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THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND RELATIONSHIP  
MARKETING IN DISABILITY SPORT SPONSORSHIP: AN EXEMPLAR CASE  
STUDY

By

Nina Siegfried  
B.B.A., HAN University of Applied Sciences, 2018  
M.S., University of Louisville, 2019

A Dissertation

Submitted to the faculty of the College of Education and Human Development of the  
University of Louisville in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in Educational Leadership and Organizational Development

Department of Health and Sport Sciences  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

May, 2022

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March 25, 2022

by the following Dissertation Committee

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Dr. Mary Hums, Chair

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Dr. Chris Greenwell

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Dr. Denise Cumberland

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Dr. Yannick Kluch

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the people who raised me, shaped me, and inspired me to become the woman I am today. To my parents, Mama and Papa, thank you for loving me and supporting me unconditionally in pursuing all my dreams. If it was not for you believing in my 15 years old self who wanted to study and live abroad for a year in the United States, I would never be in the position of pursuing and completing my Ph.D. today. Growing up and witnessing your hard work and dedication inspired me to never give up and always give my best. The countless times you took me to and from the gym over the years to every bike ride we took together that you carefully planned for me, it inspired my passion for sport management, and I deeply thank you for that. Despite the endless goodbyes and tears at the airport every time I had to leave, the birthdays, anniversaries, funeral, and holidays I missed out on, the million text messages and facetime calls we shared instead of face-to-face conversations, you never stopped supporting and believing in me. Thank you for always pushing me to go my own way and to follow my passions as it led to me living my ultimate dream of putting these words on paper right now. I dedicate this dissertation to you, our family, my grandparents, great grandmas, and the ancestors of our family who have paved the way for me to become the first person in our family with a terminal degree.

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## ABSTRACT

### THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND RELATIONSHIP MARKETING IN DISABILITY SPORT SPONSORSHIP: AN EXEMPLAR CASE STUDY

Nina Siegfried

March 25, 2022

Worldwide, disability sport faces funding challenges. Sponsorship offers a viable alternative to combat the lack of sustainable funding in disability sport. Exploring how organizational culture can be leveraged to increase strategic partnerships, the purposes of this multiple manuscript dissertation were to (a) examine the elements of the organizational culture that make a successful international wheelchair basketball sport club attractive to external partners and (b) determine what role those organizational cultural elements play in leveraging relationship marketing (RM) for sponsorship acquisition and retention. Utilizing an exemplar case study methodology, the focus of this study was the RSV Lahn-Dill, an international wheelchair basketball sport club which has been successful in sponsorship acquisition and retention and has a history of building a fan and organizational culture. Based on Schein's (2010) organizational culture framework and extended by Meyerson and Martin's (1987) framework, an analysis of external communication elements, twelve interviews, and two focus groups revealed being a pioneer, approachability, and organizational excellence as the underlying

assumptions driving the RSV's organizational culture appeal to sponsors. Further, themes of pioneering through innovation and professional family were identified as key cultural elements in leveraging relationship marketing in sponsorship acquisition.

Approachability and building rapport emerged as cultural elements leveraged for sponsorship retention. This study is the first direct demonstration of sport organizational culture driving sponsorship potential and success, particularly for disability sport properties and outlines the significance of considering culture to leverage RM practices for successful sponsorship acquisition and retention in the disability sport sector.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Sport for people with disabilities, also referred to as adaptive sports or parasport (Disabled World, 2019), has experienced growth in recent years, resulting in more participation, job opportunities, and increasing professionalism (Pitts & Shapiro, 2017). Article 30.5 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities highlights the importance of all forms of sport for people with disabilities at all levels worldwide (United Nations, 2006). Although the Paralympic Games gained worldwide support with the cumulative worldwide audience of the Summer Paralympics rising from 1.85 billion in 2004 to 4.11 billion in 2016 (IPC, 2016) making it the third largest sporting event in the world (Amplitude, 2020), researchers still found a lack of funding for parasports on the local levels (Sørensen & Kahrs, 2006). The audience for the Paralympic Games almost doubling between 2004 to 2016, and athlete participation at the Games has continuously grown as well with 3,808 athletes in 2004 to 4,328 in 2016 (IPC, 2016). Elite disability sport opportunities are, however, still limited in offerings, media coverage, recognition, and development opportunities worldwide even 60 years after the first Paralympic Games (IPC, n.d.; Patatas et al. 2018). The reality remains that for many years, champion Paralympic athletes represented select countries, most prominently the U.S., Canada, Germany, China, and Australia, with only restricted access to disability sport opportunities at all levels in other countries.

Worldwide, athletes with disabilities face unequal sport participation opportunities compared to able-bodied athletes. This discrepancy is perpetuated by lack of access, fewer available opportunities, and a lack of talent identification structures (Patatas et al., 2018). Additionally, driven by disproportionately low levels of public funding directed to the disability sport grassroots system and scarce disability sport funding on the local levels, disability sport programs lack funding to sustain programming (Cottingham et al., 2017; Sørensen & Kahrs, 2006). To compound these financial challenges, disability sports require higher participation costs due to the often expensive equipment (e.g., prostheses, racing wheelchairs) and additional staff needed (e.g., athlete guides for athletes with visual impairment). For example, regulation rugby wheelchair cost \$2,500–\$5,000 and will last two to five years (Eleftheriou, 2005). Sport specific wheelchairs are costly as they often must be custom designed to meet the athlete’s needs based on their disability as inappropriate sitting positions can lead to contractures and musculoskeletal deformities among other issues (Ekiz et al., 2014). Add in the fact that Paralympic athletes receive significantly less sponsorship funding than Olympic athletes (Patatas et al., 2018) and the financial challenges these athletes face become apparent. Cottingham et al. (2017) support this notion and point out

Disability sport cannot rely on scarce local governmental funding as the majority of resources are allocated to able-bodied sport. Neither can they depend on fair and accurate media coverage, which further propagates the super skewed “supercrip” mentality and the idea that sponsoring an event merely is an act of charity (pp.18-19).

To combat the financial challenges faced by disability sport, sponsorship - the main revenue source of able-bodied sport teams – offers a viable alternative.

While persons with disabilities make up fifteen percent of the world's population (1.2 billion persons with disabilities; WeThe15, 2021), disability sport is still in need of sponsorship funding to sustain and provide further sport opportunities for people with disabilities. This study aims to utilize the two very seemingly different theories of organizational culture and relationship marketing (RM) to identify elements of a disability sport organizational culture which are attractive to external partners and the role RM plays in leveraging the cultural elements for sponsorship acquisition and retention to increase funding in the parasport sector and thus, further the professionalization of parasports. However, the two theories do overlap and supplement each other, as illustrated in this study. Organizational culture research has been long been driven by Edgar Schein's work. Schein's multi-layer model of organizational culture looks at an organization's (a) artifacts, (b) espoused beliefs and values, and (c) basic underlying assumptions in order to identify the elements of an organization's culture. Hereby, *artifacts* are the visible part of organizational culture which can easily be observed and include style, clothing, language, emotional displays, stories about the organization, published values of the organization, organizational processes and structural elements (e.g., organizational charts, mission statements), as well as rituals and ceremonies. *Espoused beliefs and values* exist on a conscious level and predict a much of the behavior observed at the artifacts level. They connect the deeper level of underlying assumptions by reflecting conscious beliefs, norms, and operational rules (i.e., moral and ethical rules) based on the non-discussible assumptions. Non-discussable assumptions are parts of the culture which have been so ingrained in organizational members' thoughts, behavior, and rules that members do not question or discuss them. *Basic underlying*

*assumptions* originate in the simple solution to a problem and are assumptions humans often are unaware of, but which guide their behavior. Within a group setting they tell group members how to perceive, think and feel. (i.e., treating everyone equally regardless of the position held in the company and/or background; Schein, 2010). The model has proven to be an effective tool, credited with practical value and intuitive appeal in exploring (sport) organizational cultures (Hogan & Coote, 2014; McDougall et al., 2020; Bailey et al., 2019; Henriksen et al., 2010). Knowing one's organizational culture - specifically the artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions - is essential in identifying matches between the values, mission, and philosophy of potential sponsors.

Through relationship marketing (RM), an organization's favorable and attractive cultural attributes can be leveraged for sponsorship acquisition and retention. As RM originates in exchange theory, its underlying assumption is that through a relational exchange, reciprocal benefits are received by both parties involved in an agreement (Berry, 1983; Grönroos, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 22) defined RM as "all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges" while establishing commitment and trust as the key tenants of successful relationships. These tenants were later expanded by Palmatier (2008) to also encompass relationship breadth and composition. *Commitment* indicates maximum efforts by exchange partners to continue the relationship and is driven by the value of the relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). *Trust* is determined by confidence in the reliability and integrity of the exchange partner (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). *Relationship breadth* consists of the number of interpersonal relationships existing

between two partners (Palmatier, 2008). *Relationship composition* is underlined by the decision-making capabilities of the relational connection of exchange partners (Palmatier, 2008).

Considering the importance of being aware of one's organizational culture for external relations and the power of relationship marketing for sponsorship acquisition and retention, disability sport and the Paralympic Movement can widely benefit from an in-depth understanding of how elements of a disability sport organization's culture can be leveraged through RM for external relations. Hence, disability sport is going to be the avenue to show where and how these theories overlap and interconnect beyond literature. The theories can be put into practice and act as guides in providing recommendations for adaptive sport organizations looking to leverage their culture through RM to acquire and retain sponsors, and thus, provide sustainable funding for adaptive sports.

### **Disability Sport and Sponsorship**

While sponsorship in disability sport is still in its infancy (Cottingham et al., 2017), Legg and Dottori (2017) pointed to the value and importance of sponsorship to the Paralympic Movement. Sponsor representatives noted corporate entities around the world are increasingly turning to Paralympic sports for their sponsorship involvements (Legg & Dottori, 2017). Toyota's sponsorship involvement with Paralympic athletes is based in the company's belief that "mobility goes beyond cars and wants to support people in their efforts to get across town, across a room, and through life" (Toyota, 2021, para. 3). Additionally, the company "believes in the power of sport, and its ability to connect people with diverse backgrounds as they compete with mutual respect towards a common goal" (Toyota, 2021, para. 3). Toyota's reasons for sponsoring Paralympic athletes,

highlight how disability sport can encourage sponsors to follow their mission and engage consumers. With sponsorship acquisition and retention research garnering increased attention, the case for investment in disability sport needs to be explored. One avenue worth examining is viewing disability sport as a niche sport product.

### **Disability Sport as a Niche Sport in the Sponsorship Context**

The context of disability sport is quite unique. Disability sport requires special attention as it has been found that both consumption behavior (Cottingham et al., 2014) and policy development differs from able-bodied sports (Patatas et al., 2018).

Researchers and practitioners can therefore not presume the sponsorship landscape of disability sport mimics able-bodied and mainstream sports. College adaptive sport, for example, was found to possess unique assets attractive to sponsors not found in able-bodied and mainstream sports such as impacting the disability community and serving an underserved population (Siegfried et al., 2021). Hence, disability sport sponsorship specific research is needed to leverage and serve this unique context.

Disability sport shares several characteristics of other niche sport categories as it does not appeal to a mass audience, is not mainstream, and does not receive sufficient funding through broadcast and ticket sales (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013b; Miloch & Lambrecht, 2006). Sponsorship has been found to provide vital capital for operation within the niche sports realm (Lough & Irwin, 2001). To maximize sponsorship effectiveness, sponsors have long turned away from setting up simple one-way exchanges of financial resources (Renard & Sitz, 2011) to building strategic alliances which are underlined by relationship marketing efforts (Farrelly & Quester, 2005b). Relationship marketing (RM) includes intentional actions to establish, develop, and maintain



successful relationships. RM focuses on the commitment, trust, number of relational ties, and decision-making capabilities between partners (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Palmatier, 2008). Strategic alliances maximize the potential shared goals of sponsorship - a value match and joint pursuit between partners (Farrelly & Quester, 2005b; Urriolagoitia & Planellas, 2007). Sport entities creating their own brand identities and values to align with potential sponsors can maximize sponsorship revenues and opportunities (Renard & Sitz, 2011). This alignment is essential for disability sports to leverage corporate sponsorship as operational capital, similar to able-bodied niche sports (Lough & Irwin, 2001).

### **The Role of Organizational Culture and RM in Disability Sport Sponsorship**

Culture, which forms the core of an organization and holds that organization together, plays the leading role in developing an organizational identity which can in turn be leveraged to showcase that identity to the external environment (Jo Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Renard & Sitz, 2011). Thus, culture plays an essential role in forming external relations (Barney, 1986). Cultural analysis of (sport) organizations can identify the parts of the culture which appeal to potential partners and can be leveraged to build external relationships (Ellis et al., 2006). Through Schein's (2010) multi-layer organizational culture model an organization's artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions and thus, aspects of culture appealing to external partners, can be identified. For a complete analysis of culture, Martin and Meyerson (1986) urged researchers to expand the model and not only identify what is shared in cultural perceptions among organizational members, but also what is differentiated and/or fragmented. *Differentiation* in culture occurs when elements of culture are contested by

and/or unclear to members. *Fragmentation* is evident in ambiguous cultural perceptions by members illustrated by different meanings being attached to cultural elements by organizational members.

Going beyond relationship formation, inter-firm relationships have been found to be more successful (sustained retention) when the firms involved had coherent cultures (Beugelsdijk et al., 2009). Understanding disability sport organizational culture and its factors which appeal to potential sponsors can drive sponsorship relationship formation and retention. When a disability sport organization knows who they are and which of their cultural elements are attractive to external partners, they have the ability to attract sponsors by highlighting those elements and creating sponsorship offerings including those elements. For example, Siegfried (2021a) identified a community theme exemplified by a family atmosphere of the organization with all stakeholders, including its sponsors. This cultural element can be leveraged to attract family businesses as companies which reflect similar cultural values, and/or companies looking to get engaged in the local community.

As RM is key to sponsorship acquisition, retention, and discontinuation (Farrelly & Quester, 2005a; Farelly et al., 2006; Morgan et al., 2014; Morgan et al., 2020; van Rijn et al., 2019), its role in leveraging culture in sponsorship acquisition and retention cannot be overvalued. Also, several studies have highlighted the importance of considering the context of an organization when exploring a firm's capacity to embrace RM as a dominant philosophy (Cousens et al., 2001; Pettigrew, 1987; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Organizational culture and RM frameworks can bring valuable insight into explaining how successful sponsorship relations are created and sustained. The combination of both

frameworks can extend the current understanding of sponsorship management and guide scholars in future research.

While both organizational culture and RM research have seen wide application, there is an unfulfilled need for studies on the culture of sport teams for people with disabilities (Wicker & Breuer, 2014) and on the use of RM for sponsorship acquisition in the disability sport sector. Exploring the aspects of culture which build an organizational identity appealing to sponsors of sport organizations for people with disabilities can provide the necessary insight to enhance sport partnerships through RM in the disability sport sector and further professionalize disability sports.

### **Problem Statement**

The current lack of understanding of organizational culture in adaptive sport and how it can be leveraged (through relationship marketing) to increase strategic partnerships, results in limited sponsorship opportunities and consequently, funding, for adaptive sport organizations. Sponsorships, as vital capital for operation, increase funding (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013b) and decrease financial barriers to offering and participating in disability sport programs. Through sponsorship revenue, organizational structures to develop high-performing parasport athletes can be established (Patatas et al., 2018). Moreover, participation opportunities on all levels can be expanded, conforming with Article 30 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006). Further, corporate partnerships expand a given sport's exposure, publicize athletes competing in that sport, and promote sport properties (i.e., sport teams, programs, and organizations), leading to increased awareness and potential expanded media coverage.

## Study Purposes and Research Questions

Exploring how organizational culture can be leveraged to increase strategic partnerships, the purposes of this study were to (a) examine the elements of the organizational culture that make a successful international wheelchair basketball sport club attractive to external partners and (b) determine what role those organizational cultural elements play in leveraging relationship marketing (RM) for sponsorship acquisition and retention. As disability sport is still developing professionalism worldwide, the study of an exemplar organization which has been successful in sponsorship acquisition and retention and has a history of building a fan and organizational culture can yield valuable insights into how other disability sport teams can mimic their success. The study was conducted with the Rollstuhl Sport Verein (RSV; English: wheelchair basketball club) Lahn-Dill, a German major league wheelchair basketball team governed by the RSV Lahn-Dill Sportvermarktungs GmbH (sport marketing company with limited liability, similar to an LLC). The RSV Lahn-Dill, founded in 1983, has gained international presence, players, and reputation, has played a leading role as being considered ‘by far’ the most successful team in Germany (German record holder in national championships) (Kehrer, 2019; Rollt, 2018), Europe and even worldwide, in revolutionizing wheelchair basketball. Even the players see RSV as “the most prestigious wheelchair basketball club in the world. They have built a culture of excellence by always remaining at the top of the game” (Rollt, 2020, para 2). The team’s RBBL (German Wheelchair Basketball League) and European Champions League home games are the most highly attended Paralympic sport events outside the Paralympic Games (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019). The budget is also one of the two highest in the league

(Hamburger Abendblatt, 2019), and was achieved primarily through its extensive partner network of 145 sponsors (Joneck, 2019). Wheelchair basketball is the most successful and popular Paralympic sport in Germany, and Germany is seen as the pioneer of professional wheelchair basketball leagues (IWBF, 2016). The sport has seen enormous growth in recent years in Germany on both athletic and structural levels, leading to wider media interest in the RBBL and the RSV Lahn-Dill specifically (IWBF, 2016; RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019). Clubs in this league are independently responsible for their marketing and securing of sponsorships (IWBF, 2016) and thus provide an ideal basis for this study.

Through this study I identified organizational cultural elements of the RSV which were attractive to external partners and determined what role the organizational cultural elements played in leveraging relationship marketing (RM) for sponsorship acquisition and retention in order to increase funding in the parasport sector and thus, further the professionalization of parasports. The theoretical framework was twofold. The first was Schein's (2010) organizational culture framework, looking at (a) artifacts, (b) espoused beliefs and values, and (c) underlying basic assumptions, as extended by Meyerson and Martin's (1987) scholarship to identify any potential differentiation and fragmentation. Secondly, the framework of relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Palmatier, 2008) was applied to the (potential) use of cultural elements in sponsorship acquisition and retention.

To identify the cultural elements attractive to (potential) sponsors based on Schein's (2010) framework, it is key to explore what elements the organization currently uses to express and position itself to the external environment. This is the messaging

external partners likely first encounter when exploring a partnership. Hence, research question one examined:

**RQ1:** How does a successful disability sport club position itself to the external environment with respect to its cultural attributes?

While research question one addresses how the organization positions itself to the external environment, research question two explored how the members perceived the organization's culture as they are the drivers of the organizational culture (Schein, 2010). This second research question was also important to identify whether the culture was perceived similar, differentiated, and/or fragmented (Meyerson & Martin, 1987) by different members and/or by how the organization presents itself to the external environment.

**RQ2:** How do members of a successful disability sport club perceive their organization's culture?

Finally, building on previous research which identified culture as playing an essential role in forming external relations (Barney, 1986), this research study addressed what role the organizational cultural elements play in leveraging RM for sponsorship acquisition and retention. Culture can attract external partners through cultural coherency (Beugelsdijk et al., 2009), and can nurture relationships by raising awareness of the organizational context (Cousens et al., 2001; Pettigrew, 1987; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). It is essential for organizations to be aware of their culture to identify matches between the values, mission, and philosophy of potential sponsors. (Macdougall et al., 2014). Through RM, an organization's favorable and attractive cultural attributes can be

leveraged for sponsorship acquisition and continued sponsorship relations and thus, research question three and four explored:

**RQ3:** What role does culture play in building relationships to acquire sponsors?

**RQ4:** What role does culture play in building relationships to retain sponsors?

### **Significance**

As disability sport organizations face disproportionate lower financial resources compared to able-bodied sports and, specifically, lack sponsorship funding, this study aimed to provide insight into the cultural elements appealing to external partners of disability sport organizations and how these can be leveraged to attract and retain sponsors. Attracting increasing sponsorship revenues and numbers of partners has the power to further professionalize adaptive sports in several ways. First, the revenues can provide funding for athletes to be professionals in their sport (i.e., providing salaries, travel funding, equipment funding). Second, it will help coaches to receive fair payment to stay in the sport (i.e., compared to switching to able-bodied sport where higher salaries await). Third, it can create branding opportunities which provide legitimacy to the sport and athletes (i.e., co-branding opportunities with sponsors as well as internal branding components). Finally, increased sponsorship investment and professionalization of adaptive sports also can increase media attention and the broadcasting of adaptive sports, elevating society's value placed on adaptive sports and further the disability sport movement.

### **Implications**

Wicker and Breuer (2014) noted “The limited body of research on providers of disability sport in general and specifically on disability sport clubs suggests a pressing

need for more research in this field” (p. 33). This case explored the elements of the culture of a highly successful international wheelchair basketball team which are attractive to external partners and what role the organizational cultural elements play in leveraging RM for sponsorship acquisition and retention. Thus, the work not only answers Wicker and Breuer’s (2014) call but also addressed the lack of funding in disability sport, particularly when it comes to sponsorship acquisition and retention.

Findings from this study have practical and theoretical applications. For practitioners and sport managers, the goal of this study was to provide insight and knowledge into the cultural elements of sport teams for people with disabilities which are essential and can be leveraged to attract and maintain sport partnerships. Through this knowledge, other adaptive sport teams, organizations, and athletes can potentially leverage the key cultural elements identified in this study to attract sponsors and increase funding and sustainability of adaptive sports. Further, this study intended to address and provide recommendations on which cultural elements can be leveraged through relationship marketing for sponsorship acquisition and retention and how to successfully do so.

Based on the author’s knowledge and an extensive literature search, this in-depth case study is the first of its kind looking at a disability sport club’s organizational culture and relationship marketing practices. Hence, the researcher advanced the theoretical application of Schein’s organizational culture framework relative to relationship marketing. Additionally, up to now, these two frameworks have up not been combined in one study and thus, this study extended the use of the frameworks for a holistic understanding of organizational culture, sponsorship acquisition, and sponsorship



retention. Outside of the sport context, this study can also yield transferable insights into sponsorship acquisition and retention of educational ventures and non-profit organizations.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The following section outlines the study's limitations and delimitations.

Limitations are out of the researcher's control and are imposed restrictions based on factors involved in research such as the research design and available funding.

Delimitations are boundaries or limits imposed by the researcher on their study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018).

#### **Limitations**

Several limitations apply to this research study. Based on the exemplar case study methodology and the therefore singular case studied, the findings are not generalizable to a wider population. By studying a single organization, it cannot be assumed similar entities would yield reflective findings, particularly due to culture being unique to each organization. However, case study findings can be suggestive of what may be found in a similar context (Simon & Goes, 2013) and naturalistic generalizations were developed for this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify naturalistic generalization as "working hypotheses" which need to be assessed for their transferability to other cases by comparing the similarities between the source and target case. Since generalizations cannot readily be made from case study research, naturalistic generalizations provide readers with generalizations from which they can learn for themselves and which can be applied to a population of cases or be transferred to similar contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As the interviewees in this study were all employed members of the organization, and the fan focus group members were considered as part of the organization's "family", a potential limitation of this study is a social desirability bias. Subjects may respond with what they think is considered socially desirable by other organizational members, particularly when inquiring about the organization's culture (Nederhof, 1985). To address this limitation, interviews were conducted on an individual basis and focus group sessions included the use of index cards on which members noted their responses to selected questions before discussing the answers.

Finally, due to the researcher's history of being involved with the organization on separate occasions and the researcher's interest in the topic at hand, the researcher's relationship to the study site and topic is a limitation. While the prior connection will help establish legitimacy and rapport with the participants, it is important to note potential personal biases and how these may affect the study's findings. In chapter three the researcher's positionality is further addressed.

### *Delimitations*

The major delimitation of this study is the limited scope. This study focuses only on one sport club for people with disabilities (e.g., RSV Lahn-Dill), in one sport (e.g., wheelchair basketball), and in one country (e.g., Germany). Since not all sport clubs for people with disabilities can be explored, the researcher chose to focus on an exemplar club which has excelled at the sport, thereby attracting and retaining fans and sponsors, all of which speaks to its culture. Additionally, as culture is inherent to the organization, the researcher chose to focus on a review of external communication elements from the organization and an internal perspective of the organization's culture and the role of

relationship marketing in their sponsorship acquisition and retention. The decision to collect data from current members who have been with the organization a minimum of one year and avid fans who have been part of the official fan club for a minimum of one year ensures familiarity of participants with the organization's culture. Limiting the scope to one study site allows for in depth analysis and convenient data collection given the time and location constraints.

### **Definition of Terms**

- Disability sport: "Disability sport is a term that refers to sport designed for, or specifically practiced, by people with disabilities" (Sportanddev, n.d., para 6). Disability sports are further known as adaptive sports or parasport (Disabled World, 2019).
- Wheelchair basketball: "Wheelchair basketball is played by people with different level of physical disabilities that prevents running, jumping and pivoting. Riding on a wheelchair, a game of basketball is played among two teams of five players each." (Singapore Sports Council, 2020, para 1).
- Rollstuhl Sport Verein Verein Lahn-Dill (RSV Lahn-Dill): Wheelchair Basketball Club Lahn-Dill (Lahn-Dill = a region in state Hesse in Germany)
- Rollstuhlbasketball-Bundesliga (RBBL): English: Major wheelchair basketball league; the RBBL is the highest German wheelchair basketball league. (RBBL, n.d.)
- Organizational culture: "A pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to

new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.” (Schein, 2010, p. 17).

