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*How to optimize benefits and attract physiotherapists  
for a professional association in Portugal?*

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How to optimize benefits and attract physiotherapists for a professional association in Portugal?

## How to optimize benefits and attract physiotherapists for a professional association in Portugal?

“At a national level, national physical therapy associations are responsible for defining physical therapy and physical therapists’ roles relevant to their nation’s health service delivery needs, ensuring that they are consistent with accepted international guidelines set out by WCPT. National physical therapy associations have a responsibility to seek support for legislation, regulation and recognition which defines the distinctive and autonomous nature of physical therapy practice, including a defined scope of practice.”

World Confederation for Physical Therapy

# How to optimize benefits and attract physiotherapists for a professional association in Portugal?

## ABSTRACT

Title: *How to optimize benefits and attract physiotherapists for a professional association in Portugal?*

This thesis is part of a Consulting Project for APF - Associação Portuguesa de Fisioterapeutas. This project guides APF with recommendations to support it relieving its financial vulnerability and expanding its operations, as their ultimate goal is to become the Authority which regulates the physiotherapy profession in Portugal. The project concluded that APF was efficient on cost savings. However, several recommendations were made, focused on the revenue and operational fields. Those opportunities in the business model were identified thanks to the collection of data, which included surveys from current and potential members, but also secondary research and theoretical literature.

As the majority of the revenues of APF arise from member fees, conferences and learning clinics, the research was focused on clarifying that physiotherapists could materialize returns by joining the Association and taking advantage from the services which are offered.

Transforming APF into a “member-centered” organization would promote its membership, which consequently would affect positively the revenues and create economies of scale.

*“When associations host their annual meeting, it provides members a great opportunity for face-to-face leaning, networking with their colleagues and industry partners.”*

Michael Gruenberg, 2015

This study concludes with several recommendations, which will enable APF to attract more members and increase its chances to become the National authority for the physiotherapy profession.

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### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Thank you

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## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 CONTEXT

This thesis is part of a Católica-Lisbon's Consulting Project Seminar. In this seminar a consulting project for APF - Associação Portuguesa de Fisioterapeutas was built. APF is a professional association for physiotherapists, with approximately 1.000 affiliates out of a market constituted by approximately 7.000 active physiotherapists. The project was mainly focused in the construction of a long-term strategy to reduce the financial vulnerability of APF. It included the identification of points of improvement within the Association's business model and, obviously, recommendations which could potentiate an increase of the total number of active-paying members and, consequently, lead to an increase of revenues. The proposed strategy intended to overlap the needs and expectations of physiotherapists in Portugal with the services which were provided by APF (See Appendix B – Reasons to become a member of APF). Meanwhile, this study took also into consideration the previous findings of the Executive Committee, as well as their long-term goals through the whole process.

Therefore, this thesis aims to justify the implementation of those recommendations for the sake of a healthier financial situation of APF, as well as their membership stability.

On the other hand, this study also highlights the importance for professionals to join a professional association as Associação Portuguesa de Fisioterapeutas. Without clarifying the positive outcomes that may arise for joining and the impact it may have on their careers and personal success, it would be useless to adapt the Association into a “membership-centered” organization.

It is also implicit that this study could be transferred and applied into other professional associations with similar business models, due to its uniqueness and originality.

### 1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The core-revenues of APF arise from its membership fees, sponsors and activities. Increasing the number of members is definitely an ultimate goal. Currently, as previously said, APF has 1.000 members out of approximately a market of 7.000 physiotherapists in Portugal. This signifies that only less than 15 % are, at the moment, members of the Association. Thereby, a wide range of opportunities still exist, as there is a huge proportion of physiotherapists that may still join. This study begins by understanding the

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behavior of the physiotherapists. Why are they deciding to become members? Why did some of them abandon the association in the middle of their career? Why some of them simply disregarded the Association after graduation? Understanding their behaviors was an important step to understand which decisions lead to potentially attract new members or to reduce the turnover rate, and that was a point of start. Their behavior, as any other decision, is part of a cost-benefit analysis that needs to be taken into consideration. Thus, the research questions aim to provide answers that will help guiding this study into conclusions regarding the policies, recommendations and behaviors that should be followed, either by APF's management committee but also by the physiotherapists themselves.

RQ1: Is APF meeting physiotherapist's expectations through the services provided?

RQ2: Should a physiotherapist be a member of its professional association in Portugal?

RQ3: How can APF transform into an even more "membership-centered" organization?

### 1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As curious as it may seem, besides informal opinions and talks, no official research had been conducted until date to measure physiotherapists' level of satisfaction at APF. Therefore, the research began by collecting quantitative and qualitative primary data from physiotherapists to understand their overall perception of APF, the types of services they most use and its frequency. The research also included suggestions of improvement. In order to complete the research, mostly to address an answer for the first and last question, a benchmarking from other professional associations in Portugal was also done. It was a tool to understand the role each organization has in different professions and also the different services they provide to its members, acknowledging that some of those services could be eventually replicated by APF.

The three research questions were also covered by the Literature Review, which provided important theoretical frameworks to address them appropriately, as it expressly justifies the magnitude of a professional association on one's career, the importance of networking to accelerate progresses and reach goals, and finally providing management guidelines.

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#### 1.4 ACADEMIC & BUSINESS RELEVANCE

This thesis is an important tool for any physiotherapist during the decision making process of joining or not joining APF. For the first time, a research provided with significant qualitative and quantitative information, exposing the benefits of joining the association was done. Nevertheless, it can also be applied for other professions as many paths and way of thinking can be expanded.

