.