- Schein’s Organizational Culture Framework:
  - Artifacts: “Visible organizational structures and processes (hard to decipher)” (Schein, 2010, p. 26)
  - Espoused beliefs and values: “Strategies, goals, philosophies (espoused justifications)” (Schein, 2010, p. 26)
  - Underlying assumptions: “Unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. . . (ultimate source of values and action)” (Schein, 2010, p. 26)
- Meyerson and Martin levels of organizational culture analysis:
  - Integration: Level of analysis is on what is ‘shared’ within a culture such as language, values, and behaviors (Meyerson & Martin, 1987).
  - Differentiation: “stresses inconsistency and lack of consensus” (Martin & Meyerson, 1986, p. 15) and “occurs when espoused ideology conflicts with actual practices” (Martin & Meyerson, 1986, p. 16).
  - Fragmentation: “Cultural manifestations are not clearly consistent or inconsistent with each other. Instead, the relationships among manifestations are characterized by a lack of clarity from ignorance or complexity” (Meyerson & Martin, 1987, p. 637).

- Relationship marketing: “All marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges” (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 22).
  - Relationship quality: “Nature of relational bonds with an exchange partner” (Palmatier, 2008, p. 19).
    - Commitment: “Exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it; that is, the committed party believes the relationship is worth working on to ensure that it endures indefinitely” (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 23).
    - Trust: “When one party has confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity” (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 23).
  - Relationship breadth: “Represents the number of relational bonds with an exchange partner; interorganizational relationships that include many interpersonal ties can uncover key information, find profit-enhancing opportunities, and withstand disruptions to individual bonds (e.g., reorganizations, turnover)” (Palmatier, 2008, p. 20).
  - Relationship composition: “The decisionmaking capability of relational contacts; a diverse and authoritative contact portfolio increases a seller's ability to effect change in customer organizations” (Palmatier, 2008, p. 21).

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Worldwide, athletes with disabilities face inequitable sport participation opportunities compared to able-bodied athletes. This discrepancy is perpetuated by lack of access, fewer available opportunities, a lack of talent identification structures, higher participation costs, and significantly less sponsorship funding (Patatas et al., 2018). To combat the financial challenges faced by disability sport, sponsorship - the main revenue source of able-bodied sport teams – can prove to be a viable alternative. While sponsorship in disability sport is still in its infancy (Cottingham et al., 2017), Legg and Dottori (2017) pointed to the value and importance of sponsorship to the Paralympic Movement. However, disability sport requires special attention as it has been found that both consumption behavior (Cottingham et al., 2014) and policy development differs from able-bodied sports (Patatas et al., 2018). Researchers and practitioners can therefore not presume the sponsorship landscape of disability sport mimics able-bodied and mainstream sports. To maximize sponsorship effectiveness, sponsors have long turned away from setting up simple one-way exchanges of financial resources (Renard & Sitz, 2011) to building strategic alliances which are underlined by relationship marketing efforts (Farrelly & Quester, 2005b). Relationship marketing (RM) includes intentional actions to establish, develop, and maintain successful relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). As culture plays an essential role in forming external relations (Barney, 1986),

cultural analyses of (sport) organizations can identify the parts of the culture which appeal to potential partners and can be leveraged to build external relationships (Ellis et al., 2006). Thus, understanding disability sport organizational culture and its factors which appeal to potential sponsors can drive sponsorship relationship formation and retention.

Two theoretical frameworks will drive this study – organizational culture and relationship marketing. These next sections will first briefly focus on organizational culture, followed by a review of relevant relationship marketing literature, and concludes with an outline of the disability sport context illustrating how the two frameworks apply to this study.

### **Organizational Culture**

Organizational culture is at the core of every organization and holds that organization together while playing the lead role in developing an organizational identity which can in turn be leveraged to showcase that identity to the external environment (Jo Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Renard & Sitz, 2011). Shared meanings and beliefs are central to the culture concept and determine how its members think, feel, value, and act, making culture significant to any organization and its operations (Alvesson, 2013).

### **Organizational Culture Background**

Organizational culture first gained traction in academic research in the late 1970s and early 1980s when Japanese firms operated superior to western companies. The first studies failed to identify organizational culture differences due to a focus on the structural firm approach rather than national cultures as the reason for different firm performance (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985). Hofstede (1980) took the approach of reviewing social science

literature on human mental programs as he reasoned social systems are grounded in mental programming. Mental programming refers to how a human behaves given a specific situation. It leads humans to exhibit similar behaviors in similar situations. It is stable over time making human behavior predictable if the person and situation are known. When someone tells a joke, for example, mental programming will naturally cause humans to react to humor by laughing rather than crying. Humans are programmed to laugh when something is funny. Hofstede found in his review 50 terms dealing with human mental programs which he categorized into mental programs of individuals (e.g., personality), collectives (e.g., culture), or both. Additionally, he highlighted how mental programming is partly unique and partly shared and can be further divided into three levels – universal, collective, and individual. Universal refers to mental programming shared among a majority of mankind such as laughing. The collective level includes mental programming shared with some but not all people. People from different groups or categories can be distinguished at this level through their subjective human culture (Hofstede, 1980) which is defined as a society’s “characteristic way of perceiving its social environment” (Triandis, 1972, p. 8, as cited in Triandis, 2002, p. 3) and includes everything which is not material (e.g. food, houses, tools, dress; Triandis, 2002). The last level refers to the individual human programming which is the part of an individual’s personality resulting in differing behavior within a collective culture. Mental programming is both genetic and can be learned. The universal level is most likely inherited, collective level is learned, and the individual level has inherited parts, as well as learned parts. Therefore, the universal level can be seen as the biological operating system which determines a range of expressive behaviors such as crying when a human is



in pain. The difference in language use between a Southern American (ex. – y’all) and a Northern American (ex. - you guys) is part of the collective level. Lastly, the individual level would be exhibited by one twin having a very open personality while the other twin has a reserved personality. Even though they may have experienced the same universal and collective levels, they still exhibit differences at the individual level as no two humans are identical.

The basis of culture is collectivity. Hofstede identified values as a key part of culture as values are attributable to individuals and groups. He defined values as “a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others” (Hofstede, 1980, p.19). “Attributes” and “beliefs” were identified by Rokeach and others (as cited in Hofstede, 1980, p.20) as specific mental programming. Values as part of an individual’s and collective programming culture. Hence, culture affects mental programming similar to the effects values have on mental programming. Hofstede found behavior differences in institutions even more extreme than in individuals, reflecting national culture, professional subculture, and an organization’s history. Thus, “the structure and functioning of organizations are determined not merely by rationality, or, if they are, by rationality that varies according to the cultural environment.” (Hofstede, 1980, p. 27). Culture affects organizations in various ways, including, for example, how power is distributed. It drives the values of the powerful groups, determining organizational goals and objectives, decision-making processes, organizational structure and formal procedures, and reward systems. The values of organizational members who are not in power positions also influence organizational culture by providing the rationale to comply with organizational requirements, providing insight into the regulation and

control processes necessary to meet the desired behavior and into the members' zone of manageability, as well as affecting the accuracy of communication within the organization and determining support for the people in power. Lastly, the dominant values of persons external to an organization, including competing and interacting organizations, media, government and the public at large, all influence what an organization can and cannot do in their operations (Hofstede, 1980). In example, an organization cannot not go against the ethical standards set by the public at large as the media would publicity scrutinize the company for any wrongdoing.

Aware of the influence culture has on organizations and how organizational culture is shaped, Hofstede (1980) called for an approach to analyze various cultures beyond what is similar and what is different. Schein answered Hofstede's call for an extension on cultural analysis in his scholarship on organizational culture and leadership. Between his scholarship and Hofstede's findings, researchers utilized different approaches to debate culture and its definition for 25 years (Ashkanasy et al., 2000; Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Deal & Kennedy, 1999; Martin, 2002; Schultz, 1995; Trice & Beyer, 1993, as cited in Schein, 2010). Schein (2010) addressed the ambiguity to form a comprehensive definition of culture as

“a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.” (p. 17).

Culture therefore has several layers and characteristics, and no cultures are precisely the same due to the variety of external and internal influences.

## **Culture Characteristics**

Beyond the definition of culture, several characteristics further elaborate on culture – (a) structural stability, (b) depth, (c) breadth, and (d) patterning or integration. Structural stability refers to group identity which is not only shared but also stable over time and withstands change in organizational membership (Schein, 2010). The idea of cohesion and stability was laid out in the social theory of Emile Durkheim (1858/1984, as cited in Beckert, 2001). Durkheim introduced the significance of values in social cohesion as he identified educational institutions' role in developing moral values as the foundation of social order (Beckert, 2001). An existing culture is a mechanism for social control through which members can be explicitly manipulated to perceive, think, and feel particular ways (Kunda, 1992; Schein, 1968, as cited in Schein, 2010; Kunda & Van Maanen, 1999). The depth characteristic recognizes culture as the unconscious, less tangible and visible part of a group. Breadth concerns the covering of all aspects and functioning of a group by culture (Schein, 2010). Lastly, patterning or integration as a characteristic of culture stems from the human desire to create a sensible and orderly environment (Weick, 1995). Rituals, climate, values, and behaviors are all tied together coherently in this characteristic. Therefore “organizational cultures, like other cultures, develop as groups of people struggle to make sense of and cope with their worlds” (Trice & Beyer, 1993, p. 4). Schein (2010) notes that creating culture starts with a leader imposing their values and beliefs on a newly formed group of people. If they are successful, meaning the group achieves what they set out to accomplish, the beliefs and values of the founder are confirmed, reinforced, and become *shared*. The author further highlighted that as the beliefs and values are continuously reinforced, the group becomes

less actively conscious of them as they become part of the deeper group culture. As the group internalizes the beliefs and values, they become nonnegotiable values, also known as *assumptions*. To unravel these deeper-level shared assumptions, regular members or old-timers with institutional memory who have immersed themselves into the culture have to be interviewed and observed (Schein, 2010).

### **The Levels of Culture**

The manifestation of organizational culture can be overt or subtle (Hogan & Coote, 2014). Considering Hofstede's and Durkheim's scholarship, Schein further expanded on the role of values and assumptions held by individuals about reality, specifically leaders, and concluded those form organizational culture (Schein, 2010). Schein (1985) introduced three levels of culture in his scholarship, differentiating by the degree to which the phenomenon is visible to observers. Culture is manifested in (a) artifacts, and (b) espoused beliefs and values, while the essence of culture is grounded in (c) basic underlying assumptions. Schein's (2010) definitions of culture are detailed below.

Artifacts are the surface level of culture and include everything which can be seen, heard, or felt when encountering an unfamiliar culture. All that is visible, including style, clothing, language, emotional displays, stories about the organization, published values of the organization, organizational processes, and structural elements (e.g., organizational charts, mission statements), as well as rituals and ceremonies are artifacts of culture. While artifacts are easily observable, they are difficult to understand since their meaning is derived from the underlying espoused beliefs and values. Hence, it would take an observer living in the group for an extended period of time to decipher

their meanings. To rapidly understand the artifacts, the espoused values, norms, and rules for daily operations need to be analyzed.

Espoused beliefs and values exist on a conscious level and predict a majority of the behavior observed at the artifacts level. For example, an organization may value employee freedom to work from wherever and whenever. On the artifact level, this may result in few people being present in the office or people arriving and leaving at random times. Espoused beliefs and values also connect the deeper level of underlying assumptions by reflecting conscious beliefs, norms, and operational rules based on non-negotiable assumptions. Congruency between the underlying assumptions and espoused beliefs and values serves as a source of identity and core mission. Moral and ethical rules are derived from the underlying assumptions and articulated at this level of culture. As morals and ethics become part of organizational ideology or philosophy, they serve as guides in the face of uncontrollable events (Schein, 2010).

Basic underlying assumptions originate in the simple solution to a problem. Once the solution works repeatedly it becomes taken for granted and is treated as reality. At this stage, only little variation within a social unit can be found and differentiating or dissenting behavior is believed to be inconceivable and even disruptive (Schein, 2010). Basic assumptions are similar to the “theories-in-use” which Argyris identified as assumptions humans often are unaware of, but which guide their behavior. Within a group setting they tell group members how to perceive, think, and feel. The non-confrontable and non-debatable nature of theory-in-use and basic assumptions makes those same theory-in-use and assumptions difficult to change. Only through the process of “double-loop learning”, involving adaption and modification of the governing values,

is the constancy (in this case the basic underlying assumptions) changed (Argyris, 1976; Argyris & Schön, 1974). Having established these assumptions such as treating everyone equally regardless of the position held in the company and/or background, humans are most comfortable with other humans with whom they share same assumptions than with those who do not. People who find themselves in situations where their own basic assumptions are challenged or questioned may display defense mechanisms and anxiety. Consequently, as organizational cultures are based on underlying assumptions of individuals and group members, changing any aspect of the culture is as difficult as changing an individual's defense mechanism (Schein, 2010). It is to note, while the manipulation of culture as a whole is impossible, aspects of a given culture can be intentionally influenced especially by management (i.e., by changing a company's mission statement to redirect the company; Meek, 1988). Parts of culture can be altered piece by piece, resulting in perceived organizational change. Deciphering the basic underlying assumptions provides not only insight into the ability or inability to change but also into interpreting the artifacts correctly and how much to trust the expressed values and beliefs (Schein, 2010).

Meek (1988) further argues it is important to distinguish the concepts of culture and social structure and treat them as abstractions, not tangibles. When researching culture, concrete organizational member behaviors and actions should be observed and described, and culture and social structure used to interpret those behaviors and actions. Further, Meyerson and Martin (1987) outlined three paradigms through which culture traditionally has been analyzed – (a) integration, (b) differentiation and diversity, and (c) ambiguity, also referred to as fragmentation. Schein's scholarship is exemplified in

paradigm one – integration. In this paradigm researchers identify what is ‘shared’ within a culture such as language, values, and behaviors. Paradigm two on the other hand emphasizes differentiation and diversity. Researchers (Christenson & Kreiner, 1984; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Siehl, 1984; Smith & Simmons, 1983; as cited in Meyerson & Martin, 1987) focused on inconsistencies and lack of consensus in culture and on non-leader centered sources of culture. In contrast to paradigm one, Meyerson and Martin believed cultures are not single and dominant but a collection of values and manifestations where espoused values and actual practices may show inconsistencies. Thus, cultural portrayal focuses on disagreement instead of consensus. The final paradigm, ambiguity, views culture with no shared or integrated values but rather an awareness of ambiguity and fragmentation. Within ambiguity “Cultural manifestations are not clearly consistent or inconsistent with each other. Instead, the relationships among manifestations are characterized by a lack of clarity from ignorance or complexity” (Meyerson & Martin, 1987, p. 637). Therefore, consensus among individuals, disagreeing on viewpoints and confusion or indifference about views can all coexist. Considering the different approaches of all three paradigms, Martin and Meyerson (1986) argue relying on a single paradigm to view culture misleads through oversimplification. Rather, cultures should be viewed from all three paradigms, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity and potential for innovation of a specific culture. Leveraging all three lenses and making a distinction between what is shared (integration), contested and unclear (differentiation), and ambiguous (fragmentation), results in richer and more complete descriptions of culture.

## **Summary**

Organizational culture research has been widely shaped by Edgar Schein's scholarship and framework of organizational culture analysis, examining an organization's artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions. However, going beyond Schein's framework and including an analysis of cultural differentiation and fragmentation provides a more comprehensive and holistic view of an organizational culture. As organizational culture analysis found its first application in business, in the following, the major findings of organizational culture research particularly in regard to external relations and as a source of competitive advantage are outlined.

### **Organizational Culture and Business**

Organizational culture has long been identified as a source of competitive advantage (Alvesson, 2002; Lawler, 1992, Moore, 1954; as cited in Fortado & Fadil, 2012; Waterman & Peters, 1982). Additionally, researchers have found a correlation between organizational culture and economic performance (Denison, 1990; Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Sorensen, 2002, as cited in Schein, 2010). The analysis of organizational culture comes with benefits as diversity practices can be reviewed and leadership change processes improved through unraveling cultural strengths and identifying room for improvement. Additionally, it can potentially reveal unconscious unethical processes and lead to increased numbers of ethical practices. Finally, through culture analysis, symbolic resources (e.g., symbolic awards such as achievement plaques) to guide organizational culture can be co-constructed by leadership and insight into relevant cultural practices for organizational effectiveness is provided (Driskill, 2019).



The invisible social force of culture (Schein, 2010) has been confirmed empirically with organizational culture being shown to impact organizational relationships (Williams & Attaway, 1996) partially through employee attitudes and organizational relationship performance (Beugelsdijk et al., 2009) among other influences. Further evidence has been found explaining the influence of organizational culture on creating a competitive advantage by influencing market performance (Gillespie et al., 2008; Gregory et al., 2009). It is quite clear that desired organizational outcomes can be achieved and driven through organizational culture (Hogan & Coote, 2014).

### **External Relationships**

While organizational culture is the internal core of an organization, it is also highly relevant for external relations. Moreover, “a firm’s culture not only defines who its relevant employees, customers, suppliers, and competitors are, but also defines how a firm will interact with these key actors” (Barney, 1986, p.657). Within the business literature, Sambasivan and Yen (2010) found organizational culture to have a significant effect on the degree of integration and value creation of strategic alliances. Strategic alliances are “close, long-term, mutually beneficial agreement[s] in which resources, knowledge, and skills are shared with the objective of enhancing the competitive position of each partner” (Urriolagoitia & Planellas, 2007, p.158). Sambasivan and Yen (2010) looked at different classifications of organizational culture, including clan (internal focus and flexibility), adhocracy (external focus and flexibility), hierarchy (internal focus and control), and market (external focus and control). They found adhocracy cultures, being innovative, entrepreneurial, risk-taking, resource acquisition seeking and creating new

challenges and products and services, showed higher levels of communication and commitment with suppliers (the strategic alliance partner) and reached a higher degree of value creation. The results indicate the importance of the type of organizational culture in the creating value for strategic alliances (Sambasivan & Yen, 2010).

Beugelsdijk et al. (2006) further highlighted the importance of organizational culture in interfirm relationships in their study exploring a firm's internal characteristics and their link to external relationships. The study found relationship skills, defined as a "firm's ability and behavioral tendency to actively cultivate and manage its ties with other firms" (Beugelsdijk et al., 2006, p. 833) were rooted in certain aspects of organizational culture. As relationship skills are valuable for interorganizational relationships, the organizational culture in which the relationship skills are rooted plays an instrumental role in the success of a firm's interorganizational relationships. These findings further support the notion that the nature of relationships is cultural. Organizational culture is an antecedent of interorganizational performance as it influences a firm's relationship skills which in turn are leveraged for external relations (Ellis et al., 2006). Hence, relationships are built upon cultural foundations.

Beugelsdijk et al. (2006) further found organizational cultures with an innovation orientation (e.g., focus on innovating and creating in their work and product/services) showed stronger alliance capabilities, supporting Gemünden et al.'s (1996) findings of joint innovation being a potential benefit of strong external relations. According to the authors, stability orientation, characterized by a firm's predictability through a stable culture and environment, is positively correlated with maintaining successful inter-firm relations. This orientation can also result in a firm being perceived as more trustworthy.

Firms with a results focus were found to have a negative relationship with relationship skills. The authors argued a results focus may cause a lack of patience, interest, and skills to have successful long-lasting interfirm relationships. Overall, the results of the study show organizational culture is an antecedent of interorganizational performance by influencing a firm's relationship skills which in return are leveraged for external relations (Beugelsdijk et al., 2006). In a later study, Beugelsdijk et al. (2009) extended the previous relationship management research by exploring potential effects of differences in organizational culture on relationship performance. The findings showed larger differences in organizational culture in less successful inter-firm relationships. No significant influence on the perceived relationship success was found (Beugelsdijk et al., 2009). However, there is no debate culture plays a role in relationship quality, which is one of the key tenants of relationship marketing, based on cultural understanding between partners (Palmatier, 2008). Additionally, increased communication frequency and level in relationships increases the chance of cultural integration (Iglesias et al., 2011).

Taking Martin and Meyerson's (1986/1987) case study approach to cultural analysis by looking at what is shared, differentiated and fragmented, Larentis et al. (2018) explored interorganizational culture - the norms and values shared by different organizations (Sáenz et al., 2014) of two strategic business units. The study revealed the existence of interorganizational culture, though restricted by boundaries. Despite these differences, interorganizational culture was still present. Cultural consensus was limited to specific issues or contexts the interacting organizations shared. Thus, interorganizational culture is an intersection of cultures (Larentis et al., 2018). In the buyer-seller relationship between organizations, a selling firm's organizational culture

and customer orientation determine the relationship development between buyer and seller. Moreover, a customer orientation, meaning the type of behavior by the organization and its members (in this case specifically the salespeople), serves as a mediator in the link between the selling firm's organizational culture and relationship development. Thus, selling firms reach the highest impact on their buyer-seller relationships by means of a supportive work culture *through* their customer-oriented sales staff. A supportive environment is underlined by encouragement of sales staff to be cocreators who stimulate creativity. This type of environment enables salespeople to tailor their offerings to the buyers' needs. Without a customer-oriented sales staff, even highly supportive cultures cannot mitigate the lack of contact vehicle (e.g., sales staff as connector between company and consumer) in the relationship development. Therefore, a match of values between potential new employees and organizational values can yield more successful buyer-seller relationships (Williams & Attaway, 1996).

Overall, for successful interorganizational relationships, organizations need to leverage their organizational culture through their similarities (Beugelsdijk et al., 2009) and nurture their relationships through interaction and communication (Iglesias et al., 2011), reducing potential differences. A value match between sales staff and organizational culture can further drive the buyer-seller relationship.

### **Competitive Advantage**

Recognizing the intuitive appeal and practical value of Schein's multi-layer model of organizational culture, Hogan and Coote (2014) tested a model to reveal cultural processes which foster innovation. While Schein's model has seen limited empirical application, Hogan and Coote (2014) established an empirical model based on Schein's

organizational culture framework of how firm performance can be driven through innovative behaviors based on (a) artifacts, (b) espoused values, and (c) basic underlying assumptions, of organizational culture. The results indicate innovative values need to be supplemented with norms for innovation and artifacts of innovation to improve performance. While values build the foundation, they alone do not drive results. Norms as explicit expectations are essential in guidance of particular inner firm behavior. Artifacts elicit expected behavior by communicating and facilitating the behavioral expectations set by the organization. Thus, norms and artifacts partially mediate the effects of values and act as important drivers and supporters of innovative behavior. Shaping organizational culture through Schein's layers to encourage new and novel approaches to meeting the needs of clients creates an advantage for organizations to differentiate their organizational processes, products, and services from their competition (Hogan & Coote, 2014).

Organizational effectiveness, as a prerequisite for advantages over an organization's competition, is impacted by culture. Denison and Mishra (1995) found four specific cultural traits within organizations – involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission. Involvement stands for employee participation, ownership, and responsibility. Consistency is the degree of normative integration and the prevalence of individual conformity to behaviors, systems, and meanings of the organization. Mission is the long-term vision providing meaning and direction to organizational members. Finally, adaptability refers to the internal change capacity relative to external conditions. Following Schein's (1990) findings of cultural development being driven by an organization's coping mechanisms of addressing the dual problems of external adaption

and internal integration, involvement, and consistency address internal integration, while mission and adaptability focus on external adaptation. Further, involvement and adaptability relate to an organization's capacity to change and are indicators of flexibility, openness, and responsiveness, as well as predictors of organizational growth. Consistency and involvement contribute to organizational predictability and stability and are signs of integration, direction, and vision, predicting a firm's profitability (Denison & Mishra, 1995). Sadri and Lee (2001) further discovered the foundation for effective corporate cultures was alignment with employee values and the organization's environment. Organizational culture is not just a driver of competitive advantage but a prerequisite for success and employee retention (Sadri & Lees, 2001).

Further expanding on the effects of culture and organizational effectiveness, Gillespie et al. (2008) explored the relationship between organizational culture and customer satisfaction as customer satisfaction is an essential component of effective organizations (Berry & Parasuraman, 1992; Fornell et al., 2006; as cited in Gillespie et al. 2008). The organizational traits of involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission together explain 28% of the variance in customer satisfaction ratings for home-building makers and 11% for auto dealerships. The consistency trait was further found having a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction meaning an extensive focus on consistency in relation to other traits increases customer satisfaction. Moreover, coordination as an index of consistency drives customer satisfaction. Therefore, while all traits play a role in customer satisfaction, well-coordinated employees are specifically important in achieving common goals and greater customer satisfaction. Additionally, a customer focus drives customer satisfaction more than other indices. However, trait

emphasis can also lead to negative results. An overemphasis on vision relates to negative customer satisfaction and team orientation relates negatively to service satisfaction. Creating change index also was found to have a negative unique relationship with customer satisfaction, further supporting the notion consistency and coordination versus change drive car dealership customer satisfaction. Overall, the study highlights the importance of customer focus and coordination as part of an organization's culture to satisfy customers (Gillespie et al., 2008).

Denison and Spreitzer (1991) introduced the competing values model of organizational culture based on the competing values framework (CVF) originally developed by Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1981) to "explain differences in the values underlying various organizational effectiveness models" (Denison & Spreitzer, 1991, p. 3). The framework is based on two competing dimensions – (a) change (flexibility and spontaneity) versus stability (control and order), and (b) internal (integration and buffering) versus external (competition, adaptation, and interaction focus) demands. Based on the dimensions, four types of cultural orientation emerge: group culture, development culture, rational culture, and hierarchical culture. Group culture combines flexibility with internal focus, valuing human relations and emphasizing group maintenance through values of belonging, trust, and participation. Development culture emphasizes flexibility with an external focus, putting change and adaptation first to grow the organization. Leadership is entrepreneurial, risk taking and inspires creativity. Rational cultures are also externally focused, though they emphasize control with goal attainment at the forefront of organizational values. Productivity, achievement, and competition are essential to rational cultures. Hierarchical cultures are internally focused, emphasizing

control. They value uniformity and coordination and expect efficiency through strict guidelines regulating behavior (Denison & Spreitzer, 1991).