At the same time, this study can also be replicated and be used as a guidance for the managing committees of other associations. This research provides information regarding the general services which are most valued by members, but also gathers a benchmarking of services provided by other professional associations. For the professionals, it is a study that highlights the value of a group, the need of permanent learning, the knowledge exchange, and should be encouraged to be read, especially to all those who are in doubt whether to join or not a professional association.

In this thesis, we aim to identify the opportunities hidden in the physiotherapists Association, which need to be exposed as it may later lead to a healthier financial situation of the Association and provide a more customer-oriented service. This study will help other professional associations to understand and study how can they increase their revenues and retention rates and adapt themselves to the needs of the market.

Hence, this research may significantly contribute to a positive change in the physiotherapists industry in Portugal, promoting its unification and enhancement.

#### 1.5 DISSERTATION OUTLINE

The research begins in Chapter 2 with a Literature Review where it is exposed the current status of Physiotherapy as a profession in Portugal, the general benefits of joining a professional association, the direct and indirect outcomes of taking part on a networking group, the importance of permanent learning for the success in a profession such as physiotherapy and, finally, how may associations retain members and gather new ones.

A short explanation of the whole Consulting Project attached to this thesis is explained in Chapter 3, where it is also explained the methodology applied within that project.

The Chapter 4 gathers the Data Analysis, where it is presented the whole primary data and secondary data acquired during this study, which correspond mainly to the opinions

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from physiotherapists collected through surveys and also the benchmarking from other professional organizations.

The recommendations are presented in Chapter 5, as advices to be followed by the executive board of APF, as well as an explanation for why they arose.

Finally, the Chapter 6 presents the conclusions of this thesis, which thereby includes a sum up of answers to the research questions based on the whole study. It is also in this chapter that the limitations and suggestions for future analysis is presented.

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“Network carries as great or greater of an influence on an individual’s career success than their abilities, knowledge, and experience.”

Nichole Torres, 2005

## CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

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Within this chapter there is a theoretical scrutiny of the main ideas which are present in the whole study, guiding the gathered data into construction of answers for the previously presented research questions. Those main ideas focus on understanding the role a professional association has on potential members and how can managers of those associations react in order to meet the goals and purpose of its existence.

### 2.1 A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION

“A professional association represents a formal group of practitioners in a given profession” (Mc Croskey & O’Neil, 2010). The Associação Portuguesa de Fisioterapeutas – APF is an organization opened for active physiotherapists. In 2015, it had approximately 1.000 members, within a total of roughly 7.000 active physiotherapists in Portugal (Associação Portuguesa de Fisioterapeutas, 2015). The profession is currently being struggled and devalued due to the budget cuts that the public sector has been facing. There are existing reports that indicate the lack of working conditions in several clinics and hospitals. That means the profession is not following the correct procedures and this is compromising the involved professionals (Coelho, 2013). For example, non-physiotherapists doing physiotherapists’ work or several patients being treated at the same time with the presence of only one physiotherapists reflect the current situation of the profession in Portugal (Coelho, 2013). Furthermore, the physiotherapy industry in Portugal is considered to be jeopardized by high unemployment rates as it becomes only available appropriately for patients with a high-income level or to those who have a chance to have a large insurance coverage (Coelho, 2013). An Association is, therefore, fundamental to unite individuals to “lobby and create legislation favorable” to all those who are its members (Gruenberg, 2015).

Joining a strict group of people who are related to the same field helps an individual to establish himself as a professional of that field (Abbott, 1988; Harley, 2015). After years of studies to accomplish a graduation or any other type of certification or learning achievement in a certain area of studies, which obviously requires time, effort and money, an individual is finally entitled to join a group of people in which the interests and backgrounds are expected to converge. This generates a feeling of personal fulfillment and sense of belonging which shouldn’t be disregarded (Harley, 2015). By taking part in this group, a member gains the possibility to participate in professional development

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activities, gains access to placement services and journals, but also continuing education (Yeager, 1981; Yeager & Kline, 1982). The benefits of joining a professional association don't stop here. The networking and learning opportunities that arise through the proximity with people who also work in the same field is also a strong benefit. Those may be willing to share experience, exchange ideas and information which strongly contribute to one's self-development (Harley, 2015) and, to provide access to critical information regarding the profession or even to influence politics (Gibson, *et al.*, 2013). In particular, throughout the "rapidly changing healthcare environment", having access to all the benefits, information and networking will place a physiotherapist in a strong privileged position in comparison with fellow colleagues who don't (Harley, 2015).

Joining a professional association is also an opportunity to exercise leadership (Harley, 2015). The association internally offers opportunities such as joining an executive committee, writing articles, organizing workshops and conferences which will challenge the level of the professional proactivity, and also expose the professional through different channels (Harley, 2015).

However, during the previous decades we have assisted to the growth of many social networks, such as Facebook or LinkedIn, which have made the networking within specific groups of interest and people much easier and effective (Gruenberg, 2015). As a consequence, today, in comparison with previous decades, it is simpler to connect with other physiotherapist's worldwide and gain access to information or even applying for a job without actually going through a professional association. This has significantly diminished the willingness of young graduates and new professionals to join associations (Gruenberg, 2015). Nevertheless, a professional association is capable to bring benefits to its members still far beyond social-networks as it will be explained later on throughout this study.