Considering the importance of an organization's culture, specifically its sales staff, a customer focus and coordination for organizational effectiveness, Gregory et al. (2009) explored employee attitudes as a potential mediator between organizational culture and effectiveness. Supporting previous findings of organizations which value teamwork, cohesion, and employee involvement outperforming those which lack those values, in a patient-hospital's group relationship, *group culture* has a positive relationship with patient satisfaction. This direct effect on organizational effectiveness underlines Denison's (1990) findings of the significant relationship group domains have with organizational effectiveness. Extending the competing values model of organizational culture (Denison & Spreitzer, 1991) through Quinn's (1988, as cited in Gregory et al., 2009) scholarship, Gregory et al. (2009) also considered the role of a *balanced culture* which strongly holds each of the CVF culture domains in their study. Their results indicate higher levels of patient satisfaction by balanced cultures versus unbalanced cultures. This further supports Quinn's (1988) suggestion that no one culture domain is enough to serve an organization with all the values and collective beliefs needed to be successful. Rather a breadth of values, such as held by a balanced culture, is needed to exist in a dynamic environment. Additionally, cultural effectiveness is driven indirectly through the impact of culture on employee attitudes (employee satisfaction and physician satisfaction) which in return influence organizational outcomes (controllable expenses and patient satisfaction) (Gregory et al., 2009).



It is evident a competitive advantage can be achieved through organizational effectiveness driven by organizational culture. Shaping organizational culture through Schein's artifacts, norms and values and can lead to a differentiation from and advantage over competition. Further, employees play an essential role in mitigating and driving customer satisfaction, buyer-seller relationships, and organizational performance through organizational culture. Finally, organizational culture provides the basis for success in attracting valuable talent to the organization and identifying value matches between potential employees and the organization to build a culture which achieves successful performances and may attract potential partners.

### **Summary**

Current literature within organizational culture and the business realm shows the importance of a culture which is driven by values and expressed and supported through norms and artifacts. The benefits of such organizational culture lay in successful interorganizational relationships, external relations, buyer-seller relationships, increased customer satisfaction and employee relationships which further drive organizational effectiveness.

### **Organizational Culture and Sport Organizations**

Organizational culture benefits are far reaching and yet still attainable in any organization. Within the sport management realm, the value of managing organizational culture has long been established (e.g., Amis & Slack, 2002; Colyer, 2000; Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999; Scott, 1997; Shilbury & Moore, 2006; Slack & Parent, 2006; Smith & Shilbury, 2004; Wallace & Weese, 1995; Weese, 1996, as cited in Choi et al., 2010). In fact, the increased professionalism and commercialization of the sport industry create a

rapidly changing environment in which sport organizations should review their organizational culture to maximize their effectiveness (Choi et al., 2010). However, sport organizations differ from most work organizations due to a rich sub-culture of volunteers (Colyer, 2000) and unique sub-dimensions including rituals, tradition, symbols and history (Smith & Shilbury, 2004). Therefore, research findings from other types of organizations cannot simply be applied to sport organizations. Researchers have, therefore, used two foci in examining sport organization culture – (a) competing values in sport organizations and (b) shared organizational sport culture.

### **Competing Values in Sport Organizations**

Colyer (2000) was the first to apply the competing values model in a sport organization. The study explored organizational culture in Western Australian sport associations through the Competing Values Framework (CVF) and found differences in values held by sport association volunteers versus sport association employees. The findings indicated subcultures within sport organizations, specifically due to the large number of volunteers common in sport organizations. While Colyer's (2000) approach was very much a trial of applying the framework in the sport organization setting, it proved the CVF framework, in conjunction with qualitative research methods, was appropriate for investigating the culture of sport organizations.

Choi and Scott (2008, 2009) followed suit and quantitatively assessed the organizational culture of professional baseball associations by surveying participants using the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) questionnaire based on the CVF. The OCAI is a modified version of the CVF which includes 24 items divided into clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchical subscales. These follow the different

classifications of organizational culture (Sambasivan & Yen, 2010) where clan represents an internal focus and flexibility, adhocracy an external focus and flexibility, hierarchy an internal focus and control, and market an external focus and control. Each of the classifications in Choi and Scott's (2008) study has six subitems addressing employee perceptions of core cultural elements. Within the Korean Professional Baseball League (KPBL) organizations were found to emphasize market and hierarchy cultures as dominant culture types. However, results showed a balance between all four culture types, indicating a cultural balance was present (Choi et al., 2010). Considering organizational culture and job satisfaction in KPBL organizations, a significant influence of clan culture on overall employee job satisfaction and satisfaction with co-workers, supervision and personal growth was found (Choi et al., 2008).

Within Triple-A professional baseball (TAB) organizations in the US, Choi and Scott (2008) also incorporated the competing values approach to identify ways sport managers could increase organizational effectiveness through adjusting the dimensions of culture. The findings showed TAB organizations demonstrated market cultures which are exemplified by an internal focus, centralized structure, and goal achievement. Cohesion and trust were favored by the Triple-A organizations, exemplifying a clan culture. The larger organizations within the league with high winning percentages and high attendance levels achieved a higher score of cultural strength (Choi & Scott, 2008). Besides the U.S. and Korean baseball organizations, Choi et al. (2010) called for "further investigations of organizational culture in sport organizations to determine how to best enhance their organizational effectiveness" (p. 187).

Abbasi et al. (2013) later validated the OCAI framework within Iranian Sport Organizations. The researchers used a confirmatory factor analysis to determine the necessary study sample out of the study population. In all, 253 subjects ended up participating and the results found the OCAI to be an appropriate framework when analyzing Iranian Sport Organizations. Hence, the framework was also valid in a different cultural context and language (Abbasi et al., 2013).

### **Review of Sport Organizational Culture Research**

While Maitland et al.'s (2015) review of studies on organizational culture in sport showed a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods were used to explore the topic, the majority of researchers have used qualitative methods. Studies mainly relied solely on interviews or supplemented with other methods. Document analyses, observations and ethnographies were also used to study sport organizational culture. Based on Henriksen et al. (2010a, 2010b, 2011, as cited in Maitland et al., 2015), Maitland et al. (2015) called for an extension of research methods beyond cultural assessment instruments and interviews and specifically highlighted the need for the inclusion of case studies and ethnographies in sport organizational culture research. Additionally, it is vital to expand the study population to include athletes and coaches and not just sport administrators and volunteers, since they are all stakeholders in sport organizations.

Looking beyond the study participants to the study site, the clear majority (two thirds) of studies focused on university sport organizational culture, followed by six studies on professional sport set-ups and the rest examined a range of local and national sport organizations and governing bodies. No parasport organizations were included, however. Moreover, North American sport organizations were the clear focus in 16 out of

33 studies. Australian sport organizations were the spotlight of four studies (Maitland et al., 2015).

Following Martin and Meyerson's approach to integration, differentiation, and fragmentation of organizational culture, 23 out of 33 studies reviewed were found to have taken an integration approach, meaning they viewed organizational culture as clear and not ambiguous. The differentiation approach was taken by five studies, while none solely adapted the fragmentation approach. Three studies followed Martin and Meyerson's scholarship and leveraged all three perspectives to identify the complexity of organizational culture in sport organizations (Maitland et al., 2015). Girginov (2006) further stresses the political implications of the perspectives. The author argued an emphasis of research on the integration perspective leaves a void in understanding the ambiguities and complexities of real life. For example, while top level managers may all have one shared perspective of their culture, lower-level managers dealing with everyday problems and changing workspaces, may experience ambiguities relative to what is communicated from the top management level. Life is more complex than what is shared. Therefore, one should not simply look at the similarities within cultural perspectives but also pay attention to what is (perceived) differently and/or fragmented (Girginov et al., 2006).

Maitland et al.'s (2015) review found little consensus around an organizational culture definition. However, Schein's (2010) definition (as previously outlined) was most often cited. There is a generic perception culture is something an organization *has* and is common and shared among members, highlighted by 31 out of 33. The connection between cultural conceptualization and operationalization was not always evident in the

studies reviewed, however. Thus, Maitland et al. (2015) urged researchers to clearly define and operationalize culture and “align the manifestation of culture under study to the assumed definition of culture, to yield a more cohesive cultural understanding of sport organisations” (p. 509).

### **Shared Organizational Sport Culture**

Schein’s (2010) model and view of organizational culture assumes successful cultures have shared cultural elements (McDougall et al., 2020). Up through 2017, Bailey et al. (2019) found 18 out of 33 studies within the sport organizational culture realm utilized Schein’s organizational culture framework as a basis of analysis. Following the approach of previous studies, Bailey et al. (2019) applied Schein’s (2010) model in a case study exploring the CrossFit culture and found the following: (a) shared cultural elements, (b) artifacts, (c) espoused beliefs and values, and (d) shared underlying assumptions. *Shared cultural elements* described unity in goals and visions. The shared cultural elements were specifically highlighted by the ideals, goals, values, and aspirations of leaving one’s ego at the door, communal pride, working hard and having fun, the unconscious beliefs and values of sharing a common goal of health and fitness, and a shared experience. *Artifacts* were visible in the rugged, industrial appearance of the gym and the social nature of members, expressed by heavy interaction prior to and post workout. The tough appearance of the gym was found to contrast with other (non-CrossFit based) fitness organizations. *Espoused beliefs and values* included pride in the gym and the workouts, inclusivity, a high degree of structure and a strong sense of community extending beyond the gym. A common goal of improved health and well-being reflected the *shared underlying assumptions* and the core values of the organization

in the study. Notably, while different groups of members (17 interviewees total), ranging from new or veteran members to coaches and owners were interviewed, all described a similar culture, indicating the absence of subcultures (Bailey et al., 2019).

Henriksen et al. (2010) conducted a holistic analysis of the athletic talent development environment (ATDE) with the Danish national sailing team. The researchers explored factors contributing to success through their environment success factors (ESF) working model which was based on Schein's cultural analysis. Despite the organization suffering from a lack of resources, a strong organizational culture underpinned by artifacts, values, and the basic assumptions of open cooperation and knowledge sharing, individual responsibility for own excellence, and a focus on the performance process compensated for the resource deficits (Henriksen et al., 2010).

### **Beyond What Is Shared**

However, not all organizational cultures are as coherent as found by Bailey et al. (2019) and Henriksen et al. (2010). It is argued that organizational culture is more dynamic than portrayed by Schein, and seldom so coherent and integrative. A study conducted by Norman et al. (2018) recognized the existence of diverse subcultures in a sport organization. Female coaches and coach developers in the English Football Association were found to have disparities in the espoused values and assumptions identified with the English Football Association. People generally derive their identity(s) and values from the variety of cultures of which they are part. Hence, McDougall et al. (2020) argued the conceptualization and organization of culture must go beyond what is united and shared. The diversity in occupations, demographics, and cultures in elite sports should suggest the existence of multiple subcultures. Through Meyerson and

Martin's (1987) organizational culture scholarship, a distinction between what is shared (integration), contested and unclear (differentiation), and ambiguous (fragmentation) can be made. Failing to do so, can result in the exclusion of marginalized identities and people with lower status or authority (McDougall et al., 2020).

Mills and Hoeber (2013) researched members' perceptions of artifacts in a local figure skating club. Using photo-elicited interviews, they found *integration* present in the common perception of the uniqueness of the figure skating facility. Besides the shared perceptions, findings also included *differentiated* views of achievement-oriented artifacts and *fragmented* perspectives of the dressing rooms for the figure skaters. The members' integrated, differentiated, and fragmented perception of artifacts support the notion that not everyone experiences the environment similarly. While artifacts are the visible part of organizational culture which can easily be observed, the meanings behind artifacts are not simply always shared. In this study, artifacts created a sense of unity but simultaneously also separated participants through achievement-oriented artifacts (differentiation perspective) and created hierarchies and disagreements in the dressing rooms (fragmentation perspective). Hence, it is essential for sport managers to consider the meanings associated with any artifacts present in the sport organization (Mills & Hoeber, 2013).

While Mills and Hoeber (2013) focused only on artifacts, Girginov (2006) took a multimethod approach to examine organizational culture as the driver to align sport governing bodies' (SGB) practices with those of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). WADA aimed to achieve *integration* through harmonization across all SGBs with their new World Anti-Doping Code (WADC). SGBs worried about cultural contexts



impacting the interpretation of the code (*differentiation*). Meanwhile, the importance of considering the reality in dealing with doping on a daily basis was stressed by athletes (*fragmentation*) (Girginov, 2006). This study shows the importance of organizational culture for sport governing organizations at all levels and more so having clear sport governance supported by an organizational culture which is accepted, internalized, and acted on at every level. A first step towards clear sport governance, is the awareness of organizational culture elements by leaders. In fact, another study by Frontiera (2010) on the phenomena of organizational culture change in professional sport found leaders who were able to turn their organizations to success to have a particular awareness of the different cultural elements of the organization at hand (Frontiera, 2010).

### **Summary**

When examining organizational culture in sport, looking at what is not shared (differentiated and fragmented) is just as important than what is shared (McDougall et al., 2020). Moreover, stakeholders at all levels from athletes and coaches to administrators and upper management should be included to gain a holistic view (Maitland et al., 2015). The role of leaders specifically is important to establish and maintain coherence within the culture and its meanings (Frontiera, 2010; Girginov, 2006; Mills & Hoerber, 2013). Research has established the existence of subcultures and the significance of exploring and accepting those (Colyer, 2000). Moreover, while job satisfaction was found to be linked to organizational culture (Choi et al., 2008) and the different dimensions of culture possessed the power to increase organizational effectiveness, more research on sport organizational culture and organizational effectiveness is needed (Choi et al., 2010). Acknowledging the findings of the CVF research, future research needs to incorporate

more holistic, case study approaches to sport organizational culture research and reach beyond the mainstream sport studied and the North American context.

The review of organizational culture in sport revealed a gap in the literature and the significance of expanding the research sites beyond North America to other countries and to non-college sport organizations. Specifically, parasport organizations need to be included in future sport organizational studies to address the unique context of adaptive sports and explore how the organizational culture of those organizations can be leveraged to further the Paralympic Movement.

While the review of organizational culture indicates awareness of an organization's culture is beneficial to external relations, it is unclear how organizational culture can be leveraged for positive external relations. Relationship marketing provides a framework to leverage an organization's favorable and attractive cultural attributes for sponsorship acquisition and continued sponsorship relations (Morgan et al., 2020). Therefore, to discover how disability sport organizations are using their organizational culture to successfully acquire and retain sponsorships, relationship marketing is explored in the following section.

### **Relationship Marketing**

The relationship marketing (RM) framework can provide valuable insight into successful sponsorship relationships which are underlined by a long-term engagement between a sponsor and sport property (Morgan et al., 2020). As RM originates in exchange theory, its underlying assumption is that through the relational exchange, both parties involved in an agreement receive reciprocal benefits (Berry, 1983; Grönroos, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The long-term nature and involvement of an exchange

between a sponsor and a sport property make sport sponsorship a perfect phenomenon to explore through the RM lens (Jensen & Cornwell, 2017). Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 22) defined RM as “all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges” while establishing commitment and trust as the key tenants of successful relationships.

*Commitment* indicates maximum efforts by exchange partners to continue the relationship and is driven by the value of the relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). As a driver of value creation in sponsorship research, commitment was further separated into affective and value-based commitment. Affective commitment is classified by favorable feelings toward the business relationship’s future. This type of commitment is key in forming emotional connections between a sponsor and sport property and helps the partners understand, perceive, and calculate the business value of their relationship. It is also a prerequisite for value-based commitment. Value-based commitment focuses on results such as profits, resource and information access, and increased efficiency. As the most significant type of commitment for relationship continuation, commitment has a strong direct effect on value creation (Hessling et al., 2018).

In the *trust* tenant, confidence in the reliability and integrity of the exchange partner is emphasized (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). As a driver of economic and non-economic sponsorship satisfaction, trust is foundational for collaborative partnerships (Farrelly & Quester, 2005a). Within sponsorship relationships trust has a significant connection with commitment as it conditions and increases commitment (Farrelly & Quester, 2005b; Hessling et al., 2018). A study by Brown et al. (2019) on channel members revealed that the value of trusted partners is of such undebatable nature that the

other party will engage in extra effort to maintain the trusted relationship. When higher switching costs are perceived (e.g., cost of finding a new partner), however, commitment was found to erode trust. This comes as partners feel more vulnerable the more committed they are to the relationship. Hessling et al. (2018) also found that greater perceived vulnerability was found to erode trust (i.e., perceived vulnerability to partner's opportunistic tendencies is a mediator between commitment and trust). Hence, increased levels of affective commitment can be achieved by exchange partners believing they are engaged in an honest relationship with the other party (Hessling et al., 2018). Trust can decrease, however, if they feel locked in the relationship as it leads to decreased perceptions of partner reliability and benevolence (Brown et al., 2019).

Taking RM beyond relationship quality (i.e., commitment and trust), Palmatier (2008) discovered additional factors influencing inter-firm relationship outcomes, such as involvement in the Business-to-Business (B2B) sponsorship relationships (Hessling et al., 2018). Specifically, Palmatier (2008) identified how RM also encompassed relationship breadth and composition. *Relationship breadth* is defined by the number of interpersonal relationships existing between two partners (Palmatier, 2008) such as between different employees of the sponsoring team and athletes of the sport property. RM effectiveness is increased through relationship breadth as increased interorganizational relational bonds between the exchange partners can reveal key information, profit-increasing opportunities, and resist disruptions of interpersonal bonds. Broad interorganizational relationships are more resistant to personnel changes and are driven by the variety of connections between two organizations (Palmatier, 2008). *Relationship composition* is underlined by the decision-making capabilities of the relational connection of exchange

partners (Palmatier, 2008). Hence, a diverse and authoritative portfolio of contacts with the exchange partner drives the relationship composition and allows the seller to access critical decision makers, triangulate information, and influence decisions. Through relationship breadth and quality, relationship strength is built to withstand stress and potential interorganizational conflicts. Based on relationship quality and composition, relationship efficacy determines the interorganizational ability to achieve objectives (Palmatier, 2008).

Shared values in form of shared beliefs about behaviors, goals, and policies within the relationship are instrumental to RM and increase the level of commitment between partners (Johanson & Roxenhall, 2009, as cited in Hessling et al., 2018; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Shared values are impactful from the start of the relationship as they connect to the expectations and perceived benefits of the exchange before parties enter into the partnership (Johanson & Roxenhall, 2009, as cited in Hessling et al., 2018). Developing a common understanding of the interorganizational relationship's value and obligations in the relationship encourages equity and relationship continuation (Farrelly, 2010).

### **Summary**

Relationship marketing research needs to not only focus on the trust and commitment between exchange partners (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), but also identify relationship quality and breadth. Relationship breadth hereby is identified by the number of relationships between the two exchange partners. Relationship composition is determined by the decision-making capabilities of the relational connection of exchange partner (Palmatier, 2008). Additionally, shared values between exchange partners support a common understanding of the relationship and increase the level of commitment

between the partners (Johanson & Roxenhall, 2009, as cited in Hessling et al., 2018; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

### **Relationship Marketing and Sport**

Previous sport management studies using the relationship marketing framework in the sponsorship context focused on variety of aspects of sponsorship management. Farrelly and co-authors examined RM within market orientation, collaborative communication, trust, and commitment in sponsor organizations of sport properties (Farrelly & Quester, 2005a; Farrelly et al., 2006). RM factors and conditions which potentially jeopardize sponsorship relationships (Jensen & Cornwell, 2017) and sponsorship discontinuation (van Rijn et al., 2019) have also been studied. Additionally, relationship management for shared values (Morgan et al., 2014) and RM in sport event sponsorship management have been explored (Morgan et al., 2020). Relating to the present study, research looking at sponsorship relations during the acquisition and (dis)continuation stages of sponsorships is highlighted. To capture the unique context of disability sport, a focus on existing niche and disability sport research is provided.

#### **Sponsorship Acquisition**

Sponsorship formation involves several stages including planning, selection, and negotiation. In the following, the stages are outlined in relation to niche sport and disability sport sponsorship acquisition.

##### ***Planning Stage***

During the *planning stage*, sponsors identify their target group and sport properties conduct research to develop a strategy for acquisition (Schönberner et al., 2020). Niche sports have the power to attract companies whose target market matches

their fan base such as in the case of the International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) and Subaru (Brenner, 2003). Further, considering disability sport, congruency with sponsorship portfolio and target market were revealed as important selection and reselection criteria by corporate sponsors (Macdougall et al., 2014). Sponsors of niche sports have expressed target market awareness, community involvement, and image enhancement as objectives for their sponsorship engagements. Thus, niche sport properties need to identify and articulate the psychographics and demographics of their fan base and each of the different communities the sport property influences in order to attract potential external partners (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013b).

### ***Selection Stage***

Company and sport property fit is key to the *selection stage* for sponsors. The most important selection criteria within niche sports were found to be cost effectiveness, company image fit within target market, flexibility of sports property, spectator demographics, and company product/service image fit with sports image. Image awareness by sport properties and potential fit with sponsors' image can yield positive results in the selection stage (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013a; 2013b). Supporting Greenhalgh and Greenwell's (2013a; 2013b) findings, Schönberner et al. (2020) noted niche sport properties should emphasize their cost effectiveness which can be achieved by articulating their perceived ability to achieve sponsorship objectives for a proportionately low cost (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013a).

Within disability sport sponsorship specifically, selection criteria include alignment with company strategy, strategic alignment of company mission with the sport property, a value match between sponsors and property, and broad communication and

brand objectives (Macedougall et al., 2014). Further, Siegfried (2021b) found that for teams in the National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA) identifying operational needs and cost, understanding program intangible assets, creating sponsorship packages, creating program/sport awareness, identifying decision makers, and building relationships were key factors for successful disability sport sponsorship acquisition and retention. While these are many of the traditional tactics found in sponsorship acquisition, Siegfried highlighted the importance of relationships/networks. NWBA teams achieved relationship breadth through word of mouth (network density) and relationship composition through comprehensive sponsor relations. Trust was built by (over) delivering upon contracts and promises and providing proof sponsorship money was spent as intended. Providing co-branding (value-based commitment) and volunteer (affective commitment) opportunities created commitment between sponsors and NWBA teams.

### ***Sponsorship Negotiation and Acquisition***

The last stage of the sponsorship acquisition process, sponsorship *negotiation and acquisition*, is underpinned by negotiating agreements, implementing agreements, and establishing the alliance (Urriolagoitia & Planellas, 2007). Urriolagoitia and Planellas (2007) posited that for successful sponsorship relationships, sponsors and sport properties should focus on value match and brand alignment, as well as high levels of specific (relational) investments and specialized expenditures which are not transferable. These investments can include time, effort, and money invested in planning a detailed co-marketing campaign. Objectives and norms governing the relationship should be expressed and linked to broader marketing and corporate relationships for maximum



sponsorship relationship effectiveness (Farrelly & Quester, 2005a; Urriolagoitia & Planellas, 2007) such as identified by Greenhalgh and Greenwell (2013b). Tying back to the flexibility that sponsors look for in niche sport properties (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013a), sponsors demand the development of collaborative capabilities by sport properties which drives trust in the relationship as previously outlined. Increased trust in return leads to increased economic and non-economic sponsorship satisfaction (Farrelly & Quester, 2005a).

During the acquisition stage, disability sports have the capability to leverage their uniqueness by sharing compelling stories of programs and athletes, highlighting the fact that they serve an underserved population, and allowing potential sponsors to try out their sport as in the case of NWBA teams (Siegfried, 2021b). At the collegiate level, adaptive sport programs showed some of the similar unique characteristics. Sponsors looking to engage in cause-related marketing (CRM) are attracted by college adaptive sport programs' unique characteristics of meeting the needs of an underserved population. Additionally, the programs' impact on the disability community and their positive impact on the lives of student-athletes beyond college are unique characteristics attractive to sponsors (Siegfried et al., 2021).

Further, Siegfried (2021b) found both sponsorship acquisition and retention for NWBA teams was driven by their social impact. The volunteer opportunities they offer to sponsor employees and the disability expertise they possess are attractive attributes to sponsors. Continuation of sponsorship was strengthened by mutual benefits of the relationship and the personal attachment of the sponsoring party with the sport property. Based on the findings, the researcher suggested that disability sport properties focus on

storytelling and keep building relationships to (a) change the narrative from charity to impact and (b) build relationships into partnerships (Siegfried, 2021b).

### **Sponsorship (Dis)Continuation**

Sponsorship acquisition is only the beginning of the sponsorship relationship and Siegfried (2021b) was the first to examine RM within disability sport. Other factors affecting sponsorship continuation and discontinuation in addition to RM must also be considered to establish the success of long-term strategic partnerships between disability sport properties and sponsors. Some studies have taken the approach from the sponsor perspective (e.g., Jensen & Cornwell, 2017, 2021); however, Morgan et al. (2020) examined the management of the sponsor-property relationship mid-life from the sponsored property perspective. Findings showed the roots of effective relationships were having a clear and compatible strategy, development of positive inter-organizational culture, inter-personal relationships, and stability. On the opposing side, sponsorship clutter can drive sponsorship discontinuation, emphasizing the need for sponsorship exclusivity (Jensen & Cornwell, 2017; van Rijn et al., 2019). Further, any incidents with the potential of a negative image transfer from the sport property to the sponsor (doping scandals, athlete abuse, losing records) increase the chance of discontinuation. Van Rijn et al. (2019) also looked at the discontinuation of sport sponsorship relationships and suggested finding approaches which divert the sponsorship dependency away from sporting results (i.e., winning) as sporting results still cause potential discontinuation. One approach is offering different levels of sponsorship as higher levels of sponsorship significantly reduce the probability of sponsorship discontinuation (Jensen & Cornwell, 2021).

From the perspective of the sponsoring firm, congruency, and high levels of brand equity with the sport property reduce the likelihood of sponsorship dissolution in global sponsorship (Jensen & Cornwell, 2017). Regional proximity of the sponsor to the sport property also further decreases the chance of dissolution (Jensen & Cornwell, 2021). Regional sponsors tend to have a perceived better fit with the sport property, hence, inducing more successful, longer-term sponsorship partnerships. In return, longer-term partnerships were found to increase perceived congruency among consumers (Woisetschläger et al., 2017). This comes as Olson and Thjømmøe (2011) discovered announcements of the continuation of existing partnerships as opposed to the announcement of a new partnership enhanced perceived match of the partners more so than the announcement of a new partnership. Business-to-Business (B2B) firms compared to consumer-facing firms have a lower probability of sponsorship discontinuation, with the exception of high-tech firms which were found to significantly increase the probability of sponsorship dissolution (Jensen & Cornwell, 2021). Other factors influencing a sponsor's choice to discontinue their sponsorship engagement are a change in marketing strategy or financial situation as well as having achieved the sponsorship objectives (Jensen & Cornwell, 2017). Additionally, sponsors sometimes choose to send a signal to society by ending a sponsorship relationship such as in the case of an insurance company which could not justify increased insurance rates while being a jersey sponsor (van Rijn et al., 2019). External conditions, such as the economic, legislative, and regulatory environment can also impact the choice of sponsorship dissolution, however, they cannot be controlled for by sport properties and sponsors (Jensen & Cornwell, 2017; van Rijn et al., 2019).

While many factors influence sponsorship (dis)continuation, managers of sport properties can only influence a few of them. Disability sport properties not only provide entertainment but also provide social good for society by being a source of inspiration for spectators (Cottingham et al., 2014), bridging social divides (European Commission, 2018; UN, n.d.), and improving the lives of participants (Lastuka & Cottingham, 2016; Swanson et al., 2008). Therefore, sponsors may not be as socially forced (e.g., society pushing sponsors to minimize their spending on entertainment purposes and increase salaries instead) to justify their sponsorship engagement, leading to a higher chance of sponsorship continuation.

### **Summary**

RM strategies are at the core of successful sponsorship relations as those relationships are built on trust, commitment, relationship quality, and relationship breadth. Engaging in RM strategies can increase the opportunities for sponsorship acquisition and minimize the risk of sponsorship discontinuation. Hereby, the RM framework provides an appropriate framework for sponsorship research, particularly in the disability sport context, as RM influences both sponsorship acquisition and retention and has proved effective in a recent study on disability sport sponsorship in the U.S (Siegfried, 2021b). In combination with an organizational culture analysis, the RM framework can reveal how different aspects of a disability sport team's organizational culture are leveraged in their sponsorship acquisition and retention. Findings from this analysis can support other disability sport programs in successfully acquiring and retaining sponsors, and thus, providing a sustainable funding source to the programs.

### **Introduction to Disability Sport**

To provide context to the setting and significance of this study, it is important to have a brief introduction to disability sport. Historically, the first disability sport club launched in 1888 in Berlin, catering specifically to those who were deaf or hard of hearing. Sport and disability did not converge, however, until later in the twentieth century. The melding of the two occurred as a result of social reform, war, increased governmental concern and educational, psychological, and medical considerations of disability (DePauw & Gavron, 1995). In this document, the term disability sport will refer to sport which was specifically designed for athletes with disabilities (e.g., wheelchair basketball for athletes with physical disabilities or goalball for athletes with visual impairments) or is practiced by athletes with disabilities (e.g., track and field), partially through modifications or adaptations (e.g., wheelchair tennis, tandem cycling) (DePauw & Gavron, 1995). Disability sports are further known as adaptive sports or parasport (Disabled World, 2019).

When the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990 prohibiting “discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public” (ADA, 2020, para 1), a legal basis was established for equal rights and opportunities for people with disabilities. Similar legislation passed in other countries such as a constitutional equality amendment in 1994 in Germany (Heyer, 2002). Together with the legislative changes, a change in attitudes and response to people with disabilities in Western nations occurred (DePauw & Gavron, 1995). However, full participation in society by individuals with disabilities in many places has yet to be achieved by the 21st century. Hence, the movement to establish the United Nations Convention on the Rights

of Persons with Disabilities which was entered into force in 2008 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d). People with disabilities still encounter exclusion or limited acceptance. Sport, a great equalizer of society, has been a catalyst for people with disabilities to gain social acceptance within society. Sport provides visibility and people can relate to athletes. While other historically oppressed and/or marginalized groups such as women, people of color, and the LGBTQ community have previously leveraged sport for social inclusion, individuals with disabilities “are among the last groups to seek access to the sport world” (DePauw & Gavron, 1995, p. 26). Athletes with disabilities, while present in society, have lacked major recognition and acceptance over the years.

In 1951, the first sport governing organization for sport for people with disabilities in Germany was founded. “The German Veterans Sport Organization” (Deutscher Versehrten Sportverband) initially focused on wounded soldiers and war veterans and in 1975 changed its name to “The German Disability Sport Organization” (Deutscher Behindertensportverband). While sport offerings primary focused on rehabilitation in the early years, former athletes wanted to engage in competitive events. This led to the formation of sport organizational structures, sometimes tied to able-bodied structures, but mostly independent. Thanks to Guttmann’s work at Stoke Mandeville Hospital and his hosting of the First Stoke Mandeville Games in 1948, competitive sport offerings for individuals with disabilities in Germany were developed in the years following. In the 1970s a shift in Germany occurred and existing able-bodied sport clubs, which are still the foundation of sport offerings in Germany today, started including individuals with disabilities. To best communicate and inform the German public about

disability sport and its opportunities, in 1988 an information center for disability sport was established which is still operating today. Providing grassroots opportunities for sport development of athletes with disabilities allows youth disability sport athletes to have access to elite sport schools and often train at Olympic training centers through the country (Doll-Tepper, 2016).

### **The (Restricted) Access to Disability Sport Opportunities**

The establishment of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) in Bonn, Germany on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1989, as the international governing body for sport for people with disabilities and as a liaison with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) began the integration of disability sport into the international sport Movement (DePauw & Gavron, 1995; Legg et al., 2015). As the IPC targets sport development for athletes with disabilities on all levels from beginners to elite, sport opportunities overall have increased. Much work is still needed, however, as recreational sport governance has barely been touched upon by the IPC (Hums & Pate, 2018) and the need for elite opportunities has still to be completely met. The Paralympic Games have existed for 60 years, yet elite disability sports are still restricted to few athletes and programs with limited media coverage, recognition, and development opportunities (IPC, n.d.; Patatas et al., 2018; Wolff & Hums, 2017). Article 30.5 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities highlights the importance of all forms of sport for people with disabilities at all levels worldwide (United Nations, 2006). However, for many years, winning athletes competed for select countries, most prominently the U.S., Canada, Germany, China, and Australia, with minimal distribution of disability sport opportunities in other countries. For example, sport accessibility was found to be

restricted in Brazil due to the geographic centralization of opportunities in urban areas (Mauerberg-DeCastro et al., 2016). Wicker and Breuer (2014) found that even within Germany – where the IPC is headquartered – a disadvantage in parasport offerings existed in rural areas. Most disability sport was housed in large multi-sport clubs with greater capacity located in major cities. Smaller clubs were found to have insufficient capacity to house adapted sport programs based on the heavy cost of equipment and the smaller pool of participants due to their geographic location (Wicker & Breuer, 2014). This underlines the fact that although the Paralympic Games gained worldwide support with the cumulative worldwide audience of the Summer Paralympics rising from 1.85 billion in 2004 to 4.11 billion in 2016 (IPC, 2016) making it the third largest sporting event in the world (Amplitude, 2020), researchers still found a lack of funding for parasports on the local levels (Sørensen & Kahrs, 2006). Underlining the lack of funding and talent development structures, while the audience has more than doubled between 2004 to 2016, athlete participation has seen slower growth with 3,808 athletes in 2004 to 4,328 in 2016 (IPC, 2016). Moreover, with very limited overall parasport offerings in Germany (Wicker & Breuer, 2014), the previously mentioned success of parasport and specifically wheelchair basketball in the country cannot be solely attributed to sport accessibility. Thus, given limited funding and disability sport opportunities, the success of parasport organizations has yet to be fully explained.

### **Sponsorship in Disability Sport**

Recent research on sponsorship in disability sport, while scarce, has pointed to the struggles of attracting sponsorships for adaptive athletes and sport teams in different parts of the world. For example, Brooke and Khoo (2021) identified funding challenges and



specifically, issues in attracting sponsorship by Paralympic athletes in Malaysia and Singapore and urged businesses to invest in disability sport for the sustainability of the Paralympic Movement. Wheelchair athletes in Latin America also struggled to obtain sponsorships and faced similar funding challenges (Cottingham et al., 2015).

Within the U.S., Pate and Bragale (2019) found funding to be the biggest challenge faced by NWBA teams. Tackling the issue of funding acquisition in the NWBA, Siegfried (2021b) explored leveraging relationship marketing as a strategy for sponsorship acquisition and retention. The author found several unique ways for NWBA programs to attract sponsors and identified relationship marketing practices as key to successful sponsorship acquisition and retention by the programs. Due to the differing landscape of disability sport, Siegfried identified unique assets the NWBA possessed, and which could be leveraged to attract sponsors - compelling stories, the program's impact, disability expertise, and corporate social engagement opportunities. Further, the author identified continued communication with sponsors, evaluation practices which put the program's impact into numbers, and the creation of cross-marketing opportunities with other sponsors and the program as crucial in retaining sponsors. Engaging in relationship marketing practices, NWBA programs can build commitment and trust by establishing an emotional connection and mutually beneficial relationship with the sponsor. Additionally, having a dense network of relationships between the sport property and sponsor was found beneficial to keep relationships ongoing and thus, retain sponsors (Siegfried, 2021b).

At the collegiate level in the U.S., adaptive sports are also faced with limited funding and sources as collegiate adaptive sport programs are typically not housed in the

athletic department and thus, must rely on other sources to fund their operations. Sponsorship, such as in the case of Paralympic sports in Malaysia, Singapore, Latin America, and the NWBA, was also deemed as a key for collegiate wheelchair basketball and its development as an NCAA emerging sport (Larkin et al., 2014). Addressing the lack of funding and aiming to meet the demand for funding through sponsorship, Siegfried et al. (2021) examined the intersection of sponsorship objectives, cause-related marketing (CRM), and college adaptive sport in the United States to determine how the uniqueness of college adaptive sports can be leveraged to attract sponsors. The authors identified providing opportunities for an underserved population, impacting the disability community, and positively impacting the lives of student-athletes beyond college, as characteristics which are not only unique to college adaptive sports but also attractive to sponsors looking to engage in CRM. To attract sponsors, findings showed programs should rely on their existing network channels and community relationships and focus on serving sponsors which are wanting to quantify their engagement with tangible deliverables (Siegfried et al., 2021).

Within Germany, sponsorship is only pursued by a few disability sport organizations thus far, even though the National Paralympic Committee Germany is actively encouraging their member organization to acquire sponsors (Deutscher Behindertensportverband, n.d.). The idea behind sponsoring disability sport overall is not about the financial gain but rather centers on the positive image disability sport provides a sponsor to identify with (Sturmberg, 2016).

## **Summary**

Considering the findings of the current landscape of sponsorship in disability sport, it is clear there is a lack of funding and specifically sponsorship investment in disability sport. Yet, adaptive sport programs and athletes possess the power to attract sponsors and build meaningful and long-lasting relationships by leaning into their unique assets and characteristics and finding ways to leverage those. Currently, very few teams do this successfully. Therefore, this study is taking an intrinsic exemplar case study design with the exemplar being a disability sport team which has been successful in acquiring and retaining sponsors and has played a key part in furthering the Paralympic Movement.

### **Summary of Literature**

Organizational culture has wide implications and is largely responsible for organizations' successful external relationships. While Schein's framework found limited application in business literature, in the sport realm his scholarship has proven to be widely embraced. Edgar Schein himself wrote: "I know the model is widely quoted but perhaps it does not suit itself to the kind of empirical research that is now being touted and which relies on questionnaires rather than clinical observation" (E.H. Schein, personal communication, June 20, 2020). The primarily quantitative nature of business organizational culture research publications supports his reasoning. Based on the current literature, more qualitative work, especially case study approaches, utilizing organizational culture research is essential to gain deeper insights into the different layers of organizational culture.

When examining organizational culture in sport, looking at what is not shared (differentiated and fragmented) is just as important as what is shared (McDougall et al.,

2020). Moreover, stakeholders at all levels from athletes and coaches to administrators and upper management should be included to gain a holistic view (Maitland et al., 2015). The role of leaders is vitally important to establish and maintain coherence within an organization's culture and its meanings (Frontiera, 2010; Girginov, 2006; Mills & Hoerber, 2013). The review of existing sport organizational culture studies shows the significance of expanding the research sites beyond North America to other countries and to non-college sport organizations, and the specific need of parasport organizations to be included in future sport organizational culture studies (Maitland et al., 2015). Disability sport organizational culture provides not only a unique context in organizational culture research, but also can largely benefit from such an analysis to identify the aspects of disability sport organizations which are attractive to external partners. Considering the importance of value, mission, and philosophy congruency for the success of disability sport sponsorship acquisition and retention, managers of sport properties need to be aware of and be able to express their own values, mission, and philosophy (Macdougall et al., 2014). Therefore, knowing one's organizational culture - specifically the artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions - is essential in identifying matches between the values, mission, and philosophy of potential sponsors. Through RM, an organization's favorable and attractive cultural attributes can be leveraged for sponsorship acquisition and continued sponsorship relations. RM provides an adequate framework for sponsorship research and particularly in the disability sport context, as RM influences both sponsorship acquisition and retention and has proved effective in a recent study on disability sport sponsorship in the U.S (Siegfried, 2021b). By examining the RSV Lahn-Dill, one of the most successful and highly sponsored adaptive sport teams

in the world, the relationship marketing framework can yield valuable insight into how the different aspects of their organizational culture are leveraged in their sponsorship acquisition and retention. It is to be noted, when leveraging relationship marketing, the focus must be on not only relationship quality but relationship breadth and composition as well to discover RM effectiveness (Palmatier, 2008).

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

The following section outlines the method for this study, including the research design and justification, proposed data collection and analysis procedures. The problem addressed in this study is the need for increased sponsorship funding in the disability sport sector. The current lack of understanding of organizational culture in adaptive sport is addressed how it can be leveraged (through relationship marketing) to increase strategic partnerships results in limited sponsorship opportunities and consequently, funding, for adaptive sport organizations. Therefore, exploring how organizational culture can be leveraged to increase strategic partnerships, the purposes of this study were to examine (a) the elements of the organizational culture that make a successful international wheelchair basketball sport club attractive to external partners and (b) to determine what role those organizational cultural elements play in leveraging relationship marketing (RM) for sponsorship acquisition and retention. Hence, this study was guided by the organizational culture and RM frameworks to answer the following RQs:

**RQ1:** How does a successful disability sport club position itself to the external environment with respect to its cultural attributes?

**RQ2:** How do members of a successful disability sport club perceive their organization's culture?

**RQ3:** What role does culture play in building relationships to acquire sponsors?

**RQ4:** What role does culture play in building relationships to retain sponsors?

This section on method delineates the research process which will answer the aforementioned research questions. Specifically, the research design will be detailed, outlining the type of case study, the choice of the case, and the case setting including a description of the study site and selection of study participants. Additionally, philosophical assumptions around the case are provided. Secondly, deeper insights into data collection procedures are given for the review of external communication elements, interviews, and focus groups employed. Next, the data analysis is mapped out. Finally, the researcher's positionality and strategies for ensuring credibility and trustworthiness are detailed.

### **Research Design / Qualitative Case Study**

Organizational culture in sport has traditionally been researched using qualitative methods, heavily relying on interviews supplemented by observations and document analyses to capture the rich and diverse nature of culture (Maitland et al., 2015). Qualitative research is most suitable to explore the complexity and details of an issue, such as in the case of exploring a successful disability sport club's organizational culture. Detail of information can only be reached by directly talking to and engaging with people in their environments. Qualitative research discovers deeper thoughts and behaviors of participants to understand the context or settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, the context is a successful disability sport club. The thoughts and behaviors of participants studied were their perceptions of the club's organizational culture and the culture's role in RM practices. Considering the disability sport context is still in its research infancy in both organizational culture and RM, a "complex and detailed

understanding of the issue is needed” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 101), which qualitative inquiry is ideally suited to address.

### **Bounded Single Case Study Approach**

To address the purpose and research questions, a bounded single case study utilizing a successful international disability sport club as an exemplar was conducted. Stake (1995) identified three different types of case studies - intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Intrinsic case studies are concerned with a unique phenomenon and have been widely used by researchers interested in the case itself is the primary interest of the study (Mills et al., 2010; Stake, 1995). Instrumental case studies, on the other hand, may or may not be unique phenomena, but a broader understanding of an issue is explored through a single particular case. Hereby, the case is secondary to the specific issue. Instrumental case studies are often used to build theory or redraw generalizations (Mills et al., 2010; Stake, 1995). Finally, collective case studies include studying multiple cases. Regardless of the type, case studies come with advantages and disadvantages. The case has to be carefully chosen to meet the purpose of the research and arguments for its worthiness as a case need to be provided. While multi-case studies allow for comparison - a downfall of a single case study - multiple cases are likely to dilute the overall analysis as depth of analysis per case cannot be provided (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, given the limited number of exemplars in the disability sport context, a single case study is justified and provides merit to begin the conversation around disability sport culture and sponsorship.

This study follows an intrinsic design as it was concerned with a unique case of a successful disability sport club which has excelled in sponsorship acquisition and



retention. Specifically, an exemplar methodology was employed which is a “sample selection technique that involves the intentional selection of individuals, groups, or entities that exemplify the construct of interest in a highly developed manner” (Bronk, 2012, p. 1).

The choice of an intrinsic exemplar case study methodology is well suited to provide insights into the elements of an international success wheelchair basketball club’s culture and how they have leveraged culture in building successful sponsorship relations. This can address and provide recommendation for other disability sport teams and organization on how to combat their financial challenges by leveraging their culture to build sponsor relations.

### **Nomination Criteria**

Based on the purpose of this case study, several nomination criteria were employed to identify and choose the exemplar. Germany was chosen as the country in which the exemplar is based as Germany has been a pioneer in disability sport. This is illustrated by the first disability sport club being founded in Germany, as well as the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) being established in Bonn, Germany where it is still headquartered today (DePauw & Gavron, 1995; IPC, n.d.). Additionally, Germany has taken the lead in professional wheelchair basketball leagues (IWBF, 2016) and wheelchair basketball is the most popular disability sport in the country. The exemplar is a sport club which is successful in their sport (wheelchair basketball) as identified by national and international achievements. Furthermore, the disability sport club is successful in sponsorship relations as signified by a number of continuing sponsorship engagements.

## Study Site

Based on the nomination criteria, through network sampling, the RSV Lahn-Dill was identified. Network sampling allows for access to hard-to-reach populations for empirical data collection purpose (Glesne, 2016). The researcher of this study has a personal connection to the RSV as she has interned with the club and wrote her bachelor thesis for the organization. The RSV Lahn-Dill was chosen as it has an international presence, players, and reputation. The RSV is considered ‘by far’ to be the most successful wheelchair basketball team in Germany (German record holder in national championships) (Kehrer, 2019; Roltt, 2018), Europe and even worldwide. The club has played a key role in revolutionizing wheelchair basketball. Even the players consider the RSV as “the most prestigious wheelchair basketball club in the world. They have built a culture of excellence by always remaining at the top of the game” (Roltt, 2020, para 2). The team’s home games in the RBBL (German Wheelchair Basketball League) and in the European Champions League of wheelchair basketball are the most highly attended Paralympic sport events outside the Paralympic Games (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019). The budget is also one of the two highest in the league (Hamburger Abendblatt, 2019), primarily through the extensive partner network of 145 sponsors (Joneck, 2019), including sponsors such as IBC and Leica (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019). The sport is the most successful and popular Paralympic sport in Germany, and Germany is seen as the pioneer of professional wheelchair basketball leagues (IWBF, 2016). Wheelchair basketball has seen enormous growth in recent years in Germany on both athletic and structural levels, leading to wide media interest in the RBBL and the RSV Lahn-Dill specifically (IWBF, 2016). Clubs are independently responsible for their marketing and securing of

sponsorships (IWBF, 2016) and thus RSV Lahn-Dill provided an ideal setting for this study.

### **Case Participants**

This case study included a review of external communication elements, interviews, and focus groups. The interviews and focus groups were focused on internal actors. Interviews included employees of the organization while focus groups included fans who are members of the official fan club.

### ***Interview Sample***

To recruit interview participants, purposive and quota sampling were utilized. Purposive sampling is suitable for the unique context of case studies as participants relevant to the case can be specifically chosen (Miles et al., 2014). Quota selections involves “identifying the major subgroups and then taking an arbitrary number from each” (Miles et al., 2014, p.67). Interviewees were recruited via email (Appendix A & B). To reflect all major subgroups of the RSV, the interviewees included two national players, two international players, two people from the coaching staff, one person from the crew, the General Manager, two board members, a volunteer, and an administrative employee to represent the internal actors of the club (Table 1). As the interviews informed research questions two, three, and four, looking at the organizational members’ perceptions of the RSV’s culture and the role the culture plays in leveraging relationships to acquire sponsors, it was key to identify all organizational subgroups and have members of each subgroup be represented in the interviews. Based on the official website and communication with the General Manager, at the time of the study the RSV coaching staff had three members, two of whom were Germans and one Canadian, and five crew

members who were all German. Additionally, the administrative staff was made up of four individuals, all Germans, two of whom were only responsible for parts of game days. The management team was made up of the General Manager and two board members. For the 2021/2022 season, twelve athletes were on the roster of the RSV of which four were Germans and eight were international players (A. Joneck, personal communication, August 13, 2021). Additionally, during the prolonged office visit, the researcher came across a permanent volunteer who supports the RSV not only during game days but also during school visits and helps with in other capacities. Thus, the decision was made to also include the individual (see Table 1). As only one crew member was in the city during the time of the data collection, only one crew member was interviewed.

All interviewees were chosen based on age (over 18 years old), their position with the club (national players/international players/coaching staff/crew member/general manager/ board member/volunteer/administrative employee), and their tenure with the club (must have been with the club at least one year to ensure they have immersed themselves into the culture).

**Table 1**

*Interview Sample Pool, Goal Sample, and Obtained Sample*

Role	Total Population	Goal Sample	Obtained Sample
GM	1	1	1
Board Members	2	2	2
Administrative Staff	2	1	1

Coaching Staff	3	2	2
Crew	5	2	1
National Players	4	2	2
International Players	8	2	2
Permanent volunteer	1	0	1

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The interviewees were recruited through the support of the General Manager and were presented IRB preamble forms prior to the interviews to which they verbally agreed (Appendix E & F). Additionally, all interviewee signed the data privacy forms (Appendix N & O). The General Manager helped identify potential interviewees based on the sample criteria and facilitated the connection to reach out and contact the potential participants. The interview guide was reviewed by a panel of experts to ensure content validity (Davis, 1992). The experts included a diversity, equity, and inclusion scholar who is fluent in both German and English, a methodology expert, and a disability sport scholar.

***Focus Group Sample***

The focus groups in this study included participants who are avid fans of the RSV Lahn-Dill and are members of the RSV fan club. Founded in 1999, the RSV fan club was Germany’s first and is now the oldest wheelchair basketball fan club. The club currently has over 200 members (RSV Fanclub, 2020; RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019). Fans were chosen to be part of the study for multiple reasons. First, the organization itself refers to fan club members as part of the RSV family (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019). Second, the fan club itself communicates in similar language on their website, noting that their fan club is part of the “RSV-Family” (RSV Fanclub, 2020). Third, previous research has shown fan club

members have a greater perception of team brand equity than non-members and thus, are likely to have a greater perception of organizational culture as well (Biscaia et al., 2014). Therefore, fan club members can be considered an extension of the organization which take part in organizational culture life and the shaping thereof.

To ensure their familiarity with the club and its culture as well as a high level of attachment to the organization, only active official fan club members were included. Purposive and snowball sampling were employed for recruiting participants for the focus groups with attempts made to reflect different genders, disability status, and age groups. Focus group members were chosen based on their age (over 18 years old), consent capacity, and their tenure with the club (must have been with the fan club at least one year to ensure they have immersed themselves into the culture). As the club serves a large population of people with disabilities, the inclusion of fans with disabilities in the focus groups was of high importance to reflect the fan population. While there are no official records on the ratio of fan club members with and without disabilities, a minimum of one member with a disability in each focus group session was included. However, as focus groups limit participation to participants with the ability to convey verbally, non-verbal participants were excluded from this study. Although there is no perfect size for a focus group, Trainor and Graue (2013) suggest a size of four to six participants for small in-depth approaches. Two focus groups were conducted for data saturation purposes and to compare findings. Focus group one included four fans and focus group two included four fans. The General Manager supported the recruitment and connection to fan club members and focus group members were recruited via email and word of mouth (Appendix C & D). Focus group participants were presented IRB preamble forms prior to

the focus group sessions to which they verbally agreed (Appendix G & H). Additionally, participants signed the data privacy form (Appendix N & O).