Hence, the cause of the general declining of the number of members of associations is not just social networks. It is also about failing continuously to evidence the advantages that associations can provide to its members (Wilson, 1997), which consequently leads to the professionals' underestimation of the possible returns of membership fees and ultimately leads to an increase of the turnover of the association or less numbers of new applications.

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### 2.2 NETWORKING BETWEEN PROFESSIONALS

Networking is changing the way organizations operate. It is getting common to link activities and operations between two or more organizations as a way to congregate knowledge even though reducing their autonomy and exposing their culture to outside influences (Seufert, *et al.*, 1999). It is becoming harder to identify a business that survives without a network-like relationship with other firms (Seufert, *et al.*, 1999). The same phenomenon occurs in a micro perspective with physiotherapy professionals who usually perform in an individual basis, and whose capacity to acquire and generate new knowledge is the utmost competitive advantage (Seufert, *et al.*, 1999). Joining an association, therefore, enables one to enhance the chance to gain personal and professional opportunities (Baker, 1994; Torres, 2005; Wolf & Moser, 2009) as detailed further.

There are two main different types of knowledge. It is considered explicit knowledge when it is easily shareable and distributed either in writing or verbally (Seufert, *et al.*, 1999). It is considered tacit knowledge when it is about experiences or learnings, which also include the values and feelings, which can't be perfectly shared or experienced between people from outside. Tacit knowledge by itself may also be divided in two dimensions: the technical dimension in which the whole "know-how" one has acquired is included; the cognitive dimension is about values and convictions in which a professional governs his performance (Seufert, *et al.*, 1999).

According to Seufert, *et al.* (1999), there are three "building blocks" to facilitate knowledge networking. Those pillars are "facilitating conditions, knowledge working processes and networking architecture". The first pillar lies in the environment and structural conditions within the area where networking occurs. The second one addresses the whole communication process within the people involved and the process of transformation of the knowledge into something which may potentially create value if appropriately diffused. It includes the means of socialization, physical proximity and experimentations but also the task of making the knowledge more explicit and transferable. The last one, is about the way the information is put together, processed and then spared to different entitled members (Seufert, *et al.*, 1999).

Within the physiotherapy industry, the networking is done mostly at an individual level. Therefore, APF builds the three pillars in the form of joint-working groups within the



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Association. For example, by organizing the annual conference and workshops, which include learning-clinics and disclosure of documents. This is precisely the “intentional knowledge networking” which creates value to physiotherapists who enjoy its services (Seufert, *et al.*, 1999). Hence, these are opportunities that shouldn’t remain unrecognized by physiotherapists, provided it may potentially lead to higher performing standards of the profession and a wide range of benefits.

Nevertheless, networking is not just about sharing technical knowledge. Creating relationships networks with colleagues and other stakeholders enhances one’s visibility, access to critical information, exposure to influential people and even exercise political influence and, thereby, acquiring in the long term the chance of a higher salary, negotiating power and wider employment opportunities (Wolf & Moser, 2009; Gibson, *et al.*, 2013).

### 2.3 MANAGING A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION

In the previous paragraphs, the focus went to the features which could materialize into career and personal benefits for members. Managing a professional association has no practical difference as running a business (Gruenberg, 2015). In order to reassure high retention rates and organizational commitment, it is not just about meeting the real interests and needs of their members. It is also about being capable of selling and demonstrating those benefits to the members or potential members (O’Neil & Willis, 2005). The process of understanding those expectations can only be successfully fulfilled if the executive committee frequently discusses it with the members themselves (Wilson, 1997; Gruenberg, 2015).

According to Gruen, *et al.*, (2000), there are three “general categories of membership behaviors”: retention, participation and coproduction.

A well-managed association will increase the number of members and their time of membership at the organization (Gruen, *et al.*, 2000; Vincent & Webster, 2013), as the retention rate being one of the most important measures of the performance of an organization (Gruen, *et al.*, 2000). What is struggling professional associations is the lack of adaptation towards the changing needs of a profession. Again, if members feel that the money they spent with fees has no valuable return, they will abandon it the year after.

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According to Wilson A. (1997), in order to avoid mismatches it is of utmost importance to permanently monitor the member needs through “surveys, meetings and interactive techniques”. Hence, it is fundamental for organizations to find their most differentiator factor that encourages membership (Wilson, 1997). An organization having higher numbers of members participating in the services which are being provided, is by itself a signal of a successful alignment of the services versus needs and expectations (Gruen, *et al.*, 2000). Thereby, an organization should permanently keep in mind its “per capita usage of services” as another quantitative indicator of success (Gruen, *et al.*, 2000).

Finally, the level of involvement of members producing “benefits, services or marketing” for the association is a signal of “citizenship behavior”, which is critical to the organization effectiveness (Gruen, *et al.*, 2000). Higher coproduction levels within the organization’s signifies more people aiming for accuracy involved with the leadership and the decision making process, more “word-of-mouth” publicity, as well as more available suggestions of improvement through the whole services or products (Gruen, *et al.*, 2000). Changing the organization into a “member-centered approach” requires a strong planning, as it affects the whole operation of the association (Wilson, 1997). But more than planning, it will require a team of performers who put a plan into action. Once the “terms of representation, training, qualifications and services” are aligned, more members will be willing to work for the organization and attract new ones (Wilson, 1997), increasing at the coproduction level at the same time. The management of the association shall keep in mind at all times that providing services and programs of good quality to its members will increase the level of affective engagement of memberships (Gruen, *et al.*, 2000).