### **Philosophical Assumptions**

The case study was conducted through the lens of social constructivism. The focus of social constructivism to generate meaning translates well into organizational culture where individuals come together to create their organizational worlds (Camargo-Borges & Rasera, 2013). As noted by Aguilera (2018) “social constructivism provides a conceptual framework for addressing research in the field of organizational culture, where the researcher is an actor more than an information processor that only watches the organization and reports its findings” (p.121). The core of social constructivism is to understand society from cultural and contextual perspectives and derive knowledge from that understanding (Derry, 1999; McMahon, 1997). For this study, sponsorship acquisition and retention were explored from an organizational culture perspective in the context of a successful disability sport club. Social constructivism drives the study to gain knowledge on the elements of the organizational culture of a successful international wheelchair basketball sport club attractive to sponsors and to determine what role the organizational cultural elements play in leveraging RM for sponsorship acquisition and retention.

Kim (2001) summarized three assumptions underlying social constructivism. Firstly, reality is a social construct invented by members of a society. Secondly, knowledge is also socially and culturally constructed by members through interactions with each other and their environment. Finally, learning is a social process and occurs when individuals engage in social activities. Within the context of this study, it was

assumed the members of the RSV created the reality of their organization, the culture was constructed by the members through interactions, and all members learned by engaging with other members in social activities. Therefore, key members of the organization were included in the data collection and interview and focus group questions were phrased to ask about individual experiences, thoughts, and feelings with and towards the RSV (Appendix J & L). Additionally, during focus groups the members were asked to first note some of their responses down on index cards to provide space for everyone to share what their ideas of reality were. The responses were then discussed in the group setting to identify cultural co-construction by members. Additionally, in order to capture individualist views of culture and not only shared cultural elements, Meyerson and Martin's (1987) framework was included in the cultural analysis to identify any differentiation or fragmentation of cultural perception.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection involved several methods to allow for comparison and triangulation among data and add rigor, breadth, and depth to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Leveraging multiple methods also supported the identification of how culture may be perceived as similar, differentiated, and/or fragmented (Meyerson & Martin, 1987). Therefore, this study included a (a) review of external communication elements, (b) interviews, and (c) focus groups. First a review of external communication elements via the RSV website was conducted. External communication elements that are visible to sponsors including the website, sponsor prospectus, and media data were reviewed to identify potential artifacts and espoused beliefs and values. Findings from the review of external communication elements were used to inform interviews and focus group



sessions and compare findings across data collection. Interviews and focus group sessions were conducted in person. The order of interviews and focus groups depended on the availability of participants and was an overlapping process.

The General Manager of the RSV provided a desk setup in the office for the researcher to work at throughout the data collection process and she emerged herself into the culture. Therefore, throughout the data collection, analytic memoing was utilized to document reflection and analytic thinking processes. Analytic memos can consist of various topics, including data summaries, participants' actions, reactions, interactions, routines, rituals, rules, roles, and relationships, as well as notes and thoughts on data analysis (Miles et al., 2014).

### **Review of External Communication Elements**

Documents are an important substitute for activities which cannot or may not be observed directly in the data collection process (Stake, 1995). Therefore, the data collection of the external communication elements focused on the cultural elements of the RSV. Specifically, artifacts were identified, by visually inspecting the website content, prospectus, and media data sheet. Artifacts are visible elements of culture and include style, clothing, language, emotional displays, stories about the organization, published values of the organization, organizational processes and structural elements (e.g., organizational charts, mission statements), as well as rituals and ceremonies (Schein, 2010).

To begin the data collection, the organization's website, sponsor prospectus, and media data were reviewed to address s one and identify how the RSV positioned itself to the external environment with respect to its cultural attributes. The website is publicly

available and when searching for the RSV Lahn-Dill on the web surfaces (appears) as the first result (<https://rsvlahndill.de>). Thus, external actors such as potential sponsors are likely to encounter the website first when researching the club. The website is available in both German and English but was reviewed in German as it is more complete in German and direct language comparison with the prospectus and media data was made. Stake (1995) maintains most cases need some form of document review and highlights the need to evaluate the usefulness of documents in advance. In this case, reviewing the organization's website explored how external individuals first encounter the organization when gathering information about the RSV. Additionally, the organization provided the researcher with the official prospectus and media data given to potential sponsors when they first contact the club. The prospectus and media data were also reviewed.

The focus in the review of external communication elements was on all of the aforementioned elements which were observable in the documents reviewed. Espoused beliefs and values were explored based on the artifacts since they exist on a conscious level and predict a majority of the behaviors observed at the artifacts level (Schein, 2010). To do so, the external communication elements were scanned for values and beliefs expressed in written form. On the website, the "about us" section was the focus of examination of values and beliefs, supplemented with the "partner" and "current news" sections.

## **Interviews**

Interviews are a targeted tool which focus directly on case study topics and are insightful, providing explanations and personal views (Yin, 2018). The interviews were semi-structured in nature and interviewees were informed of their rights as research

subjects and review the preamble and sign the data privacy consent form before participating. The consent form was available in both English and German language to the participants (Appendix E & F) and accuracy of translation was ensured (Appendix I). Before the start of the interviews, the researcher built rapport with research subjects by engaging in small talk, providing some insider talk (e.g, about the season, accomplishments at 2020 Paralympic Games), and shared about her connection to the team and the reason for her research study.

The interview questions focused on identifying the artifacts, unraveling the espoused beliefs and values of the organization, as well as gaining an understanding of the organization's basic underlying assumptions. Based on the questions used in the Bailey et al. (2019) study which investigated the organizational culture of CrossFit and on the basis of the literature review, interview questions were adapted for an initial interview guide (Appendix J) and translated into German (Appendix K). This line of questioning was revised after the review of the external communication elements was completed as the data collection process was iterative.

### ***Language***

The interviews with the national player, General Manager, board member, and administrative employee as well as the focus groups were conducted in German as this is the native language of the participants and also of the researcher. The interviews with the member of the coaching staff and international player were conducted either in German or English based on the request and language abilities of the interviewee. As the researcher, I am fluent in both English and German. German is my native language which I grew up with. I have lived in Germany for over 18 ½ years. I had seven years of English

language classes in school, spent an exchange year in the United States, completed my bachelor's degree in the Netherlands at the Arnhem Business School completely in English, completed my master's degree in English at the University of Louisville and am now in the progress with my Ph.D. at the University of Louisville. Thus, I am capable of conducting interviews in either language and cross translating. Additionally, the method of translation and back-translation was used. Guided by this method the researcher, a bilingual person in German and English, translated the interview and focus group guides into the target language (i.e., German) and a second bilingual person independently translated the content back into the source language (i.e., English). The original and back translated versions were compared to ensure accuracy (APA, 2020). The committee member, Dr. Yannick Kluch - a German native and reputable sport management and diversity, equity, and inclusion researcher - independently translated and back translated the content.

### **Focus Groups**

Focus groups create dynamic exchanges of ideas on the basis of questions and responses with a group of participants and researchers (Trainor & Graue, 2013). By including more than one focus group in the study, saturation of the data was reached through redundancy of participants' responses, meeting the quality touchstone set by Trainor and Graue (2013) for sample size in interview research. Additionally, the focus groups served as control groups for each other by comparing the respondents' answers and identifying any outliers or contrasting information. The focus groups were semi-structured in nature and focus group members were informed of their rights as research subjects and asked review the preamble and sign the data privacy consent form before

participating. The preamble (Appendix E & F) and data privacy consent form were available in both English and German language to the participants (Appendix N & O) and accuracy of translation was ensured (Appendix I). Building rapport with focus group members, before the focus group session the researcher engaged in small talk, insider talk (e.g., current season), and shared about her connection to the team and why she was doing the research study.

Similar to the interviews, based on the interview questions used in the Bailey et al. (2019) study which investigated the organizational culture of CrossFit and on the basis of the literature review, focus group questions were adapted for an initial focus group guide (Appendix J) and translated into German (Appendix K). This line of questioning was revised after the review of the external communication elements was completed as the data collection process was iterative.

Participants of the focus group sessions were sought based on fitting the criteria of age (over 18 years old), consent capacity, and their tenure with the club (must have been with the fan club at least one year to ensure they have immersed themselves into the culture). Additionally, an effort was made to have different genders, disability status, and age groups represented in each session.

### **Data Analysis**

While the data was analyzed iteratively, the analysis began with the external communication elements, followed by the analysis of the interviews, and focus group sessions. The findings of the external communication elements analysis informed the data collection and analysis of the interviews and focus group sessions. The analysis of interviews and focus groups was iterative, going back and forth among the data to

address research question two, three, and four. As research question two informs research question three and four, data analysis first focused on how members perceive their organization's culture and then the role culture plays in leveraging relationship marketing to acquire and retain sponsors was examined.

### **Review of External Communication Elements**

The review of external communication elements was approached through structural coding, focusing on context and concepts. Specifically, to address research question one and identify how the organization positions itself to the external environment with respect to its cultural attributes, the context and concepts explored were the artifacts and espoused beliefs and values. To further analyze structural codes, Miles et al. (2014) suggest thematic analysis as one of the key approaches. Thematic analysis allows researchers to find meaning across a data set, in this case the different external communication elements. The goal of thematic analysis is to seek out commonalities to how a topic is spoken or written about. The focus of analysis is the research question and thus, the thematic codes in this study are a deeper analysis of the structural codes first identified. The researcher followed the steps identified by Braun and Clarke (2006) by familiarizing myself with the data, generating initial ideas, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining, and naming the themes, and reporting on the findings. The findings of research question one, were used to compare and validate the findings from the interviews and focus groups regarding research question two.

### **Interviews**

Interviews were conducted to address research question two, three, and four. They were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data coding was approached first by In Vivo

coding and descriptive coding. In Vivo coding uses words or phrases from the participants' own language (the language in which the interview is conducted - in this study either German or English). This coding technique is appropriate for qualitative researchers in the beginning phases and to prioritize and honor the participants' voices (Miles et al., 2014). In Vivo codes were generated in the language of the conducted interviews and focus groups and then translated into English where needed. Through descriptive coding, also referred to as "topic coding", a passage of data is summarized in a word or short phrase. The advantage of descriptive coding is its appropriateness for beginning researchers as well as ethnographic studies with several data sources such as in this study (Saldaña, 2013).

For the second coding cycle, pattern coding was applied to group the In Vivo and descriptive codes into smaller numbers of categories, themes, and constructs (Miles et al., 2014). Pattern coding is appropriate to develop major themes and identify rules, causes, and explanations in the dataset (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data was segregated into categories by codes which were identified through a progressive process of sorting and defining data to yield results on the theoretical basis of artifacts, espoused beliefs, and values, and underlying assumptions as well as the relationship marketing concept (Glesne, 2016). The pattern codes followed the summarizations of categories or themes, causes/explanations, relationships among people, and/or theoretical constructs (Miles et al., 2014). A thematic organizational framework was established by grouping data together based on the same descriptive or theoretical idea (Glesne, 2016). Based on Schein's (2010) organizational culture framework and relationship marketing, the themes

were used to identify RSV Lahn Dill's cultural elements and the role RM plays in leveraging those cultural elements in sponsorship acquisition and retention.

### **Focus Groups**

Focus group sessions were conducted to address research question two, three, and four. They were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Analysis was conducted at the group and individual level. While the group level was the focus as consensus about the culture of the organization is at the core of the research study, the individual level served to identify dissenters. The analysis of the focus group sessions followed a constant comparison approach. First, data was split into smaller units to which descriptors or codes were assigned. The focus groups were conducted in German; however, descriptors and codes were assigned in English to allow for comparison with findings from the other methods employed in this study. Secondly, the units were grouped into categories and finally, themes were developed for each of the groups. The advantage of using this approach with more than one focus group is that an emergent-systematic focus group design can be leveraged. One focus group will serve as the *emergent* focus group to explore themes and the other focus group will serve as the *systematic* focus group for verification purposes. Through comparison of the themes of both focus groups, general saturation and saturation across groups was reached (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

Finally, naturalistic generalizations were developed. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify naturalistic generalization as “working hypotheses” which need to be assessed for their transferability to other cases by comparing the similarities between the source and target case. Since generalizations cannot be made from case study research, naturalistic generalizations provide readers with generalizations from which they can



learn for themselves from the case, and which can be applied to a population of cases or be transferred to similar context (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Ensuring Trustworthiness**

Several strategies were employed in the research study to ensure trustworthiness. The most used criterion to create trustworthiness in qualitative research are credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Cope, 2014).

#### **Credibility**

Credibility was ensured through (a) prolonged engagement, (b) persistent observation, and (c) triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Prolonged engagement refers to a researcher spending an extended amount of time with the population they study in order to build trust and familiarize themselves with the setting and context (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). For this study particularly, I was in the office for the duration of the data collection to meet the prolonged engagement and trust requirements.

Persistent observation includes a focus on the most important elements of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Persistent observation in this study occurred by focusing on specific communication elements as previously outlined, as well as an interview and focus group guide originating from the theories reviewed (organizational culture and RM) and the problem at hand.

Triangulation involves using several data sources and collection methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation is at the heart of case studies (Stake, 1985). In this case triangulation occurred by involving documents, interviews, focus groups, and engaging different members of the organization in the data collection.

## **Transferability**

Transferability looks at the extent to which findings can be applied or transferred to other settings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). While case studies only provide naturalistic generalizations (Creswell & Poth, 2018), “thick description” of findings were provided for outsiders to draw meaning from the findings. While the case study may not be replicated, there may be aspects of culture that other organizations can embrace to build upon the learnings.

## **Dependability and Confirmability**

Ensuring the accuracy and stability of the collected data, transparency throughout the data collection and analysis needs to be given (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Analytic memoing was utilized to document reflection and analytic thinking processes and ensure dependability and confirmability.

## **Reflexivity**

Self-awareness throughout the data collection and analysis process needs to be ensured to identify one’s own conceptual lens, assumptions, and preconceptions and acknowledge how these affect the research process (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Reflexive notes were included in the analytic memoing to meet this criterion.

## **Researcher Positionality**

Based on Milner’s (2007) framework, my researcher positionality is outlined in the following sections, looking at researching the self, the self in relation to others, and shifting from self to system.

## **Researching the Self**

My interest in disability sport dates back to my early childhood days. I grew up in competitive gymnastics, sharing the hallway of my gym with wheelchair basketball athletes of the RSV Lahn-Dill. Seeing the athletes every day, they became my friends. Ever since I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, I wanted to study sport administration so when my I had my first internship from school in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, I knew I wanted to intern within sport management. I ended up interning with the management of the RSV Lahn-Dill. A few years later, during my bachelor's degree, I wrote a social media strategy for the RSV, volunteered at the Champions League matches they hosted, and wrote my bachelor thesis for the club. During my bachelor thesis research, I explored the inequity in finance, marketing, broadcast, and media representation which athletes with disabilities face compared to their able-bodied counterparts. Specifically, my research explored the reasons sponsors chose to partner with the RSV. Although I never participated in the sport myself, my experience with the club and my research within disability sport and sponsorship provide me with a unique background and personal insight to tackle the problem of funding, more specifically sponsorship acquisition and retention, in disability sport. My background and previous connection to the RSV Lahn-Dill helped me build rapport with participants and established the trust required for this study.

While I have a personal connection to the research topic and research site, the last time I worked with the organization was during my bachelor thesis research in the spring of 2018. Additionally, my doctoral journey has helped me identify methods to mitigate bias and equipped me as a qualitative researcher to leverage my connections with study populations while limiting bias. I am aware I do not have all the answers for the problem faced in this study, underlining the reliance on data collection to address the purposes of

this study. My background in disability sport, specifically wheelchair basketball, however, allows me to engage deeply with participants and to embrace their responses to generate meaningful findings.

### **Researching the Self in Relation to Others**

Within my research context, being an able-bodied individual working with and researching individuals with disabilities is the part of my identity I have to be most conscious about. When I engage in research with individuals with disabilities, I am mindful of the setting of the research (e.g., is it accessible?) and to allow participants to share their experiences. I am aware there are individuals with disabilities who are skeptical of able-bodied researchers. Thus, I try to create an environment where I elevate their voices at all stages of the research project (e.g., by engaging in In Vivo coding) and allowing participants to discontinue their participation at any point and to take their participation in any direction they like.

Additionally, I have engaged in a great deal of reading and discussion, learning more about disability sport history and how it is shaping today's landscape. Through continued learning and engagement with people with disabilities I have acquired what Milner (2007) refers to as evidential truth - essentially, countering ableist views and beliefs I held unconsciously. A recent 2019 large-scale study by the Council on Quality and Leadership found the majority of people still hold some prejudice against individuals with disabilities. Specifically, most individuals are aversive ableists (56.3%), meaning they show explicit prejudice and high implicit prejudice (Friedman, 2019). Within my research, when interacting with participants I tried to be conscious of how they may have encountered unconscious bias in their prior experiences with other able-bodied

researchers or individuals. Additionally, I am using person first language (“person with a disability” as opposed to saying, “a disabled person”) as deemed acceptably by the American Psychological Association (2019) and language specific to disability sport culture such as using the term “basketball” instead of “wheelchair basketball”.

### **Shifting from Self to System**

In Germany as well as the U.S., individuals with disabilities tend to come from lower SES and have significantly lower rates of college degrees compared to able-bodied individuals. In 2019 in Germany, only 6.3% of persons with disabilities above the age of 15 have obtained a college degree, compared to 12.7% of persons without disabilities. Additionally, 16.4% of people with disabilities above the age of 15 have not completed their formal school education, compared to only 3.5% of able-bodied individuals (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2021). In 2013 in the United States, only 41.4% of persons with disabilities over the age of 25 had a post-secondary education compared to 66.8% of persons without a disability (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). In 2019 in Germany, the employment-population ratio of persons with disabilities (ages 15 to 64) was 57% in comparison to person without disabilities at 82% (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2021). The employment-population ratio of persons with disabilities (ages 16 to 64) is 30.9% in comparison to person without disabilities at 74.6% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Access to sport is still limited to very few athletes and programs worldwide with funding being a major concern. Considering many individuals with disabilities come from lower SES, they often do not have the financial means to participate in sport, and especially as disability sport which comes with a higher cost of involvement due to the equipment (e.g., wheelchairs) and extra staff (e.g., guides) needed (Patatas et al., 2018).

Ableism further widens the sport access equality gap as public funding especially for youth sports greatly lags behind for disability sport opportunities while opportunities for able-bodied individuals are steadily increasing with public funding being poured into training facilities, sport parks, and other opportunities (Cottingham et al., 2017; Sørensen & Kahrs, 2006). All this comes while Article 30.5 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities highlights the importance of all forms of sport for people with disabilities at all levels worldwide (United Nations, 2006). Sport in fact is a human right for people with disabilities but one which currently is not acted on enough. Sponsorship can be a means to fund and increase sport opportunities for people with disabilities.

### **Multiple Manuscript Overview**

The following chapters are part of a multiple manuscript dissertation. Chapter four includes manuscript one in which the elements of the organizational culture that make a successful international wheelchair basketball sport club attractive to external partners were examined. Chapter five includes the second manuscript which determined what role the organizational cultural elements play in leveraging relationship marketing (RM) for sponsorship acquisition and retention.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE “FLAGSHIP STORE OF DISABILITY SPORT”: AN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE ANALYSIS OF AN EXEMPLAR DISABILITY SPORT ORGANIZATION

Sponsorship, proven to be a major and essential revenue source of able-bodied niche sports (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013b), can provide an avenue to sustainably increase revenues for disability sport properties and athletes. As culture plays an essential role in forming external relations (Barney, 1986), cultural analyses of (sport) organizations can identify the parts of their cultures which appeal to potential partners and can be leveraged to build external relationships (Ellis et al., 2006). Based on an exemplar organization which has been successful in sponsorship acquisition and retention and has a history of building a fan and organizational culture, this study examined the elements of the organizational culture of that make a successful international wheelchair basketball sport club attractive to external partners. Based on Schein’s (2010) organizational culture framework and as it pertains to RSVs positioning to the external environment, the analysis of external communication elements revealed community centered, celebration of excellence, tradition of continuity, and authentic professional sport experience artifacts. Further, espoused beliefs and values of social responsibility rooted in commitment to inclusivity and diversity, being an innovative trailblazer, and serving the RSV family were identified. Interviews and focus groups revealed eight espoused beliefs and values and several artifacts rooted in RSVs basic underlying

assumptions of being a pioneer, approachability, and organizational excellence. The findings of this study represent the first direct demonstration of sport organizational culture driving sponsorship potential and success, particularly for disability sport properties. The findings also highlight how organizational culture research outside of sports can help inform sport organizational culture and sponsorship success. Despite Schein's (2010) model only looking at the shared elements of organizational culture, the present study also illustrated how organizational culture seldom comes without its inconsistencies and ambiguities (Meyerson & Martin, 1987).

**Key Words:** Disability Sport, Sponsorship, Organizational Culture

Sport for people with disabilities, also referred to as adaptive sports or parasport (Disabled World, 2019), has experienced growth in recent years, resulting in increased participation, job opportunities, and professionalism (Pitts & Shapiro, 2017). Article 30.5 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities highlights the importance of all forms of sport for people with disabilities at all levels worldwide (United Nations, 2006). Although the Paralympic Games gained worldwide support with the cumulative worldwide audience of the Summer Paralympics rising from 1.85 billion in 2004 to 4.11 billion in 2016 (IPC, 2016) and an expected 4.25 billion in 2021 (Around The Rings, 2021) making it the third largest sporting event in the world (Amplitude, 2020), researchers still found a lack of funding for parasports on local levels (Sørensen & Kahrs, 2006). With the audience of the Paralympic Games almost doubling between 2004 to 2016, athlete participation has experienced modest growth with 3,808 athletes in 2004 to 4,328 in 2016 (IPC, 2016), and 4,403 in 2021 (IPC, 2021). Elite disability sport opportunities are still limited in offerings, media coverage, recognition, and development



opportunities worldwide even 60 years after the first Paralympic Games (IPC, n.d.; Patatas et al. 2018). The reality remains that for many years, champion Paralympic athletes represented select countries, most prominently the U.S., Canada, Germany, China, and Australia, with only restricted access to disability sport opportunities across all levels in other countries.

Worldwide, athletes with disabilities face inequitable sport participation opportunities compared to able-bodied athletes. This discrepancy is perpetuated by lack of access, fewer available opportunities, a lack of talent identification structures, higher participation costs, and significantly less sponsorship funding (Patatas et al., 2018). Sponsorship, proven to be a major and essential revenue source of able-bodied niche sports (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013b), can provide an avenue to sustainably increase revenues for disability sport properties and athletes. While sponsorship in disability sport is still in its infancy (Cottingham et al., 2017), Legg and Dottori (2017) pointed to the value and importance of sponsorship to the Paralympic Movement. Disability sport requires special attention as it has been found that both consumption behavior (Cottingham et al., 2014) and policy development differ from able-bodied sports (Patatas et al., 2018). Researchers and practitioners can therefore not presume the sponsorship landscape of disability sport directly mimics able-bodied and mainstream sports. As culture plays an essential role in forming external relations (Barney, 1986), cultural analyses of (sport) organizations can identify the parts of their cultures which appeal to potential partners and can be leveraged to build external relationships (Ellis et al., 2006). Thus, understanding disability sport organizational culture and its factors which appeal to potential sponsors can drive sponsorship relationship formation and retention.

As disability sport still lacks professionalism worldwide, the purpose of this study was to examine the elements of the organizational culture that make a successful international wheelchair basketball sport club attractive to external partners. The study of an exemplar organization which has been successful in sponsorship acquisition and retention and has a history of building a fan and organizational culture can yield valuable insights into how other disability sport teams can mimic their success. In the present study, Schein's (2010) organizational culture framework of (a) artifacts, (b) espoused beliefs and values, and (c) underlying basic assumptions were examined. Schein's (2010) framework was extended by Meyerson and Martin's (1987) scholarship to identify potential differentiation and fragmentation of culture. Therefore, for practitioners and sport managers, this study provides valuable insight and knowledge into the cultural elements of sport teams for people with disabilities which are essential and can be leveraged to attract and maintain sport partnerships. Through this knowledge, other adaptive sport teams, organizations, and athletes can potentially leverage the key cultural elements identified in this study to attract sponsors and increase the funding and sustainability of adaptive sports. By extending Schein's (2010) framework to not only examine what is shared in the culture but also what is differentiated or fragmented, this study provides a first of its kind cultural analysis in disability sport and a framework to follow in future sport organizational research.

### **Literature Review**

The following section includes a review of organizational culture research and its application in sport management.

### **Organizational Culture**

Organizational culture is at the core of every organization and holds that organization together while playing the lead role in developing organizational identity which can in turn be showcased to the external environment (Jo Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Renard & Sitz, 2011). Shared meanings and beliefs are central to the culture concept and determine how its members think, feel, value, and act, making culture significant to any organization and its operations (Alvesson, 2013).

Aware of the influence culture has on organizations and how organizational culture is shaped, Hofstede (1980) called for an approach to analyze various cultures beyond what is similar and what is different. Schein answered Hofstede's call for an extension on cultural analysis in his scholarship on organizational culture and leadership. Between his scholarship and Hofstede's findings, researchers utilized different approaches to debate culture and its definition for 25 years (Ashkanasy et al., 2000; Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Deal & Kennedy, 1999; Martin, 2002; Schultz, 1995; Trice & Beyer, 1993, as cited in Schein, 2010). Schein (2010) addressed the ambiguity to form a comprehensive definition of culture as

“a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.” (p. 17). Culture therefore has several layers and characteristics, and no cultures are precisely the same due to the variety of external and internal influences.