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“Being a member of a professional association helps establish one as a career professional. This connection creates another strong benefit of membership - access to great networking and learning opportunities.”

Catherine Harley, Director ORNAC (Canadian Operative Nurses Association)

## CHAPTER 3 – THE CONSULTING PROJECT

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This chapter presents a description of the Consulting Project, including its purpose, methodology and findings. The recommendations for this project are integrated and presented in Chapter 5, after analyzing all the available primary and secondary data.

### 3.1 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Associação Portuguesa de Fisioterapeutas is facing a problem which is common in this type of organizations: excessive exposure to membership fees and their willingness to be a member. The activities held by the organization are always dependent on the number of members they have each year, in order to avoid exceeding the expenses in comparison to the revenues. If they have significantly less members and are obliged to make cuts on their programs due to budget constraints, its members will become dissatisfied and even more disappointed, leading to successive abandonments (Gruenberg, 2015). Therefore, APF pretends to reduce its exposure, for example, by becoming the National Authority (“Ordem”) that regulates the profession as it happens in Portugal with doctors, lawyers, engineers, economics, accountants, and so on. If that happens, professionals would have to become members of the Association in order to be authorized to perform the profession. These attempts haven’t yet become successful, as this enhancement depends on political decisions, even though several meetings were held in the Parliament (Associação Portuguesa de Fisioterapeutas, 2015).

Therefore, the challenge is now to increase the financial balance of APF through its ordinary operational activity. Shrinking APF’s general operational expenses could endanger the predisposition of current members to renewal as it would probably signify a reduction of benefits due to cuts on programs (Gruenberg, 2015). On the other hand, increasing revenues by increasing the price of the fees would have a similar deterrent effect, which is not what is pretended to happen. Hence, since APF currently has roughly 1.000 members within a total of 7.000 active physiotherapists in Portugal, chasing a way to call the remaining 85% of active physiotherapists to join the Association seemed to be the most obvious and efficient solution. Moreover, the whole negotiating power of an Association widely increases with its expansion, which would also help future talks and debates with the political parties.

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### 3.2 PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The ultimate goal of this project is to expand the number of members of Associação Portuguesa de Fisioterapeutas. Therefore, in order to materialize recommendations for that purpose, it was required to understand where the points of change were.

Three meetings were held in the beginning of the project with the board of APF where we had the chance to acquire as much information as possible regarding the Association's annual activities, main operational expenses and source of revenues, their policies and constraints, and other information which could be relevant for our later analysis.

One of the objectives the Association had, besides becoming a National Authority, is to increase by 20% the number of members in two years' time, which means roughly an increase of 300 members. Therefore, our recommendations have to be done accordingly.

After the several meetings we analyzed past annual reports, including the activities and financial reports. Those analysis provided us with important information, as we understood that the members were actively participating on the activities which were held. This high level of participation also explains the low turnover rate of APF. As the Association gains an average of 70 new members annually (Associação Portuguesa de Fisioterapeutas, 2014 & 2015), the average turnover is between 40 to 50 members, which means a low turnover rate of approximately 5%. The big challenge was, therefore, positioning APF in a way to somehow conquer the active physiotherapists who are not yet members, given the fact that according to the statistics, once they are aware of the benefits they will by their own wish join the organization and renewal each year. This point of view is later confirmed by the collected primary data and secondary data research. Due to the existence of a mailing list of current members and former members, we decided to build a survey as it will be described in Chapter 4.

Based on all the data which was collected through physiotherapists and other organizations to serve as benchmarking, we were finally capable to provide our final recommendations suitable to their expectations, which were later presented and delivered to the board of Associação Portuguesa de Fisioterapeutas.

## CHAPTER 4 – DATA ANALYSIS

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This chapter is divided in two parts. The first part consists in the analysis of primary research, by following the “membership-centered” management guideline, described in the Literature Review of this study, collected directly from physiotherapists, mainly to understand if APF is following the essential needs and expectations of its members. The second part, consists in the benchmarking of the services and activities provided by APF with other similar professional associations in Portugal through secondary research.

### 4.1 PRIMARY RESEARCH

This research aims to answer the first and the second research questions “Is APF meeting physiotherapist’s expectations through the services provided?” and “Should a physiotherapist be a member of its professional association in Portugal?”. Based on the statement of Aubrey Wilson (1997), “there must be a constant surveillance of members’ needs and a clear understanding of their perceptions. As it can be done through low cost survey techniques”, an online survey was built, and then sent to the mailing list and also promoted on social networks (See the Appendix A – Survey to Physiotherapists).

#### 4.1.1 Methodology

The key of the survey was to clarify if members and potential members were satisfied about the services which were provided by APF. It aimed to identify points of change, understanding in detail if by any reason a professional was not taking into consideration some services, which might end up enjoying, leading to misjudgments when deciding about abandoning or not renewing with the Association. The survey also included room for open answers regarding suggestions for improvement.

Moreover, the survey aimed to figure out what was, to the point of view of members, the cumulative financial return of enjoying and accessing to those services, most of them free of charge or with a significant discount. Given the fact that their perception of value could differ in comparison with the real market value of the services to which they were entitled, the survey questioned if they were using each service, one by one, in order to evaluate the annual cumulative return of the service usage, to later compare with the value of the annual fee. Throughout this data, besides understanding if the services provided by APF were being useful to physiotherapists, it also became possible to identify services which could be started, discontinued or suspended.

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### 4.1.2 Scope of Analysis

The survey was sent to active physiotherapists through a mailing list provided by APF and also published in the social network Facebook. By promoting the survey on Facebook, it was possible to reach physiotherapists that were never members of APF, and consequently were not reachable through the mailing list. For the purpose of this survey, the physiotherapists were divided into three groups: members, former members and non-members (See Table 1). Members were asked about their level of satisfaction regarding the services which were offered to them, what were the matters that required a change to their point of view and recommendations of change, whereas former members and non-members were asked about the reasons for the abandonment or reasons for not joining the Association (See the Appendix A – Survey to Physiotherapists). The list of services which were offered by APF was collected directly from the Association’s website and also confirmed by the Executive Board (See the Appendix B – Reasons to become a member of APF).

The survey was done anonymously and 249 responded, even though only 161 were perfectly completed surveys. Nevertheless, the results were conclusive and helpful.

Table 1 – Descriptive Analysis

<b>Local</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Are you a member of APF?	168 (70%)	71 (30%)
Have you ever been a member of APF?*	36 (69%)	16 (31%)

Source: Survey Data

\*Some surveys were only partially responded. Question only asked to those who said NO when asked if they were members of APF.

### 4.1.3 Data collection

During the questioning process, the survey was changing automatically the questions which were being presented, taking into consideration the group of physiotherapists who were being addressed. The survey also allowed an open section for suggestions and further comments either positive or negative regarding their experience with the Association. This section helped to improve the long-term strategy to include in the recommendations to the board of APF.

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### 4.1.3.1 Who tends to join APF?

Based on the answers to the surveys, the conclusion is that besides those who work in gyms and training centers most of the people who work in hospitals or clinics become members of the association, although hospitals have a higher rate of membership than clinics (See chapter 4.1.3.2 General Feedback, Table 2). This is aligned with the predictive model of Yeager, *et al.*, (1985) that stated that the larger the organizations were, more likely it would be the employers to join the professional association, as larger organizations have higher wages than smaller ones. The higher the salary is, the more affordable becomes to pay membership fees in terms of purchasing power (Yeager, *et al.*, 1985).

### 4.1.3.2 General Feedback

Out of 239 answers, 168 physiotherapists (70%) were satisfied with the Association, which means 30% were not satisfied. 76% of those who said were satisfied with the Association, valued either the information updates to which they have access and workshops (60 similar opinions), the fact of having someone fighting for their rights (50 similar opinions) and also the sense of belonging to a group (17 similar opinions) (See Table 3). On the other hand, the majority of those who were not satisfied with the performance of the Association, highlighted the lack of pro-activity by the people involved with APF (14 similar opinions), along with those who mentioned the dissatisfaction related to the price of the fees versus the benefits that were obtaining (8 similar opinions). There were also opinions who reported the lack of support they receive outside Lisbon, the capital city (7 similar opinions) (See Table 3, Table 4 & Table 5).

Table 2 – Level of membership & satisfaction versus local of employment

<b>Local</b>	<b>% of members of APF</b>	<b>% of members satisfied with the services</b>
Clinics	69%	70%
Hospitals	76%	74%
Training Centers/Gyms	46%	78%
Others	77%	73%

Source: Survey Data



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Table 3 – What do you most value in APF?

<b>Rank</b>	<b>No. Opinions</b>	<b>Evaluations</b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	60	I value the possibility to expose doubts regarding the good practices for the performance of physiotherapy, the information sharing and the organization of workshops that enhance knowledge.
2 <sup>nd</sup>	50	I value the fact of belonging to an organization that is permanently defending our rights and the appreciation of the profession.
3 <sup>rd</sup>	17	I value the unification, the sense of belonging and identification to a team of people who share the same ideas.
4 <sup>th</sup>	2	I value the sharing and help for new employment opportunities.
5 <sup>th</sup>	39	Others/Blank answer.
Total	168	

Source: Survey Data

Table 4 – What leads to your dissatisfaction?

<b>Rank</b>	<b>No. Opinions</b>	<b>Evaluations</b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	14	I feel there is lack of pro-activity promoting physiotherapy.
2 <sup>nd</sup>	8	I believe the fees are too high for the benefits obtained. There is too much disorganization within the Association, and the support is very inactive.
3 <sup>rd</sup>	7	There is too much focus in the capital city Lisbon. They are not defending all the physiotherapists but just a few of them.
4 <sup>th</sup>	3	I was never asked to give feedback for the work which the Association has been performing.
5 <sup>th</sup>	39	Others/Blank answer.
Total	71	

Source: Survey Data

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Table 5 – Suggestions of improvements

<b>Rank</b>	<b>No. Opinions</b>	<b>Evaluations</b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	48	APF needs to be more aggressive with the communication channels. The website is outdated and many information is lost. It should be APF's job to promote the profession more widely.
2 <sup>nd</sup>	26	It is fundamental to transform APF into the regulator of physiotherapy in Portugal. That will help reinforce the control of illegal physiotherapy and be stronger lobbying for our rights.
3 <sup>rd</sup>	19	APF should promote for more workshops and learning activities so that professionals will be capable to have higher standards of knowledge.
4 <sup>th</sup>	18	More support is needed from the back office. Messages take too much time to be replied and even the legal advice support service is not working as fast as it should.
5 <sup>th</sup>	14	The prices for the fees and workshops should be revised as they are too high and don't replicate the reality.
5 <sup>th</sup>	14	It is important to decentralize the Association and promote workshops and activities also outside Lisbon. That is the only way to enhance our profession in the whole country.
Total	139	

Source: Survey Data

### 4.1.3.3 Individual benefits on APF

According to the gathered data, 34% of members participated in the annual meeting, and there is also a very significant proportion of members (46%) who intended to participate but couldn't for any reason. The data also shows that 98% of APF members read the magazine they receive (See Table 6). The magazine has articles and contents regarding the physiotherapy profession and it is sent on a 3 month-basis.