### ***The Levels of Culture***

The manifestation of organizational culture can be overt or subtle (Hogan & Coote, 2014). Schein (1985) introduced three levels of culture in his scholarship, differentiating them by the degree to which the phenomenon is visible to observers. Culture is manifested in (a) artifacts, and (b) espoused beliefs and values, while the essence of culture is grounded in (c) basic underlying assumptions. Schein's (2010) definitions of culture are detailed below.

Artifacts represent the surface level of culture and include everything which can be seen, heard, or felt when encountering an unfamiliar culture. All that is visible, including style, clothing, language, emotional displays, stories about the organization, published values of the organization, organizational processes, and structural elements (e.g., organizational charts, mission statements), as well as rituals and ceremonies are artifacts of culture. While artifacts are easily observable, they are difficult to understand since their meaning is derived from the less visible underlying espoused beliefs and values. Hence, it would take an observer living in the group for an extended period of time to decipher their meanings. In order to rapidly understand the artifacts, one must analyze the espoused values, norms, and rules for daily operations.

Espoused beliefs and values exist on a conscious level and predict a majority of the behavior observed at the artifacts level. For example, an organization may value employee freedom to work from wherever and whenever. On the artifact level, this may result in few people being present in the office or people arriving and leaving at random times. Espoused beliefs and values also connect the deeper level of underlying assumptions by reflecting conscious beliefs, norms, and operational rules based on non-negotiable assumptions. Congruency between the underlying assumptions and espoused

beliefs and values serves as a source of identity and core mission. Moral and ethical rules are derived from the underlying assumptions and articulated at this level of culture. As morals and ethics become part of organizational ideology or philosophy, they serve as guides in the face of uncontrollable events (Schein, 2010) such as a pandemic. For example, an organization's culture may have the underlying assumption of employees being in the office by 8:00AM at the latest. On the espoused beliefs and values level this may result in believing an individual is unproductive when they enter the office no earlier than 9:00AM.

Basic underlying assumptions originate in the simple solution to a problem. Once the solution works repeatedly it becomes taken for granted and is treated as reality. At this stage, only little variation within a social unit can be found and differentiating or dissenting behavior is believed to be inconceivable and even disruptive (Schein, 2010). Basic assumptions are similar to the "theories-in-use" which Argyris identified as assumptions humans often are unaware of, but which guide their behavior. Within a group setting they tell group members how to perceive, think, and feel. Having established these assumptions such as treating everyone equally regardless of the position held in the company and/or their background, humans are most comfortable with other humans with whom they share same assumptions than with those who do not. Deciphering the basic underlying assumptions provides not only insight into the ability or inability to change but also into interpreting the artifacts correctly and how much to trust the expressed values and beliefs (Schein, 2010).

Meek (1988) further argues it is important to distinguish the concepts of culture and social structure and treat them as abstractions, not tangibles. When researching

culture, concrete organizational member behaviors and actions should be observed and described, and culture and social structure used to interpret those behaviors and actions. Further, Meyerson and Martin (1987) outlined three paradigms through which culture traditionally has been analyzed – (a) integration, (b) differentiation and diversity, and (c) ambiguity. Schein’s scholarship is exemplified in paradigm one – integration. In this paradigm researchers identify what is ‘shared’ within a culture such as language, values, and behaviors. Paradigm two on the other hand emphasizes differentiation and diversity. Researchers (Christenson & Kreiner, 1984; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Siehl, 1984; Smith & Simmons, 1983; as cited in Meyerson & Martin, 1987) focused on inconsistencies and lack of consensus in culture and on non-leader centered sources of culture. In contrast to paradigm one, Meyerson and Martin believed cultures are not single and dominant but a collection of values and manifestations where espoused values and actual practices may show inconsistencies. Thus, cultural portrayal focuses on disagreement instead of consensus. The final paradigm, ambiguity, views culture with no shared or integrated values but rather an awareness of ambiguity and fragmentation. Within ambiguity “Cultural manifestations are not clearly consistent or inconsistent with each other. Instead, the relationships among manifestations are characterized by a lack of clarity from ignorance or complexity” (Meyerson & Martin, 1987, p. 637). Therefore, consensus among individuals as well as disagreement on viewpoints and confusion or indifference about views can all coexist. For example, the leadership team of a sport organization may have the consensus that their organization is diverse and inclusive, while employees with minority backgrounds could disagree, and others are confused as to what inclusion and diversity should look like in their organization. Considering the different approaches of

all three paradigms, Martin and Meyerson (1986) argue relying on a single paradigm to view culture misleads through oversimplification. Rather, cultures should be viewed from all three paradigms, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity and potential for innovation of a specific culture. Leveraging all three lenses and distinguishing between what is shared (integration), contested and unclear (differentiation), and ambiguous (fragmentation), results in richer and more complete descriptions of culture.

### **Organizational Culture and External Relationships**

While organizational culture is the internal core of an organization, it is also highly relevant for external relations. Moreover, “a firm’s culture not only defines who its relevant employees, customers, suppliers, and competitors are, but also defines how a firm will interact with these key actors” (Barney, 1986, p.657). Within the business literature, Sambasivan and Yen (2010) found organizational culture to have a significant effect on the degree of integration and value creation of strategic alliances. Strategic alliances are “close, long-term, mutually beneficial agreement[s] in which resources, knowledge, and skills are shared with the objective of enhancing the competitive position of each partner” (Urriolagoitia & Planellas, 2007, p.158).

Beugelsdijk et al. (2006) further highlighted the importance of organizational culture in interfirm relationships in their study exploring a firm’s internal characteristics and their link to external relationships. The study found relationship skills, defined as a “firm’s ability and behavioral tendency to actively cultivate and manage its ties with other firms” (Beugelsdijk et al., 2006, p. 833) were rooted in certain aspects of organizational culture. As relationship skills are valuable for interorganizational

relationships, the organizational culture in which the relationship skills are rooted plays an instrumental role in the success of a firm's interorganizational relationships. These findings further support the notion that the nature of relationships is cultural.

Organizational culture is an antecedent of interorganizational performance as it influences a firm's relationship skills which in turn are leveraged for external relations (Ellis et al., 2006). Hence, relationships are built upon cultural foundations. Additionally, organizational culture is an antecedent of interorganizational performance by influencing a firm's relationship skills which in return are leveraged for external relations (Beugelsdijk et al., 2006). Beugelsdijk et al. (2009) further extended the previous relationship management research by exploring potential effects of differences in organizational culture on relationship performance. The findings showed larger differences in organizational culture in less successful inter-firm relationships. No significant influence on the perceived relationship success was found (Beugelsdijk et al., 2009). However, there is no debate culture plays a role in relationship quality, which is one of the key tenants of relationship marketing, based on cultural understanding between partners (Palmatier, 2008).

### **Organizational Culture and Sport Organizations**

Organizational culture benefits are far reaching and yet still attainable in any organization. Within the sport management realm, the value of managing organizational culture has long been established (e.g., Amis & Slack, 2002; Colyer, 2000; Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999; Scott, 1997; Shilbury & Moore, 2006; Slack & Parent, 2006; Smith & Shilbury, 2004; Wallace & Weese, 1995; Weese, 1996, as cited in Choi et al., 2010). In fact, the increased professionalism and commercialization of the sport industry create a



rapidly changing environment in which sport managers should review their organizational culture to maximize their effectiveness (Choi et al., 2010). However, sport organizations differ from most work organizations due to a rich sub-culture of volunteers (Colyer, 2000) and unique sub-dimensions including rituals, traditions, symbols and history (Smith & Shilbury, 2004). Therefore, research findings from other types of organizations cannot simply be applied *carte blanche* to sport organizations.

### ***Review of Sport Organizational Culture Research***

While Maitland et al.'s (2015) review of studies on organizational culture in sport showed a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, the majority of researchers have used qualitative methods. Studies mainly relied solely on interviews or were supplemented with other methods. Document analyses, observations and ethnographies were also used to study sport organizational culture. Based on Henriksen et al. (2010a, 2010b, 2011, as cited in Maitland et al., 2015), Maitland et al. (2015) called for an extension of research methods beyond cultural assessment instruments and interviews and specifically highlighted the need for the inclusion of case studies and ethnographies in sport organizational culture research. Additionally, it is vital to expand the study population to include athletes and coaches and not just sport administrators and volunteers, since they are all stakeholders in sport organizations.

Looking beyond the study participants to the study site, the clear majority (two thirds) of studies focused on university sport organizational culture, followed by six studies on professional sport set-ups while the rest examined a range of local and national sport organizations and governing bodies. No parasport organizations were included, however. Moreover, North American sport organizations were the clear focus in 16 out of

33 studies. Australian sport organizations were the spotlight of four studies (Maitland et al., 2015).

Following Martin and Meyerson's approach to integration, differentiation, and fragmentation of organizational culture, 23 out of 33 studies reviewed were found to have taken an integration approach, meaning they viewed organizational culture as clear and not ambiguous. The differentiation approach was taken by five studies, while none solely adapted the fragmentation approach. Three studies followed Martin and Meyerson's scholarship and leveraged all three perspectives to identify the complexity of organizational culture in sport organizations (Maitland et al., 2015). Girginov (2006) further stresses the political implications of the perspectives and argued an emphasis of research on the integration perspective leaves a void in understanding the ambiguities and complexities of real life. For example, while top level managers may all have one shared perspective of their culture, lower-level managers dealing with everyday problems and changing workspaces may experience ambiguities relative to what is communicated from the top management level. Life is more complex than what is shared. Therefore, one should not simply look at the similarities within cultural perspectives but also pay attention to what is (perceived) differently and/or is fragmented (Girginov et al., 2006).

Maitland et al.'s (2015) review found little consensus around an organizational culture definition. However, Schein's (2010) definition (as previously outlined) was most often cited. There is a generic perception that culture is something an organization *has* and is common and shared among members, as highlighted by 31 out of the 33 studies mentioned above. The connection between cultural conceptualization and operationalization was not always evident in the studies reviewed, however. Thus,

Maitland et al. (2015) urged researchers to clearly define and operationalize culture and “align the manifestation of culture under study to the assumed definition of culture, to yield a more cohesive cultural understanding of sport organisations” (p. 509).

### ***Shared Organizational Sport Culture***

Schein’s (2010) model and view of organizational culture assumes successful cultures have shared cultural elements (McDougall et al., 2020). Up through 2017, Bailey et al. (2019) found 18 out of 33 studies within the sport organizational culture realm utilized Schein’s organizational culture framework as a basis of analysis. Following the approach of previous studies, Bailey et al. (2019) applied Schein’s (2010) model in a case study exploring the CrossFit culture and found the following: (a) shared cultural elements, (b) artifacts, (c) espoused beliefs and values, and (d) shared underlying assumptions. *Shared cultural elements* described unity in goals and visions. The shared cultural elements were specifically highlighted by the ideals, goals, values, and aspirations of leaving one’s ego at the door, communal pride, working hard and having fun, the unconscious beliefs and values of sharing a common goal of health and fitness, and a shared experience. *Artifacts* were visible in the rugged, industrial appearance of the gym and the social nature of members, expressed by heavy interaction prior to and post workout. The tough appearance of the gym was found to contrast with other (non-CrossFit based) fitness organizations. *Espoused beliefs and values* included pride in the gym and the workouts, inclusivity, a high degree of structure and a strong sense of community extending beyond the gym. A common goal of improved health and well-being reflected the *shared underlying assumptions* and the core values of the organization in the study. Notably, while different groups of members (17 interviewees total), ranging

from new or veteran members to coaches and owners were interviewed, all described a similar culture, indicating the absence of subcultures, hence no fragmentation or differentiation appeared present (Bailey et al., 2019).

Henriksen et al. (2010) conducted a holistic analysis of the athletic talent development environment (ATDE) with the Danish national sailing team. The researchers explored factors contributing to success through their environment success factors (ESF) working model which was based on Schein's cultural analysis. Despite the organization suffering from a lack of resources, a strong organizational culture underpinned by artifacts, values and the basic assumptions of open cooperation and knowledge sharing, individual responsibility for own excellence, and a focus on the performance process compensated for the resource deficits (Henriksen et al., 2010).

### ***Beyond What Is Shared***

However, not all organizational cultures are as coherent as found by Bailey et al. (2019) and Henriksen et al. (2010). It is argued that organizational culture is more dynamic than portrayed by Schein, and seldom so coherent and integrative. A study conducted by Norman et al. (2018) recognized the existence of diverse subcultures in a sport organization. Female coaches and coach developers in the English Football Association were found to have disparities in the espoused values and assumptions identified with the English Football Association. People generally derive their identity(s) and values from the variety of cultures of which they are part. Hence, McDougall et al. (2020) argued the conceptualization and organization of culture must go beyond what is united and shared. The diversity in occupations, demographics, and cultures in elite sports should suggest the existence of multiple subcultures. Through Meyerson and

Martin's (1987) organizational culture scholarship, a distinction between what is shared (integration), contested and unclear (differentiation), and ambiguous (fragmentation) can be made. Failing to do so, can result in the exclusion of marginalized identities and people with lower status or authority (McDougall et al., 2020).

Mills and Hoeber (2013) researched members' perceptions of artifacts in a local figure skating club. Using photo-elicited interviews, they found *integration* present in the common perception of the uniqueness of the figure skating facility. Besides the shared perceptions, findings also included *differentiated* views of achievement-oriented artifacts and *fragmented* perspectives of the dressing rooms for the figure skaters. The members' integrated, differentiated, and fragmented perceptions of artifacts support the notion that not everyone experiences the environment similarly. While artifacts are the visible part of organizational culture which can easily be observed, the meanings behind artifacts are simply not always shared. In this study, artifacts created a sense of unity but simultaneously also separated participants through achievement-oriented artifacts such as trophies or medals (differentiation perspective) and created hierarchies and disagreements in the dressing rooms where "winners" received preferential treatment when they needed equipment or access (fragmentation perspective). Hence, it is essential for sport managers to consider the meanings associated with any artifacts present in the sport organization (Mills & Hoeber, 2013).

While Mills and Hoeber (2013) focused only on artifacts, Girginov (2006) took a multimethod approach to examine organizational culture as the driver to align sport governing bodies' (SGB) practices with those of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). WADA aimed to achieve *integration* through harmonization across all SGBs

with their new World Anti-Doping Code (WADC). SGBs worried about cultural contexts impacting the interpretation of the code (*differentiation*). Meanwhile, the importance of considering the reality in dealing with doping on a daily basis was stressed by athletes (*fragmentation*) (Girginov, 2006). This study showed the importance of organizational culture for sport governing organizations at all levels and more so having clear sport governance supported by an organizational culture which is accepted, internalized, and acted on at every level. A first step towards clear sport governance is the awareness of organizational culture elements by leaders. In fact, another study by Frontiera (2010) on the phenomena of organizational culture change in professional sport found leaders who were able to turn their organizations into successful entities have a particular awareness of the different cultural elements of the organization at hand (Frontiera, 2010).

Based on the literature review and the purpose of this study, the following research questions were addressed:

**RQ1:** How does a successful disability sport club position itself to the external environment with respect to its cultural attributes?

**RQ2:** How do members of a successful disability sport club perceive their organization's culture?

### **Method**

A bounded single case study with an intrinsic design was conducted on an exemplar, the RSV Lahn-Dill, an internationally successful wheelchair basketball club. Within the disability sport sector only a small number of organizations have achieved a sustainable level of professionalism, with the RSV being a pioneer and exemplar. Thus,

the choice of a single case study is appropriate for the present study, providing valuable insight into disability sport culture and sponsorship (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Case Study Design**

Organizational culture in sport has traditionally been researched using qualitative methods, relying heavily on interviews supplemented by observations and document analyses to capture the rich and diverse nature of culture (Maitland et al., 2015).

Qualitative research is most suitable to explore the complexity and details of an issue, such as in the case of exploring a successful disability sport club's organizational culture. Detail of information can only be reached by directly talking to and engaging with people in their environments. Qualitative research discovers deeper thoughts and behaviors of participants to unpack the context and settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, the context is a successful disability sport club. The thoughts and behaviors of participants studied were their perceptions of the club's organizational culture.

This case study followed an exemplar methodology, which is a "sample selection technique that involves the intentional selection of individuals, groups, or entities that exemplify the construct of interest in a highly developed manner" (Bronk, 2012, p. 1). The following section outlines the nomination criteria of the exemplar and the chosen study site.

#### ***Nomination Criteria***

Considering the purpose of this case study, the researcher identified several nomination criteria to locate and choose the exemplar. Based on Bonn, Germany being home to the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) since its establishment in 1989 (DePauw & Gavron, 1995; IPC, n.d.), and Germany's pioneer role in professional

wheelchair basketball (IWBF, 2016), Germany was chosen as the country in which the exemplar is based. Considering wheelchair basketball is the most popular disability sport in Germany, a successful wheelchair basketball sport club with national and international achievements and a history of successful sponsor relations identified by several continuing sponsorship engagements, was chosen as the exemplar.

### *Study Site*

Contingent on the nomination criteria and employing network sampling, the RSV Lahn-Dill was identified as the exemplar. Network sampling provides access to hard-to-reach populations (Glesne, 2016). The club was chosen based on its international presence, players, and reputation. Within the RBBL (German Wheelchair Basketball League), the RSV's success is undebatable as it is the German record holder in national championships, making the RSV 'by far' the most renowned RBBL team (Kehrer, 2019; Rollt, 2018). Together with its success in Europe and internationally, the RSV has been a pioneer in revolutionizing wheelchair basketball on and off the court. Players consider the RSV as "the most prestigious wheelchair basketball club in the world. They have built a culture of excellence by always remaining at the top of the game" (Rollt, 2020, para 2). Outside of the Paralympic Games, the RSV's home games are the highest attended Paralympic sport events internationally (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c). The organization's success has been driven by its sponsorship support with a network of 145 sponsors (Joneck, 2019) which is primarily responsible for the club having one of the two highest budgets in the RBBL (Hamburger Abendblatt, 2019). The RSV provides an ideal exemplar as within the RBBL clubs are independently responsible for their marketing and sponsorship acquisition (IWBF, 2016).



## **Data Collection**

Data collection involved several methods to allow for comparison and triangulation among data and to add rigor, breadth, and depth to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Leveraging multiple methods also supported the identification of how culture may be perceived as similar, differentiated, and/or fragmented (Meyerson & Martin, 1987). Therefore, this study included (a) a review of external communication elements, (b) interviews, and (c) focus groups.

Documents are an important substitute for activities which cannot or may not be observed directly in the data collection process (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) highlighted the need for a document review in most case studies and pointed out the need to evaluate the usefulness of documents in advance. In the present study, the RSV's website, sponsor prospectus, and media data were reviewed as those external communication elements are visible to sponsors. The data collection of the external communication elements focused on the cultural elements of the RSV to identify potential artifacts and espoused beliefs and values. Specifically, artifacts were identified by visually inspecting the website content, sponsor prospectus, and media data sheet. Artifacts are visible elements of culture and include style, clothing, language, emotional displays, stories about the organization, published values of the organization, organizational processes and structural elements (e.g., organizational charts, mission statements), as well as rituals and ceremonies (Schein, 2010). Espoused beliefs and values were explored based on the artifacts since they exist on a conscious level and predict a majority of the behaviors observed at the artifacts level (Schein, 2010). To do so, the external communication elements were scanned for values and beliefs expressed in written form. On the website,

the “About Us” section was the focus of examination of values and beliefs, supplemented with the “Partner” and “Current News” sections. Findings from the review of external communication elements were used to inform interviews and focus group sessions and compare findings across data collection.

Interviews are a targeted tool which focus directly on case study topics and are insightful, providing explanations and personal views (Yin, 2018). Using purposive and quota sampling, a total of twelve individuals were interviewees. Interviewees were recruited via email based on age (over 18 years old), their position with the club (national players/international players/coaching staff/crew member/general manager/ board member/volunteer/administrative employee), and their tenure with the club (must have been with the club at least one year to ensure they have immersed themselves into the culture) to reflect all major subgroups of the RSV (Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Interviewee Demographics*

Code Name	Gender Identity	Position	Sponsorship Management (Yes/No)	Number of years with the organization	German/ International
Uwe	Male	General Manager	Yes	21-30	German
Peter	Male	Board Member	Yes	21-30	German
Lasse	Male	Board Member	Yes	11-20	German
Tim	Male	Administrator	No	1-3	German
Alexandra	Female	Coach	No	4-10	International
Florian	Male	Coach	No	1-3	German
Georg	Male	Player	No	11-20	German
Sarah	Female	Player	No	1-3	German
Bill	Male	Player	No	4-10	International
Sean	Male	Player	No	1-3	International
Lukas	Male	Crew	No	1-3	German
Franz	Male	Volunteer	No	11-20	German

The interviews were semi-structured in nature and interviewees were informed of their rights as research subjects per University Human Subjects approval (Appendix P) and asked to verbally agree to the preamble and sign the data privacy consent before participating. The questions focused on identifying the artifacts, unraveling the espoused beliefs and values of the organization, as well as gaining an understanding of the organization's basic underlying assumptions. Based on the questions used in the Bailey et al. (2019) study which investigated the organizational culture of CrossFit and on the basis of the literature review, interview questions were adapted for an initial interview guide, translated into German, and back translated to ensure accuracy. This line of questioning was revised after the review of the external communication elements was completed as the data collection process was iterative.

Focus groups create dynamic exchanges of ideas on the basis of questions and responses with a group of participants and researchers (Trainor & Graue, 2013). Two focus groups were conducted. The focus groups included participants who were avid fans of the RSV Lahn-Dill and were members of the RSV fan club. Fans were included in the study as the RSV considers its fans part of the "RSV Family" (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c) which is reciprocated on the fan club website (RSV Fanclub, 2020). Additionally, to ensure familiarity with the organization and its brand, fan club members provided a sample of the fan base which has a greater perception of team brand equity than non-members (Biscaia et al., 2014). Fan club members, as an extension of the RSV family, take part in experiencing and shaping organizational culture life.

Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling and chosen based on their age (over 18 years old), consent capacity, and their tenure with the club (must have been with the fan club at least one year to ensure they have immersed themselves into the culture). Attempts were made to reflect different gender identities, disability status, and age groups. The focus groups were semi-structured in nature and, similar to the interviews, the focus group guide was based on the interview questions used in the Bailey et al. (2019) study. Trainor and Graue (2013) suggest a size of four to six participants for small in-depth approaches of focus groups. Hence, two focus groups were conducted with four and five avid RSV fans respectively. By including more than one focus group in the study, saturation of the data was reached through redundancy of participants' responses, meeting the quality touchstone set by Trainor and Graue (2013) for sample size in interview research. Additionally, the focus groups served as control groups for each other by comparing the respondents' answers and identifying any outliers or contrasting information.

The final interview guide was comprised of an organizational culture and community related section, a sponsor related section, and a section on sponsorship relations only for administrators involved in sponsorship management. The final focus group was comprised of an organizational culture and community related section of questions, a section on sponsor related questions, and one section on the fan's identification with the organization.

### **Data Analysis**

To begin the data collection, the organization's website, sponsor prospectus, and media data were reviewed to address Research Question One and identify how the RSV

positioned itself to the external environment with respect to its cultural attributes. The review of external communication elements was approached through structural coding, focusing on context and concepts. Specifically, the context and concepts explored were the artifacts and espoused beliefs and values. The second cycle of coding involved a thematic analysis, seeking out commonalities to how the topic was spoken or written about and providing a deeper analysis of the structural codes (Miles et al., 2014). The findings of Research Question One were used to compare and validate the findings from the interviews and focus groups regarding Research Question Two.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The first cycle of coding utilized In Vivo coding, using the participants' own language to prioritize and honor the participants' voices (Miles et al., 2014). In Vivo codes which were originally in German were then translated into English for further analysis.<sup>1</sup> Descriptive coding summarized words and short phrases (Saldaña, 2013). Second cycle coding involved applying pattern codes to the In Vivo and descriptive codes to create smaller numbers of categories, themes, and constructs (Miles et al., 2014). The data was segregated into categories by

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<sup>1</sup> On the basis of Squires' (2008) methodological recommendations for cross-language qualitative research, translations were conducted. To ensure the participants' voices were honored In Vivo codes were first assigned in the participants' native language. The codes were then translated contextually to remain the original meaning. Translations were completed by the main researcher of this study who is a German citizen who is native in German and fluent in English. The translator was responsible for all data collection and analysis. To ensure accuracy of translation, translations were validated by a second bilingual researcher.

codes, identified through a progressive process of sorting and defining data, to yield findings on the theoretical basis of artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions (Glesne, 2016). Establishing a thematic organizational framework, the data were grouped together based on the same descriptive or theoretical idea (Glesne, 2016). Based on Schein's (2010) organizational culture framework, the themes were used to identify RSV Lahn Dill's cultural elements.

Focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data analysis was conducted at both the group and individual levels. While the group level was the focus as consensus about the culture of the organization was at the core of the research study, the individual level served to identify dissenters, following Meyerson and Martin's (1987) framework of identifying differentiation or fragmentation of culture. The focus group sessions were analyzed through a constant comparison approach and codes and descriptors were assigned to smaller units of data. Further, the codes and descriptors were grouped into categories and themes for each of the groups were developed. An emergent-systematic focus group design was leveraged whereby one focus group served as the emergent focus group to identify themes and the second focus group served as the systematic group, verifying (or not) the findings of the first focus group. General saturation and saturation across groups was reached by comparing the themes across focus groups (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

### **Ensuring Trustworthiness**

To ensure trustworthiness of the data, credibility was met through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In order to ensure dependability and confirm transparency throughout

the data collection and analysis, analytic memoing with reflexive notes was employed to document reflection processes (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Additionally, to further strengthen trustworthiness the researcher’s positionality was considered<sup>2</sup>.