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Table 6 – Use of APF benefits

<b>Type</b>	<b>LA 2014*</b>	<b>LA 2015*</b>	<b>AM (participation/intention)</b>	<b>Magazine</b>
Member	10%	11 %	34% / 46%	98%
Formal Member	N/A	N/A	3% / 39%	N/A
Non-member	N/A	N/A	19% / 56%	N/A

Source: Survey Data

LA: Legal Advice; AM: Annual Meeting

\*at least once, but may have used the legal advice more than once.

According to the answers of the members, the current value they attribute to the benefits they receive in a year basis is on average 50,84 €. Furthermore, the analysis concludes that within a 95 % confidence interval the value would stay between 40,11 € and 61,57 €. The same question, asked after questioning them for how many times they have used each service, which sneakily forces them to remind the benefits they might have unconsciously received, has different results. The value is increased by 7,55 € to 58,39 €. In this case, within a 95 % confidence interval the value would stay between 47,62 € and 69,15 € (See Table 7).

This means that some of the members were not aware of the whole services which were available to them, because there was an increase on their attribution of values for the benefits after providing them more information. Nevertheless, neither number is above the real value of the fees, which might not be a good signal for the long-term.

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Table 7 – For how much would you value the benefits?

<b>Moment</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Avg.</b>	<b>St dev.</b>	<b>Lower (95%)</b>	<b>Upper (95%)</b>
Before	0 €	300 €	<b>123</b>	<b>50,84 €</b>	<b>60,12 €</b>	<b>40,11 €</b>	<b>61, 57 €</b>
After	6 €	300 €	<b>122</b>	<b>58,39 €</b>	<b>60,04 €</b>	<b>47,62 €</b>	<b>69,15 €</b>

Source: Survey Data

### 4.1.3.4 Suggestions of improvement

Most of the suggestions of improvement were focused in the enhancement of the communication channels and the changes in the website which was outdated (48 opinions). In fact, other suggestions included the need to promote the profession to outside, so it becomes easier to pass the message that physiotherapy is part of a medical treatment and was as important as any other medical procedure. The need for more workshops and learning sessions was also highlighted (19 opinions). Those opinions agree on the fact that permanent learning is a differentiator factor and, therefore, should be encouraged. The importance of having a strong back office was also another point of improvement mentioned in the surveys (18 opinions). The arguments were that the office was constantly late in response, which was delaying any answer to doubts regarding the physiotherapy technical issues or legal affairs. The other points of improvement have also been mentioned by other members who left APF as the need to stop focusing just in Lisbon and extend the operation to other parts of the country, also as a tool to promote the profession (See chapter 4.1.3.4 General Feedback, Table 3, Table 4 & Table 5).

## 4.2 SECONDARY RESEARCH

This research is intended to find benchmarking for the policies and activities held by Associação Portuguesa de Fisioterapeutas. The research focused on searching for similar types of professional organizations with activity in Portugal, and to understand the services they are offering to its members.

### 4.2.1 Methodology

In order to find which benefits members of other associations may expect, the search was done on their institutional websites. Showing the benefits that they can offer to members is part of a marketing strategy, followed by most of the Associations that own an updated

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institutional website, in order to attain more members (as Appendix B). Therefore, it was not difficult to obtain the information for benchmarking. Once the information was collected, it was compared with the Associação Portuguesa de Fisioterapeutas' benefits. If there was any service offered by another association but not by APF and if it was considered to be replicable by APF, it was considered a “highlight” (See Table 8).

Table 8 – Benchmarking with other Professional Associations

<b>Association</b>	<b>Highlights for benchmarking</b>
Associação Portuguesa dos Profissionais de Marketing	Access to discounts in hotels and travels; Possibility of marketing companies to become members; Certification of marketing professionals; Information regarding discounts is available to the public.
Ordem dos Engenheiros*	Insurance automatically available for members; Access to a wide range of discounts partners.
Associação Portuguesa de Técnicos de Contabilidade	Members have access to some privileges abroad at the foreign homolog associations; National partnerships for discounts available to the public.
Associação Portuguesa de Anunciantes	Discount due to a partnership with a consulting firm in order to receive help while choosing one's agency.
Associação Portuguesa de Contabilistas	No available information.
Ordem dos Médicos*	“Bank of doctors” as a way to help recruitment processes and job allocation.
Associação Portuguesa de Psicologia	No highlights.
Associação Portuguesa de Terapeutas para a fala	Certification in order to be a qualified therapist, even though it is not mandatory it enhances credibility.
Associação Portuguesa de Nutricionistas	Be present in the platform “find a nutritionist”; International Network – chance to contact colleagues who have had experience abroad to exchange ideas.
Associação Portuguesa de Dietistas	Access to platform to contact potencial clients; Some workshops are only available if you are a member.
Associação Portuguesa de Horticultura	Access to a network with international specialists to share ideas and request consultation.