### **Findings**

Based on Schein’s (2010) framework, supplemented with Meyerson and Martin’s (1987) framework, first the findings for Research Question One are presented. Second, the findings for Research Question Two are outlined.

#### **RQ1: How does a successful disability sport club position itself to the external environment with respect to its cultural attributes?**

An organization’s artifacts are rooted in its underlying espoused beliefs and values (Schein, 2010). In the following sections each of the espoused beliefs and values are outlined, followed by the artifacts. Table 3 details how the espoused beliefs and values and artifacts relate.

**Table 3**

#### *External Communication Organizational Culture Elements*

Espoused beliefs and values	Artifacts	Artifacts Examples
Social Responsibility Rooted In Commitment To Inclusivity And Diversity	Community centered	Practical and theoretical introduction to our Paralympic sport and an insight into all socially related topics

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<sup>2</sup> The author grew up in Germany and identifies as an able-bodied, white, cisgender woman. At the site of the present research, the RSV Lahn-Dill, the researcher had her first experience working with athletes with disabilities twelve years ago. Since the start of her academic career, her research has focused extensively on the disability sport sector while previously trained in disciplines such as international business and management (undergraduate degree) and sport administration (graduate and terminal degrees). The researcher’s experience as a scholar and practitioner as well as her history with the organization under analysis have helped her build rapport with participants throughout the study.

Innovative Trailblazer	Celebration of excellence	One of Germany's and Europe's most successful professional sport teams
	Tradition of continuity	Many long-term partnerships
	Authentic professional sport experience	Professional communication channels
Serving the RSV Family and Community	Community centered	Fans and team are one – united

***Espoused Beliefs and Values***

Within the espoused beliefs and values level, three themes were identified: (a) social responsibility rooted in commitment to inclusivity and diversity, (b) innovative trailblazer, (c) serving the RSV family and community.

**Social Responsibility Rooted in Commitment to Inclusivity and Diversity.** On the espoused beliefs and values level, the first theme which emerged in the analysis was *social responsibility rooted in commitment to inclusivity and diversity*, exemplified by the RSV “connecting Paralympic spirit with social responsibility” (sponsor prospectus, p. 3) and “inclusion, diversity, and social participation” (sponsor prospectus, p. 4). In the sponsor prospectus, RSV promotes how the organization’s professionalism enables future generations of young adults to garner appreciation and take advantage of equal opportunities.

Inclusion is one of RSV’s core values and was highlighted directly or indirectly across all external communication elements. Printed materials overtly identify this value as referenced by “successful and lived inclusion” (media data, p. 2), “lived and



professional inclusion” (sponsor prospectus, p. 1), “great importance to the integration of disabled and non-disabled people” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Gesamtverein, para. 1).

While inclusion was named in the communication elements targeted directly at sponsors, the organization did not specifically name it on its website. However, the RSV did outline how they engage in social responsibility and drive inclusion by promoting how the club is engaged in politics, business, and society.

Recognizing “diversity as strength” (sponsor prospectus, p. 7), the RSV is proud of its diverse fan base made up of a “wide range of age structures” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Werteorientiert, para. 11) and an “unusually high proportion of women” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Werteorientiert, para. 11). Not only is the fan base diverse, but also the team. As “diversity of individuals makes the team stronger” (sponsor prospectus, p. 7), the RSV is home to several international players and two Iranian refugees whom the organization also supports.

**Innovative Trailblazer.** The second theme within the espoused beliefs and values level was *innovative trailblazer*. RSV’s positions itself as a “down-to-earth figurehead and innovative pioneer” (media data, p. 2) which is “breaking societal barriers and setting new standards” (sponsor prospectus, p. 1). As a trailblazer in the adaptive sport sector, RSV is home to the “first fan club in wheelchair basketball founded in 1999” (sponsor prospectus, p. 5), which thanks to a “steadily growing fan base” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Werteorientiert, para. 11) is reflected in “extraordinary fan numbers” (media data, p. 1) making its “home games the most popular sports events in Europe in the Paralympic area outside of the Paralympics themselves” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Werteorientiert, para. 4). Given the organization enjoys the “highest

media interest in the sport” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Wertorientiert, para. 7) and hosts “professional events unmatched in Europe” (media data, p. 1), the RSV has established a “high reputation in sport and society” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Wertorientiert, para. 5). In its position as an innovative trailblazer, the RSV has been “realizing visions” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Wertorientiert, para. 1) and positioned itself “on eyesight with mainstream sports” (sponsor prospectus, p. 5), providing a groundbreaking platform for adaptive sport. The organization’s goal is to “influence societal community” (sponsor prospectus, p. 1) as a “popular figure for region, ambassador on international stage” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Wertorientiert, para. 6)

**Serving the RSV Family and Community.** The third theme on the espoused beliefs and values level was *servicing the RSV family and community*, underlined by efforts to engage and support players, sponsors, fans, and the regional community. Under the motto “One club, one block, ONE FAMILY” (media data, p. 1), the RSV views “Team work as key to success... with athletes, fans, and partners” (sponsor prospectus, p. 5) and thus, is “team and value oriented” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Wertorientiert, para. 1). Additionally, the “consciously lived proximity to the region” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Wertorientiert, para. 11) and “conscious proximity to fans” (sponsor prospectus, p. 5) exemplifies the RSV’s focus on its ‘family’ and community. Engaging in charitable partnerships with a foundation, a foster home, and service clubs, the RSV’s philosophy of serving the RSV family and community is reflected in “Giving back to the society we belong to, we are proud of, and are responsible for” (sponsor prospectus, p. 3). Besides the professional wheelchair basketball team, the RSV also aims to provide

“sustainable youth sport opportunities for individuals with disabilities” (sponsor prospectus, p. 6). Particularly serving its sponsoring partners, RSV highlights the “promotional appearance of our partners is just as important to us as an intensely lived network concept” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Werteorientiert, para. 6). This is reflected in the organization efforts to “transfer [its] image in high quality and individually onto partners” (sponsor prospectus, p. 8). Hereby, RSV has supported its image transfer to partner “products and services, as well as on their own values and beliefs” (sponsor prospectus, p. 8).

### ***Artifacts***

Within the artifacts, four themes were identified: (a) community centered, (b) celebration of excellence, (c) tradition of continuity, and (d) authentic professional sport experience.

**Community Centered.** Within RSV’s external communication, a plethora of artifacts showcase players, fans, partners, and the city community. The community centered artifact level of RSV’s culture is rooted in the espoused beliefs and values of *servicing the RSV family and community and social responsibility rooted in commitment to inclusivity and diversity.*

The artifacts highlighted the organization’s “fan culture” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Werteorientiert, para. 11) and “family friendliness” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Werteorientiert, para. 11). The fan focus was further underlined by a picture titled “fans and team are one unity” (sponsor prospectus, p. 5) in which players were shown clapping for the fans as a thank you measure. Within the sponsor prospectus, a section was dedicated to the “big fan and media culture” (p. 5), supported by a picture of

the fans in the fan block with the caption “pure enthusiasm” (p. 5). Additionally, on the website a player was pictured signing a basketball surrounded by four young fans, showcasing the RSV’s fan centered culture. The RSV’s work centering sponsors was reflected in a picture of a big poster advertisement of the team bus with the bus sponsor’s and RSV’s logos on it and the words “together to big destinations” (sponsor prospectus, p. 7). Together with a sponsoring partner, for over 15 years the RSV has visited local and regional schools and provides “practical and theoretical introduction to our Paralympic sport and provide an insight into all socially related topics” (sponsor prospectus, p. 3) for kindergartens and schools. This was also reflected in a picture showing a school class with a RSV player, titled “RSV Lahn-Dill makes school.”<sup>3</sup> RSV further involved sponsors in its community work by founding an initiative together with the state’s Chamber of Crafts through which provides individuals with physical disabilities training and jobs in crafts.

Community work and partnerships are at the center of RSV’s culture as further exemplified by its charity, foster home, and service club partners. As players were also shown engaged in all of RSV’s community, partner, and fan work, the team is at the center of the organization’s culture with all three title page pictures of the sponsor prospectus featuring the team, as well as the title and final page of the media guide, and the landing page picture on the website. Further outlining the center of the team to the organization and to its fans, the title page of the sponsor prospectus included a picture of

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<sup>3</sup> The translation provided is literal and has two meanings in the German language. Firstly, it means RSV is meeting schools. Secondly, it means RSV is the first to do so.

a spotlight on the team and the team in a circle with their arms on each other's shoulders and fans in the background. A very similar picture was also featured on the final page of the media guide. Moreover, the organization focuses not only on its team on the court, but also off the court, as highlighted by a section in the sponsor prospectus featuring a picture of an international player and a refugee player with the text of the section outlining RSV's effort to support the players in learning to live in a foreign culture and country.

**Celebration of Excellence.** RSV also positions itself as “one of Germany's and Europe's most successful professional sport teams” (sponsor handout, p. x) and the organization celebrates its players' successes. This theme of celebration of excellence at the artifact level of RSV's culture is rooted in the espoused beliefs and values of the RSV as an *innovative trailblazer*.

Wording throughout the external communication elements highlighted RSV's position of excellence. The success “nationally and internationally” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Werteorientiert, para. 9) was visible by phrasing including “international stage” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Werteorientiert, para. 10), “national players succeeding internationally” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Werteorientiert, para. 10), and “most successful wheelchair basketball club in Germany and one of the most successful in Europe” (sponsor prospectus, p. 6). The RSV further positioned itself as the “most successful sport club in the region” (media data, p. 1). However, not only specific wording reflected the success, but also news articles related to recent successes such as being nominated for Hesse Team of the Year, players participating in European championships for their respective countries, the team staying

on top of national rankings, and players being nominated for athletes of the year in the city of Wetzlar. Excellence is so greatly expected and celebrated that after a close game, the news article of the game published by the RSV was very critical about barely winning. Besides RSV's wording and news coverage, the pictures visible across the different external communication elements further supported this theme. In the sponsor prospectus, a picture of a player signing the city book with the caption "entry in the golden book of the city of Wetzlar" (p. 6) and the text beside the picture further outlining the organization's societal recognition thanks to the team "in the past 20 years competing in over 150 Champions League, Europe Cup, and World Cup games, in the process winning seven Europe Cups and one World Cup" (p. 6). The sponsor prospectus also featured a picture of an award ceremony, titled "Triple award as 'Team of the Year in Hesse'." Beside the picture, information was provided on the 40 times RSV players have placed on the podium for their respective countries in World and European Championships, as well as the Paralympic Games. All titles the team has won in its history were also listed in the media guide, along with a picture of three players with the Champions Cup trophy. The news page also included a picture of the team celebrating.

**Tradition of Continuity.** Representing RSV's long-lasting record with its management, partners, and success, the tradition of continuity theme at the artifact level of RSV's culture is rooted in the espoused beliefs and values of the RSV as an *innovative trailblazer*.

According to the RSV, its "Team-oriented action in professional structures is the basis for continuity in our club and company policy" (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Leitbild, para. 1). Continuity was reflected in the RSV's "almost unchanged management" (RSV

Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Werteorientiert, para. 1), and its “many long-term partnerships” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Werteorientiert, para. 6). As “continuity [of partnerships] is particularly important” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Werteorientiert, para. 6) to the RSV, on the website, RSV shared that a local bank was its first big sponsor in 1993 and is still a sponsor today. “Quality & continuity” (sponsor prospectus, p. 1) is at the organization’s forefront and reflected in the players’ continued international success. In its tradition of continuity, the RSV has achieved a “High brand image in region and beyond” (media data, p. 1).

**Authentic Professional Sport Experience.** The final theme on the artifacts level was “authentic professional sport experience”, underlined by RSV’s professionalism. The authentic professional sport experience artifact level of RSV’s culture is rooted in the espoused beliefs and values of the RSV as an *innovative trailblazer*.

Providing a “high-quality brand environment” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019b, para. 1), RSV has “professional communication channels” (media data, p. 1) and a “professional appearance” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Werteorientiert, para. 7). The media data featured sample pictures of the magazine, livestream, and team bus with sponsor branding. Additionally, a picture of the home game arena at night was included, showing the professional venue RSV plays in. The authentic professional sport experience during game days is further created by branding of partners around the court (as pictured in the media data) and the team’s own cheerleaders. Team and athlete pictures throughout the external communication elements have a professional appearance. The sponsor prospectus also included a picture of a public speaking engagement by an RSV athlete captioned “media experienced and welcomed interlocutor” (p. 8). What makes the RSV

so appealing for professional image transfers are “no scandals, no doping, no million-dollar business – Paralympic sport captivates with passion and heart and soul” (p. 8). Through “value-based professionalism”, RSV has positioned itself on “eyesight with [able-bodied] professional sport” (media data, p. 1), hosting “international events” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, Team- und Werteorientiert, para. 7), while still being “down to earth” (sponsor prospectus, p. 1).

**RQ2: How do members of a successful disability sport club perceive their organization’s culture?**

RQ2 explored how members, including RSV management, staff, coaches, players, and fans, perceived their organizational culture. In the following, each of the underlying assumptions, their espoused beliefs and values, and artifacts related to the espoused beliefs and values are outlined. Additionally, any differentiation and fragmentation are identified for each part of the culture. Table 4 provides an overview of the RSV’s organizational culture as perceived by its members and the following section includes quotes from participants which illustrate emergent themes.

**Table 4**

***RSV Organizational Culture Member Perception***

Underlying Assumption	Espoused beliefs and values	Artifacts (Examples)
Pioneer	Business Pioneer in Disability Sport Sector	Front office, sponsor events, seven-figure budget, LLC
	Inclusion Pioneer in Society	Diverse fan base, marketing players as athletes first
Approachability	Transparency	Clear structures, open and honest communication



	Individual Care	Provide player support off the court, personally drop off Christmas gifts to sponsors
	Treat Everyone Like Family	Keeping Sponsors despite economic issues, player relationships with sponsors and fans
	Building Rapport	Inviting sponsors onto team bus, player partnerships, fan talk
Organizational Excellence	Expectation of Winning	Disappointment by fans when players do not perform at their best, centering success
	Professionalism	New arena, wood court, atmosphere, professional appearance

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### ***Pioneer***

The first basic underlying assumption that emerged was RSV being a pioneer as the RSV has “broken barriers” (Uwe, Managing Director) and through “visionary thinking” (Peter, Board Member) has established its position as a “flagship store of disability sport” (Uwe). This theme is reflected in the managing director Uwe highlighting they “had a vision at the end of the 90s,... and I am surprised how many visions have been realized since and how quickly.” He further explained that their “Vision was to enter the biggest sports scene in Germany and Europe – regardless of Paralympic and Olympic sport but on eyesight.” Administrative employee Tim, while having been with the organization for less than three years, also supports the notion of RSV’s pioneer position and stated: “RSV stands out in the industry because they are ahead of the time and the state of the sport, especially in its reach and international success.” Within the disability sport sector “pretty much everything is unique about

[RSV] compared to other teams... it's like a brand more than more than any other kind of team in the world” (Sean, international player). Board member Peter who has been with the RSV for over 25 years identified “seeing you can be a change-maker” as the reason for his continued work with the RSV.

As basic underlying assumptions are the source of values and actions, the espoused beliefs and values and artifacts related to the underlying assumption of being a pioneer provide more insight into this finding. Thus, in the following the espoused beliefs and values with their respective artifacts are outlined. On the espoused beliefs and value level of culture, two themes were identified in relation the pioneer assumption – (a) business pioneer in the disability sport sector and (b) inclusion pioneer in society. For each espoused belief and value, a related set of artifacts were identified.

**Business Pioneer in the Disability Sport Sector.** Members of the RSV perceived the RSV as a business pioneer in the disability sport sector, exemplified by being the “club that everyone looks up to” (Alexandra, Head Coach). The RSV has established its position as a business pioneer so extensively that player Bill shared “even before coming overseas to play professionally, it's just the organization to be part of it; how high they're regarded in terms of like their professional side and how they handle wheelchair basketball in like the business sense. You just don't see that at all.” He further talked about this being the reason why he wanted to be part of the team for a long time. Player Sean supported that notion and saw the RSV as “one of the best professional wheelchair basketball teams in the world, maybe the only one that is run like a business as well, so impressive.”

In its business pioneer position, the RSV has “broken societal barriers” (Uwe) as illustrated in the following example: “When we started advertising agencies were still discussing whether it makes sense for the customer, i.e., the company, the product, to advertise with Paralympic sports. Nowadays, no one thinks about it anymore” (Uwe). Additionally, the organization has “broken the barrier of Paralympic sport” (Uwe), particularly regarding spectator numbers and the game venue. While “many disagreed that it wouldn’t be possible in Paralympic sports to have big venues... many things we have done are now standard in the industry” (Uwe), further highlighting RSV’s business pioneer position in the disability sport sector. Tim shared, “we believe everything is possible despite external disbelievers.” Having “always new dimension” and “positioning itself like [ablebodied] sports” (Lasse, board member), RSV was “the first to have international players... to bring through the players’ knowhow into the league, knowhow into our club” (Uwe). Uwe further underlined the organization’s business pioneer position as “we were probably the first wheelchair basketball club which started a marketing budget because we said we have to invest, we have to invest in sustainability, in structures, and we said we are opening an office now.” Additionally, “we took money to advertise... we sure were the first to do so” (Uwe). This decision has evidently paid off, as international player Bill was impressed by “how well they go out to get new sponsors, or even maintain some of the sponsors they have so long because most businesses, definitely smaller ones, go in ways of how successful they are.” With sponsors, RSV leverages being a business pioneer by supporting sponsors and “really drives home for those sponsors how well they can basically show their brand and show how they can get advertising for their brand using our brand” (Brian).

***Business Pioneer Artifacts.*** Within the interviews and focus groups several artifacts rooted in the business pioneer in the disability sport sector espoused beliefs and values level of RSV's organizational culture. Particularly, having an office, hosting sponsor events, advertisements in traditional and new media, seven-figure budget, international players, and the team's international success were highlighted by several members. For managing director Uwe, the business appeal of the RSV was reflected in its own team bus, road screen with RSV advertisements, and the new game day venue. Player Sean highlighted that the RSV "has a club shop, ticket sales, I don't think many other clubs, maybe two or three clubs in the whole of Europe or the world even manage to sell clubs tickets and merchandise". He further expanded "as a player with the professional contracts, you kind of you feel like an employee rather than just like a player, you feel like you're part of an organization." Players having professional contracts is only possible thanks to the RSV's seven-figure budget. To assistant coach Florian "this is something whole of Europe or the world admires - that they succeeded to build their own budget through economical work without external crises." To him, RSV has the "best conditions to play and coach wheelchair basketball in Germany." Particularly the RSV's home game venue was at the center of artifacts mentioned "because we identify with it" (Sarah, player). Fan Ursula highlighted the "new arena, on eyesight with [the local major league handball team], provides more recognition and value."

***Inclusion Pioneer in Society.*** The second theme on the espoused beliefs and values level which emerged regarding the underlying assumption of being a pioneer was being an inclusion pioneer in society, exemplified by setting an example of lived inclusion. Uwe shared "In its history, RSV Lahn-Dill has broken down barriers, got

people to think, has also dissolved social, let me say, inequalities, because we simply didn't talk big about the topic of inclusion or anything, but just did it." Peter further supported this notion and shared: "inclusion is there when you just do it and don't talk about it. And I actually believe on the inside: We just do that too. It is always completely irrelevant to us whether we are wheelchair users or not, or whatever." The organization's goal is to "pave the way for inclusion" (Peter) and thereby be an example for inclusion. According to fan Ursula the RSV "provides a space for individuals with disabilities to feel valued and included." As a person with a disability, to fan Max "inclusion" is RSV's core value. Additionally, fan Helena sees the RSV's core value as "promotion for sport for people with disabilities", further exemplifying the inclusion pioneer character. To fan Jakob the uniqueness of the RSV is "Everyone is as good as they are. You will not be put in a box... You are accepted and recognized just the way you are." Fan Theresia supported this notion, sharing "everyone is good the way they are and it doesn't matter what their quirks are. Whether they are disabled or not. Everyone is just fine the way they are." Fan Monika shared this consensus "You don't just feel left out, even when you're new." Board member Nick identified RSV fans as "barrier-free in their minds", further reflecting the inclusion character. Regarding RSV fans, general manager Uwe shared: "Through our pioneering role, we clearly noticed that many people came who themselves have a disability, who said 'through your actions you gave us self-esteem, recognition, because you showed that you can be a star and hero in a wheelchair.'"

While the perception of the RSV as an inclusion pioneer is shared, findings showed some fragmentation and differentiation when it comes to whether inclusion is a core value and whether it should be talked about. Talking about core values, managing

director Uwe noted: “Of course, everyone probably expects that we say inclusion and equality and so on. And as I said, we don't want to discuss that away, but I don't think our core values are in the first place”, showing some *fragmentation* as to the significance of inclusion as a core value. Uwe rather sees the RSV as “the slightly different basketball team, not because of the wheelchair but because we do things differently.” Additionally, while highlighted several times by different organizational members (e.g., managing director, board member) that inclusion is not talked about, board member Peter did share that “in the context in which we work, that happens again and again... [Inclusion] somehow comes up. When we talk about partners, sponsoring, these issues come up.” Peter’s quote shows there is *differentiation* in RSV’s culture regarding to whether inclusion should be verbally addressed.

***Inclusion Pioneer Artifacts.*** As the RSV ‘lives’ inclusion instead of talking about it, the artifacts found further supported the espoused belief and value of being an inclusion pioneer in society. According to long-term volunteer Franz “wheelchair basketball is the epitome of inclusion - men, women, people with and without disabilities, young, old, all playing together.” The diversity and inclusion is further reflected in the fan base as the RSV’s “target group is very mixed from young to old with inclusion at the forefront” (Tim), and the “typical RSV fan is also much more female than in other sports... 51 percent” (Uwe). On the fan bus “15-year-olds get on and 80-year-olds get on together. And that shows that, especially in this day and age, our sport is also able to unite socially” (Uwe), further underlining the inclusion pioneering position in society of the RSV. Additionally, fan Ursula pointed out “groups being invited” to come to home games, “e.g., children from homeless center.”

Within the RSV's latest sponsorship deal which includes the main sponsorship of the RSV, the local major league handball team (playing in the same venue), and the venue naming rights, Peter shared they "let pictures do the talking. ... A cool photo is simply taken. One athlete with the basketball under his arm, the other with the handball. Then you've already sent messages without me having to talk big about inclusion again."

### ***Approachability***

The second basic underlying assumption that emerged was RSV's approachability, meaning "that we are down to earth, that we can be touched, that we are approachable, that there are low hierarchies" (Uwe). This was further exemplified by assumed approachability between all organizational members. Fan Monika shared "There's always someone new [at games]... And that's always nice... they slide closer, or you automatically get into a conversation with them. That does not happen in soccer", showcasing the approachability between fans. Fans also have "great contact to players" (Helena), describing players as "down-to-earth players despite their success" (Max), also in comparison to other teams in the league. Similar, veteran player Georg mentioned he is "close with the fans." Lukas has "only been with the team shortly, but everyone interacts with everyone." Tim, who has been with the team for less than three years, highlighted the "approachable staff" in his interview, showcasing the approachability between all RSV members. Player Georg shared

we had a little bit a problem with the big arena – we are now in the new big arena – that the approachability with the fans got a bit lost. But I think we found a good solution now in that we have a Q&A in the foyer after the game where fans can ask players questions.

Georg's quote highlights the value of approachability as part of the RSV's culture. Providing more insight into this finding, on the espoused beliefs and value level of culture, three themes were identified in relation the approachability assumption – (a) transparency, (b) individual care, (c) treat everyone like family, and (d) building rapport. For each espoused belief and value, a related set of artifacts were identified.

**Transparency.** The espoused belief and value of transparency was the first theme to emerge under the approachability assumption and highlighted the “open and honest” (Lasse) culture of the RSV. Valuing approachability with all organizational members, Tim emphasized “we try to work at eye sight and include fans as much as possible.” From a coach's perspective, Florian mentioned working at the RSV is “professional at a high level but still open and honest with each other” and further stated the “common interest comes before your own interest.” Board member Nick highlighted “we just want to make sure that we at RSV Lahn-Dill always know where everyone's turn is with open, honest, transparent communication with the players.” While these quotes indicate the belief and value of transparency, artifacts can showcase transparency in practice.

**Transparency Artifacts.** Further supporting the transparency belief and value of RSV's culture, organizational members identified several ways transparency is reflected in visible organizational practices and structures. Franz identified the RSV's “clear structures” as unique. Transparency was further reflected communication as “everyone talks with each other” (Lukas). The management also communicated transparently with its fans “when the fans have their fan club meetings, then we are there, we report internal information, we try to take up their suggestions, but above all their criticism” (Uwe). Management “respect[s] fans and spectator opinions and act on those or explain why not”



(Uwe), further exemplifying the transparent communication. Regarding sponsors, Tim highlighted the organization's effort for sponsors "to be comfortable and allow them to provide feedback" during sponsor events, underlining the organization's value of transparency by sponsors. Transparency with sponsors is further lived by cutting sponsors which "are not liked or did not behave all too correctly" (Uwe), and "openly discuss" (Uwe) any differences in expectations with sponsors. Uwe further shared: "I am thankful for most of the sponsors which quickly do that, we also do that in return."