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Associação Portuguesa dos Arquitetos Paisagistas	Offers free civil responsibility insurance up to 25.000€ coverage.
Associação Portuguesa de Árbitros de Futebol	Discounts in many companies operating in Portugal.
Ordem dos Farmacêuticos*	No highlights.

Source: Online Research

\*National Authority, with higher responsibilities in comparison to associations

### 4.2.2 Scope of Analysis

The research went through eleven professional associations, which have a similar task and purpose as APF. Besides these associations, the research also went through three professional organization that have the task to regulate that profession at a National level and to which its membership is mandatory to perform it.

### 4.2.3 Data Analysis

The core purpose of this analysis was to understand in what way Associação Portuguesa de Fisioterapeutas could become more “membership-centered”, as mentioned in the third research question of this study. For instance, by attributing more benefits to its members.

One of the highlights identified from this benchmarking was the existence of discounts and partnerships with companies which most of the people contact frequently. In some of them its members had discounts in financial institutions, technological companies, hotels in Portugal and well-known travel companies. This kind of partnerships, as it results in financial savings are, without a doubt, adding value to its members and justifying even more the fees they pay (See chapter 4.2.1, Table 8).

The other benefits were similar to those who are offered by APF, such as the discounts for the Annual Meeting and participation in workshops. Therefore, the majority of the organizations are applying the need for “continuing education” in order to progress as a professional as a return for the fees they receive (Yeager, 1981; Yeager & Kline, 1982).

## CHAPTER 5 – RECOMMENDATIONS

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Once collected all the internal and external data concerning the Association, it was finally possible to elaborate recommendations to build a long-term sustainable strategy for APF.

### 5.1 METHOD OF PAYMENT

One of the reasons for the abandonment of the Association was the fact of accumulating late fees. By creating a method of direct payment through bank transfer, this situation of unconsciously accumulating debt to the Association could be avoided and, more members would renewal.

### 5.2 WEBSITE UPDATE

The website is a fundamental tool for promotion and search. The version which was being used was outdated and required to be cleaned. It was also hard to search for information which makes it difficult to new people, potential members or patients navigate on it.

Within this website change, the recommendations also state the importance of creating a public Q&A service, where other colleagues could also participate and have an active interaction between professionals.

### 5.3 LOYALTY POINTS PROGRAM

The Loyalty Points allow members to gain points for contributing somehow for the growth of the Association. Attributing points for participation in workshops, annual conferences, recommending colleagues to join APF, would be an incentive to enjoy even more the services being provided and exert some coproduction effort (Gruen, 2000). The points could be exchanged for additional discounts or free services. Although attributing points being a cost for APF, it is a variable cost on marketing without risk, as they are only given once some kind of revenue is activated.

### 5.4 NEWSLETTER

81.3% of the members preferred to receive information from APF through e-mail. It no longer makes sense to spend roughly 4.000€ in stamps to send physical newsletters as it could be transformed to an economic, costless and friendly service.

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### 5.5 PARTNERSHIPS

Another way to justify the value of the fees is to offer discounts, not only in the services which are provided by the Association on its own, but also by external organizations. Since APF is an organization composed by people, it is possible to reach partnerships with outside organizations. Offering discounts, even small ones, in shops, financial institutions, insurance companies, restaurants and hotels which are already a common expense of a physiotherapist will be welcomed. In fact, APF has some partnerships but the discounts are not attributed in places where the majority of members considers useful. These procedure has been already adopted by other organizations with success (See chapter 4.2.1, Table 8).

### 5.6 NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

The Association should promote the organization of informal events (breakfast, lunch, coffee lunch) in each city as a way to enhance networking and conversations between professionals in a two month basis. Besides being a costless activity (a source of revenue, eventually), as the expenses are payed by the members, it could potentiate union and promotion of the profession. The magnitude of networking in each other's career has been stated through the Literature Review of this study.

### 5.7 CONNECTING PATIENTS TO PROFESSIONALS

Physiotherapy is rather than an "individual to organization" profession, it is an "individual to individual" profession. Therefore, it is fundamental to create a tool to connect members (or their clinics) to potential patients. That platform, which the application is strict to those who are members, could be a source of search by location in case a patient requires physiotherapy services, showing also the insurance protocols each physiotherapist or clinic has. According to the survey, this would potentiate approximately 86% of the non-members or former members of APF to think about joining the Association (See Table 9). More detailed data shows that on average those former members and non-members would join the Association if the incremental revenues of this platform is equal or higher to 190 €. Within a confidence interval of 95 %, the lower and upper value of this value would stay between 145,64 € and 234,36 € (See Table 10).



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Table 9 - Would like to use a platform to connect patients with physiotherapists?

<b>Type of Member</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Members	89%	11%
Non-members/Former members	86%	14%

Source: Survey Data

Table 10 – How much would have to be your annual incremental revenues with this platform to justify becoming a member of APF and paying its fees?

<b>Type of members</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Avg.</b>	<b>St dev.</b>	<b>Lower (95%)</b>	<b>Upper (95%)</b>
Former & Non members	<b>51</b>	<b>190 €</b>	<b>22,08 €</b>	<b>145,64 €</b>	<b>234,36 €</b>

Source: Survey Data

### 5.8 CHANGE OF LOGO

The project also provided a suggestion for a new logo, in order to portray a complete change of the image of the Association made by a professional designer (See Appendix C – Logo, Image 1 & Image 2).

## CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATION, FUTURE STUDIES

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### 6.1 CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the surveys which were performed, it is established that the majority of the physiotherapists are satisfied to be part of APF. After making a benchmarking to compare with other organizations, it was also clear and satisfying that Associação Portuguesa de Fisioterapeutas is already offering most of the services the others do. Therefore, taking into account all the elements throughout this study, the services which are being provided are aligned with the expectations of its members. The concern of and limitation of this study lies in the price of the fees, as it is impossible to accurately calculate the financial return that is being extracted on average by a physiotherapist. The main discount, which most of the members take advantage from, lies in the entry fee for the annual meeting, which has a total reduction of 25€. The other benefits such as the discounts on workshops depend on the level of participation of each person in each moment, and the legal advices are different case-to-case. Hence, calculating if the 89,78€ of the annual fee can be reached or not, strongly depends on the proactivity each member, using or not using the services, taking or not taking advantage of the synergies and networks which exist as stated in the Literature Review of this study.

According to Torres (2005), networking may have more value than knowledge, “it is not what you know, but who you know”. For sure that joining Associação Portuguesa de Fisioterapeutas opens the door to establish relationships between professionals. Nevertheless, it is not just about networking, but also about permanent learning. The physiotherapy itself is constantly changing (World Confederation for Physical Therapy, 2015), which means that a physiotherapist must constantly learn and participate in workshops, conferences and other self-enhancing activities. As shown during the whole research, APF offers that possibility at a marginal cost and encourages its participation.

### 6.2 LIMITATIONS

The toughest challenge of this study was to obtain significant evidence from physiotherapists, which could provide enough information to be capable to make accurate conclusions. Considering that APF has currently 1.000 members, which only represents 15% of the total number of physiotherapists in Portugal, reaching over 200 survey replies in a timely manner was a difficult job.

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Furthermore, there is no previous similar study available on this matter of professional non-profit organizations, which made even more challenging to find criteria to make a transversal analysis of the whole impact the Association could have on professionals.

### 6.3 FUTURE STUDIES

Future studies may take into account the limitations that arose in this project and eventually create a methodology to calculate individual returns on this type of organizations. In fact, there are thousands of professional associations worldwide, consequently, even though most of them having non-profit purposes, this kind of study may end up having an over expected economic value.

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## APPENDICES

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### APPENDIX A – SURVEY TO PHYSIOTHERAPISTS

1. Are you physiotherapist?
  - a) If not, end of survey.
  - b) If yes, where do you perform your profession? Hospital or clinic? Training centers? Gym? Where else?
  - c) If yes, are you a member of Associação Portuguesa de Fisioterapeutas?

[Only to physiotherapists who are active members of APF]

2. Are you satisfied of being a member of APF?
  - a) If yes, what do you most value in APF?
  - b) If not, what leads to your dissatisfaction?
  - c) Do you have any recommendations for change?
  - d) If you had to calculate the value of benefits you attain through APF in €, how much would that be?
  - e) In 2014, how many times did you take the free legal advice?
  - f) What about 2015?
  - g) In 2015 did you participate or wish to participate in the Annual National Meeting of Physiotherapists?
  - h) Do you usually read the Newsletter/Magazine of APF?
  - i) Now again, if you had to calculate the value of the benefits you attain through APF in €, how would that be?

[Only to physiotherapists who are NOT active members of APF]

3. Have you ever been a member of APF?

[Only to physiotherapists who are formal members of APF]

4. Why did you to take the decision of abandoning APF? Fees too expensive? Lack of enjoyment of benefits? Accumulation of fees debt? Change of professional status?

[Only to physiotherapists who are formal members of APF]

5. Have you ever heard about Associação Portuguesa de Fisioterapeutas?
  - a) If yes, why did you decide not to become a member? Fees too expensive? Lack of information about APF? Negative feedback from colleagues? The benefits which were being presented did not meet your needs? No especial reason and simply decided to stay out? Any other reason?

[Only to physiotherapists who are NOT active members of APF]

6. Within your professional life experience did you ever need legal advice?



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- a) If yes, in 2014 how many times did you need and take legal advice?
- b) If yes, in 2015 how many times did you need and take legal advice?
7. If legal advice was a free service for you, between 2014 and 2015 how many times would you have used?
8. In 2015 did you participate or wish to participate in the Annual National Meeting of Physiotherapists?

Now imagine Associação Portuguesa de Fisioterapeutas builds a platform which allows patients to contact you directly to acquire services, as long as you are an active member of the Association.

9. How much would have to be your incremental revenues in order to justify being a member of APF and paying its fees?

[To all active physiotherapists]

10. Would you like to be included on that platform?

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APPENDIX B – REASONS TO BECOME A MEMBER OF APF

1. Partnerships with insurance companies for accidents while acting as physiotherapist, competitive in terms of price and coverage
2. Free counseling via telephone
3. Free legal counseling via e-mail
4. Free face-to-face legal counseling a year
5. Access do learning clinics (workshops, conferences and information)
6. Take part in investigation groups
7. Access to limited information only available to members in the website
8. Access to physiotherapists' list of required standards and best-practices
9. Access to documentation
10. Discounts in the entry fee of the annual Conference
11. Free access to Physiotherapy Magazine “FISIO”

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APPENDIX C – LOGO

Image 1 – Old Logo



Image 2 – New Logo