**Individual Care.** The second espoused belief and value under the approachability assumption was individual care, underlined by personal support for all RSV members. Player Sean, highlighted the management and coaches' efforts to see "how we are doing off the court" and their "high regard for players." Player Bill further supported Sean's statements indicating "they make sure that on and off the court everyone's taken care of." Veteran player Georg shared his experience as "if I need something management helps me out." Long-term volunteer Franz also highlighted the "RSV supported me through the up and downs of life." In Tim's experience "everyone is always on eye-sight, everyone is always helpful." Board member Lasse shared about his relationship to sponsors that he "probably care[s] for 80 sponsors and I know 80 of them privately." Tim mentioned the care for sponsors is "as direct and personal as they like." Not only the management is providing individual care, but also fans "support each other outside the arena" (Helena). Fan Max shared how he was "moved and saddened, like many" when a fellow fan's son was sick. Ursula expanded "you take part in the stories, within this family" and provide care by "stay[ing] in contact" (Fabienne) and "going to visitations" (Ursula).

Within the individual care theme, some *differentiation* was present as player Sarah talked about the individual care of international players in comparison to national players mentioning “if they need something, they get it right away, and the others get a bit of help.” Sarah’s statement indicates differentiation in the help between national and international players.

***Individual Care Artifacts.*** On the artifact level, the individual care by management and coaches was also expressed in the effort to ensure personal success by players as “they keep us accountable” (Sean). For example, by ensuring players “get our shots in” (Sean). On and off the court, management “give us everything we need that is possible” (Sean). For sponsors, Franz helps “drop off Christmas gifts personally.” Moreover, board member Lasse provides individual care for sponsors by “I go out to eat with many, I play golf with many, I am a member with some in clubs” and “I am regularly in contact with mine [sponsors].” During the game day, he “greet everyone” and if a sponsor cannot attend, he sends them “during the game a picture from my phone where you can see their banner and the current score.” Board member Peter underlined the RSV’s philosophy to “always feed the sponsors with information. That they are always up to date.”

***Treat Everyone Like Family.*** The third espoused belief and value under the approachability assumption was treat everyone like family. All fans associated “family” with the RSV. In example, fan Helena pointed to “the family” feeling as the aspect which keeps her connected to the organization. Fan Theresia detailed “I don't think there is any distance. Well, it's a sport, there's just the team and the fans. They have no distance.” Tim supported this association from an employee perspective indicating his “positive dealing

with employees, the GM, and other board members” and further identifying it as “very family-like and personal.” Player Sean went as far as detailing the RSV family tree starting with management as “they're the parents then is the offspring of this. You know, kids that are part of the family, but they've gone away now, but they're still part of it when they come back. It's a special thing.” Sean’s statement highlights the tradition of the family character and how it remains after an athlete’s career with the RSV ends. This may be credited to the management which has remained “almost unchanged for decades” (Uwe). Player Bill further shared “most people that come here are very close knit. They take care of each other.” This is only possible thanks to management’s aim to “look for players who fit character wise” bringing “harmony” (Sarah) to the team. Lasse identified “The special thing is the charming and the familiar” when it comes to home games. Georg, a RSV veteran player, shared “I know very many sponsors personally. I have a good connection to the sponsors. Also, to the fans.” Fan Monika shared the connection with players: “It's just always the cohesion, also between fans and players. They thank you. Then make the Laola wave and you smile from ear to ear with them, as if you were standing up front and had won.” Sponsors are also treated as family and Uwe shared that RSV “keeps them internally as sponsors at a point of time where they may not be a sponsor yet.” The relationship with sponsors goes beyond the monetary value as “even a sponsor which leaves mid-season, we will let them keep their season tickets” (Uwe). RSV does not leave its sponsors behind as illustrated by Uwe’s quote:

There are sponsors which have gotten into economic difficulties, into bankruptcy, which said ‘we cannot do this right now.’ Then we said ‘it’s no problem at all, we

will leave the advertisement banner or advertisement platform up, but we won't send an invoice.'

Within the treat everyone like family espoused belief and value some *differentiation* was visible by player Sarah as "my former team was very family-like, and the RSV is also family-like but not as much, so I cannot argue [RSV being a family]."

***Treat Everyone Like Family Artifacts.*** Several artifacts were highlighted by interviewees and focus group members, underlining the treat everyone like family espoused belief and value at the visible part of culture. Fan Max shared his appreciation for "[player's name] forming a heart with his hands to the fans after the game before high fiving the players." Fan Ursula pointed out "players high five all fans after the game even after a tough loss." Management ensures to "that we keep making it clear to our players in briefings, in media training courses, that this family is part of their job." Over the years "friendship between fans, players, and staff have developed, also of a private nature" (Uwe). Player Georg further pointed out during "home games sponsors are in close contact to players and are happy to talk to the players." In fact, he shared "I hear a lot from sponsors how much they enjoy how the players are – that they are cool and easy to talk to." The interconnectivity goes as far as "from the people tearing off a ticket, to the spectators drinking the coffee, to the people serving the coffee and cake... Somehow you know everyone" (Lasse). To managing director Uwe, it is important "that the fan can also talk to the CEO and do that via 'du'<sup>4</sup>." Further fostering the family atmosphere with fans

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<sup>4</sup> The German provides two words to address an individual – "du" hereby is the informal "you" while "Sie" is the formal "you" often used to refer to people who you do not personally know or in professional settings.

and the fan club, “we visit their events, are also a member privately” (Uwe). Fan Ursula shared that “management is also friendly no matter how stressed they are.” Within the fan club, fans treat each other also as family exemplified by fan bus rides where “everyone brings food to share even if they do not know each other” (Ursula).

**Building Rapport.** The fourth and final espoused belief and value under the approachability assumption was building rapport, exemplified by relationship building and networking. Lasse highlighted the “relationship of players to fans and children... on eyesight.” Fan Helena and Max pointed out the RSV’s uniqueness to them is the “contact to players.” The relationship is nurtured during fan club events by both management and players as “we visit the events, send players” (Uwe). Building rapport with sponsors, “we were the first to do sponsorship events who recognized that the B2B business is a crucial factor, especially for the companies, the industries, that are not at the end consumer” (Uwe). Sponsor events also fostered the rapport between players and sponsors. Veteran player Georg “made the connection to sponsors since playing for the team for such a long time and through sponsor events.” Valuing the rapport between sponsors, “with these events, we not only fired up the network, but of course we also tried to bring emotions into the sponsors' clientele” (Uwe). At the sponsoring events, the management tries to “allow for direct, human exchange...and the character of our participants, athletes, and staff, such a big connection” (Peter). Through rapport, sponsoring decisions are less return on investment based as “if the decision-maker, the marketing manager, the managing director, if they are fans of ours, then it is not necessarily the mind that rules, but possibly also the gut when it comes to their commitment” (Uwe).

***Building Rapport Artifacts.*** The participants highlighted several artifacts related to building rapport. Managing director Uwe shared “we go to sponsors for their events. No sponsor pays extra when we show up at their open day or something”, illustrating the building rapport espoused belief and value on the artifact level. The RSV hosts “three to four sponsor events each year with more than 200 people attending” (Uwe), allowing for an exchange among sponsors. Lasse highlighted “overall with all partners, of course we make sure that we build up the appropriate network.” Additionally, having ‘player partnerships’ has resulted in a “close connection” from player Sean with his personal sponsor with player Bill “taking great pride in them”, referring to his personal sponsor. During game days, the business area for sponsors is set up “that you can move around freely, have a chat, that it is as informal as possible, in order to simply generate conversation and closeness” (Uwe). With fans, a “fan talk” (Georg) was implemented, allowing for a candid exchange between player and fans after the game.

### ***Organizational Excellence***

The third theme in the basic underlying assumption layer of culture which was identified was organizational excellence, underlined by (an expectation for) success and professionalism. Player Bill shared that the RSV “want[s] to make sure they are an household name, that everyone knows them.” To him the organizational excellence goes as far as “being associated with them solidifies my athletic career a bit more” despite the fact this player has won a Paralympic gold medal in the past. To general manager Uwe, the “sporting successes” have been a reason to stay with the club. Player Sarah associates “always being one of the most successful teams in Germany and Europe, very professional” with the RSV. Bill sees the “management is our biggest fan” and further

expanded “they want us to succeed, they drive the winning mentality and ensure players are ready and giving their best performance.” Among interviewees, the common perception was that RSV sponsors were attracted by the team’s success in the forms of “winning” (Alexandra, Georg, Lasse, Peter, Uwe) and “professionalism” (Bill, Sarah, Sean, Lukas, Florian, Georg, Pete, Uwe).

**Expectation of Winning.** Members of the RSV share the espoused belief of winning. Player Bill shared to him the RSV is “associated with winning.” Talking about the fans’ attitudes, Lasse said “I think they are convinced that we always have to win. I think they have a hard time with defeats.” Player Sean has a similar perspective of the fans’ attitudes:

I think the major attitude is that they want success. They want to win. They want to see trophies, obviously as with games. I mean they're disappointed when we don't play well. Even if we win and we don't play well. They're like ‘okay guys’.

Player Georg went as far as saying “the typical RSV fan is spoiled with success.” Additionally, “management tries to have a team which can win titles” (Lasse), further highlighting the expectation of winning by management. Also, administrative staff employee Tim expressed an “ultimate will to win for the team and as an organization.”

***Expectation of Winning Artifacts.*** On the artifact level of culture, the expectation of winning was visible as Fan Max’s mentioned, “I am devastated if we lose.” Max’s feelings go in line with the management and player perception. In this case some *differentiation* was present, however, as fan Petra disagreed with fan Max saying, “it is just a game.” However, fan Günther did highlight “we always win and lose with the team.” Administrator Tim further exemplifies the expectation of winning within his work

“because the goal of all our work is for the team to have their sporting success” (Tim). Further, Bill highlighted RSV’s “championships”, and Peter RSV’s “sporting successes – World Champion, Champions League wins.” Uwe also mentioned “fans travel throughout Europe, spending their money to support the team” which, considering the strong expectation of winning, is likely rooted in this espoused value and belief.

**Professionalism.** The second theme under the organizational excellence assumption was professionalism. Professionalism was reflected in dealings with players, coaches, staff, and sponsors. Player Sarah feels “pressure to perform” due to the RSV being “more serious and structured, professional” than her previous team. As the management leads by example in its professionalism, players follow as exemplified by player Bill who makes “sure every single time we go into practice that I am giving everything I got... [the professional management] drives that, they push that.” Player Sean believes “the professional approach that this club has is definitely a deciding factor” when it comes to sponsors choosing to sponsor the RSV. Peter shared they acquired their first main sponsor as “we fascinated people with our idea to make disability sport professional.” Coach Alexandra added sponsors are inclined to sponsor the RSV due “to the way management deals with them... [they] take it very seriously, are very informed about potential sponsors.” Within the greater region, the RSV is known as the only “professional sports team besides the [professional handball team]” (Tim). Lasse recognized “we do not have to hide from other professional sport teams in the region.” Sean further supported Lasse’s statement highlighting how RSV “present themselves as any other major sport.”



Over time the relationships between veteran members “became more professional. In the sense of clear responsibilities. Also, in relation to players everything has become more professional” (Peter). However, Peter also noted “professionalism and contracts are necessary sometimes. But the most important part is the directness and open and honest dealings with people on eyesight”, highlighting some *fragmentation* in the organizational culture when it comes to professionalism, and family-like treatment. Moreover, player Sarah was critical of the professionalism, showing *differentiation*, as she mentions “it is a very professional club which specifically externally is often more professional than internally.” According to Sarah one example are the “team jobs.” She believes it is unprofessional to have one player wash all team jerseys.

***Professionalism Artifacts.*** On the artifact level of culture the espoused belief and value of professionalism was further visible. Player Georg highlighted the “atmosphere is unique, you do not have a full arena anywhere in wheelchair basketball.” Player Simon agreed and detailed:

Coming up onto the court with the player introductions and everything starts from there. It's kind of humbling and it makes you feel so proud to be a part of the history and part of the of the kind of what we can do in the future as well.

Georg also expressed “with the new arena it is even more fun – the wood court looks more professional and makes me feel more professional as a player.” Player Sean pointed out the “professional coaching staff.” Coach Alexandra identified the “VIP area” for sponsoring partners as a key artifact reflecting the professionalism of the RSV as the RSV wants to “allow sponsors to enjoy the home game experience as much as fans but with professional conditions” (Tim). Uwe reflected on the professional appearance as it

would not have been possible without their first main sponsor which “taught us a lot... and provided trainings in marketing, advertisement, etcetera.” The sponsor also “told us the visual of a professional home game is to have advertisement banners around the court” (Uwe) and ended up supporting the RSV to acquire those – the start of the professional appearance of RSV home games.

### **Summary of Findings**

Overall, the findings highlighted RSV’s organizational culture being rooted in its basic underlying assumptions of being a pioneer, approachability, and organizational excellence. The findings of the external communication elements fell in line with the interview and focus group findings. Based on the deeper level of organizational culture discovery in RQ2, the espoused beliefs and values of *innovative trailblazer* and *social responsibility rooted in commitment to inclusivity and diversity* stem from the underlying assumption of being a pioneer are directly reflected in the business pioneer in disability sport and inclusion pioneer in society beliefs and values. The espoused belief and value of *innovative trailblazer* was also based in the underlying assumption of organizational excellence and was further reflected in the espoused belief and value of professionalism. Lastly, the espoused belief and value of *servicing the RSV family and community* was based in the underlying assumption of approachability and represented in the espoused beliefs and values of transparency, individual care, and treat everyone like family.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the elements of the organizational culture that make a successful international wheelchair basketball sport club attractive to external partners. The findings highlight how elements of the RSV’s culture which can

make it attractive to external partners are rooted in its basic underlying assumptions of being a pioneer, approachability, and organizational excellence. The following sections outline how these basic underlying assumptions drive the attractiveness of the RSV through the different layers of organizational culture to external partners and how the RSV's organizational culture relates to its sponsorship success.

In the following first the main findings relating to RSV attracting sponsors through its organizational culture are discussed. Second, the connection of RSV's organizational culture to its sponsorship success is detailed.

### **Attracting Sponsors through Organizational Culture**

RSV's organizational culture attracts sponsors by catering to a fan base which matches their target market. The club does this through community involvement, by driving social recognition for individuals with disabilities and professionalizing the disability sport sector, offering image enhancement opportunities, providing flexibility, and serving a value match between sponsors and the sport property.

First, researchers (Brenner, 2003; Macdougall et al., 2014) found niche and particularly disability sport properties have the power to *attract companies whose target market matches their fan base*. Driven by RSV's culture of being an inclusion pioneer, RSV's diverse fan base exemplified by fans of all ages and levels of ability, and equitable gender representation, would presumably appeal to sponsors who are targeting individuals of all ages, individuals with disabilities, and/or women. Additionally, RSV provides the target market awareness niche sport sponsors identified as necessary (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013b) as the organization was able to identify and

communicate the demographics and psychographics of their fan base as shown in the participant interviews as well as in the external communication elements.

Secondly, Greenhalgh and Greenwell's (2013b) study underlined *community involvement* as a deciding factor for niche sport sponsorship involvements. Within the external communication elements, artifacts present in the community centered culture of the RSV are rooted in the espoused beliefs and values of serving the RSV family and community, and social responsibility rooted in commitment to inclusivity and diversity. These findings were further supported in the interviews and focus groups which consistently highlighted RSV valuing treating everyone like family and being an inclusion pioneer in society. Siegfried (2021b) found both sponsorship acquisition and retention for NWBA teams was driven by their social impact. Similarly, RSV's culture is driven by its pioneering position as an inclusion pioneer in society. The findings further support the idea that disability sport properties not only provide entertainment but also provide social good for society by being a source of inspiration for spectators (Cottingham et al., 2014). Therefore, in line with Greenhalgh and Greenwell's (2013b) and Siegfried's (2021b) findings, RSV's values would likely be attractive to external partners. Moreover, RSV is also uniquely positioned as a business pioneer in the disability sport sector, going beyond just community involvement and spectator inspiration. RSV is intentionally *driving social recognition for individuals with disabilities and professionalizing the disability sport sector*.

Third, niche sport sponsors often call for the opportunity of *image enhancement* (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013b). Consistent with this call, RSV culture provides several elements for sponsors to identify with. Siegfried et al. (2021) found sponsors

looking to engage in cause-related marketing (CRM) are attracted by college adaptive sport programs' unique characteristics of meeting an underserved population. In line with Siegfried et al.'s (2021), RSV can provide a unique appeal to organizations looking to engage in CRM by being an inclusion pioneer in society. The team's external communications elements clearly communicate RSV's value proposition of social responsibility rooted in commitment to inclusivity and diversity. Additionally, the findings identified the RSV's organizational excellence culture as being a point of appeal to sponsors, indicating RSV's success and professionalism provides an image sponsors would find attractive. This finding is consistent with Alonso-Dos-Santos et al.'s (2019) work which explored the role of sport team success on the effect of image transfer in sponsorship. The authors suggested sport sponsors want/need to sponsor more successful sport teams for image enhancement. It is to note, RSV's image awareness and potential fit with sponsors' image can yield positive results in the selection stage based on Greenhalgh and Greenwell's (2013ab) findings. However, Van Rijn et al. (2019) also suggested finding approaches which divert the sponsorship dependency away from sporting results (i.e., winning) as poor sporting results also often cause potential discontinuation. Therefore, while organizational excellence can be attractive to sponsors, RSV still needs to equally highlight its pioneering and approachability culture.

Fourth, niche sport sponsors are looking for sport properties to *provide flexibility* in helping them achieve their objectives and beyond in their relationships (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013a; 2013b). Through its culture of individual care and family like treatment underlined by providing specific care for each sponsor and supporting them like family, RSV has exemplified this flexibility by, for example, keeping sponsors'

advertisements up despite their inability to fulfill their financial commitments.

Urriolagoitia and Planellas (2007) posited high levels of specific (relational) investments and specialized expenditures which are not transferable, such as the support for sponsors in economic crises, as a pre-requisite for successful sponsorship relations. Livingstone (2009) identified how the National Lacrosse League (NLL) provided flexibility for sponsors by having players attend informal mandatory post-game receptions with the main sponsor present. Similarly, RSV has players go to the business area of the sport venue after the game to socialize with their sponsors and treat them like the rest of the 'RSV family'. However, RSV does not make it a mandatory requirement.

Lastly, according to the selection criteria of disability sport sponsors as identified by Macdougall et al. (2014), sponsors are looking for a *value match between sponsors and property*. The findings of the present study indicate RSV's value awareness as communicated in its external communication elements. Specifically, RSV highlights its innovative trailblazer position through artifacts which illustrate its celebration of excellence, tradition of continuity, and authentic professional sport experience. RSV's commitment to social responsibility rooted in inclusivity and diversity is evident in its community centered artifacts, providing a basis to match potential sponsor's values.

### **The Connection of Organizational Culture and Sponsorship Success**

RSV's drivers of successful sponsorship relationships are its RSV's pioneering culture which creates value for the sponsorship partners through innovation, its culture of approachability which cultivates relationship skills and manages relationships, and its overall cultural coherency which provides predictability.

First, relating RSV's pioneering culture to Sambasivan and Yen's (2010) classifications of organizational culture, RSV's culture can be considered an adhocracy culture, which is identified by being innovative, entrepreneurial, risk-taking, resource acquisition seeking, and creating new challenges and products and services. Within Sambasivan and Yen's (2010) study, adhocracy cultures showed higher levels of communication and commitment with suppliers (the strategic alliance partner) and reached a higher degree of value creation. Additionally, Beugelsdijk et al. (2006) found organizational cultures with an innovation orientation showed stronger alliance capabilities, and this was exemplified by RSV in its pioneer culture. Considering RSV's success in sponsorship acquisition and retention, it can be assumed its pioneering culture has been a driver for the success of its strategic alliances (i.e., sponsorships) by creating value for the sponsorship partners. Within its pioneering position, RSV worked closely on its professional appearance with its first main sponsor which stayed with the organization for over 20 years, also supporting Gemünden et al.'s (1996) findings of joint innovation being a potential benefit of strong external relations. Nowadays, as a business pioneer, RSV supports sponsors in creating co-branding strategies benefitting RSV's association for their own image.

Second, in addition to the importance of organizational capacities for successful sponsorship relationships, relationship skills also need to be developed and leveraged. Beugelsdijk et al. (2006) argued an organization's ability to cultivate and manage relationships with other organizations is rooted in certain aspects of organizational culture. In RSV's case, relationship skills are rooted in a culture of approachability which is exemplified by transparency, individual care, treating everyone like family, and

building rapport. Based on the data analysis, those espoused beliefs and values can be presumed to be the foundation and driver of relationships built between RSV staff, coaches, board members, administrators, volunteers, fans, and sponsors. These findings are consistent with the claim that organizational culture is an antecedent of interorganizational performance influencing a firm's relationship skills, which in turn are leveraged for external relations (Ellis et al., 2006).

Lastly, the review of external communication elements, interviewees' comments and focus group members' opinions all shared very similar perceptions of RSV's organizational culture. However, some differentiation and fragmentation of RSV's culture were present, particularly in the professionalism, individual care, and family treatment espoused beliefs and values. This finding contrasts with Bailey et al.'s (2019) study which utilized a similar case study approach and focused on Crossfit organizational culture in which the authors did not identify any subcultures. While RSV's culture showed some ambiguity and diversity, it overall was coherent, especially in its external presentation which is what potential sponsors first encounter. As a firm's predictability through a stable culture and environment is positively correlated with maintaining successful inter-firm relations (Beugelsdijk et al., 2006), the primarily coherent culture of the RSV can likely be credited with contributing to the continued sponsorship relationship success.

### **Summary of Discussion**

The findings of this study represent the first direct demonstration of organizational culture driving sponsorship potential and success, particularly for disability sport properties. They also highlight how organizational culture research



outside of sports can help inform sport organizational culture and sponsorship success. Despite Schein's (2010) model only looking at the shared elements of organizational culture, organizational culture seldom comes without its inconsistencies and ambiguities (Meyerson & Martin, 1987), as this organizational culture analysis proved. Additionally, the findings imply that when working on external organizational communication elements to best represent a culture, it is beneficial to tap into the organizational culture knowledge long-term employees.

### **Practical Implications**

Based on the findings of this study, practitioners involved with disability sport organizations are advised to turn to their organizational culture when attracting sponsors.

First, sport managers need to find a way to best evaluate the major elements of their organizational culture. This could be done by interviewing different members of the organization. The following questions provide some examples of what to ask when trying to identify an organization's culture:

1. If you think about [organization's name], what comes to mind?
2. What do you see as unique about [organization's name]?
3. How would you describe [organization's name] community?

Second, based on the elements highlighted by the interviewees, language communicating an organization's cultural elements should be included in marketing materials such as the website, flyers, and sponsor prospectus. Beyond language, visuals which reflect the culture in form of photos and videos can also be used. Third, disability sport managers need to work on the professionalism of their organization. While most disability sport organizations typically do not have the resources and knowledge to

professionalize their organization, partnering with companies which have the resources and knowledge is suggested. Practitioners should, for example, identify photographers, videographers/video production companies, website designers, and printing companies to work with for sponsorships in kind whereby sponsors provide their services in exchange for association and co-branding with the sport property. Lastly, while cultural change may not be easy to achieve, it can be extremely beneficial for disability sport organizations to work on building a family and inclusive environment. A family environment, for example, can be nurtured by providing the opportunity for fans to engage with players on the court post game, and hosting events for sponsors where they get the opportunity to directly engage with players. An inclusive environment can be fostered by actively inviting people and groups from all backgrounds and abilities to the sporting events, and by making sure games are accessible (physically and monetarily).

### **Limitations**

Limitations applying to this research study are the single cultural context of Germany, the research site being a well-established disability sport organization, and potential social desirability by participants. Since RSV is based in Germany, the organizational culture is undoubtedly influenced by German cultural norms and standards. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that the organizational culture elements found attractive to external partners in this cultural context would be attractive to external partners in different cultural contexts. Also, relationships between organizational members and external partners may look different in other cultural contexts. As RSV is well known for their exemplar position in the disability sport sector and has established itself as a reputable organization, they likely are receiving more resources than an

organization which is less established. This allows the RSV to provide sponsorship offerings and innovation collaboration attractive to sponsors which are not available to programs with significantly less resources. Lastly, all interviewees and fan focus group members are considered part of the organization and their responses may be bound to a social desirability bias (Nederhof, 1985). Addressing these limitations and reducing potential social desirability, interviews were individually conducted and focus group sessions included the use of index cards for participants to note their initial thoughts before discussing them with the group.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Future research should look at specific ways to leverage organizational culture to acquire and retain sponsors by building relationships. Additionally, it would be beneficial to explore disability sport organizational culture as it relates to sponsorship relationships in other cultural settings beyond Western Europe, and within different sports, both team and individual. Disability sport organizations with less well-established management teams and/or fewer available resources also need to be studied as they are more the norm than is RSV. Research should further explore the organizational culture of less successful clubs and their sponsorship relationships. Moreover, the sponsor perspective of the cultural elements of disability sport organizations and the consumer perceptions of sponsors engaged in disability sport sponsorship needs attention. As this study highlighted, sport organizational culture research needs to go beyond shared cultural perception. Hereby, it is suggested future sport organizational culture studies use Meyerson and Martin's (1987) framework which provides a lens for a holistic approach of culture research. Generally, sport organizational research can largely benefit from

more in-depth qualitative research approaches to identify the complexities and uniqueness of individual cultures.

## CHAPTER V

### EXAMINING THE INTERSECTION OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND RELATIONSHIP MARKETING THROUGH A DISABILITY SPORT LENS

Worldwide, disability sport faces funding challenges. Sponsorship offers a viable alternative to combat the lack of sustainable funding in disability sport. This study utilized an exemplar case study approach based on a sport club for people with disabilities that has been successful in sponsorship acquisition and retention and has a history of building a strong fan and organizational culture – RSV Lahn-Dill. The findings identified the role relationship marketing (RM) plays in leveraging the cultural elements of a disability sport club for sponsorship acquisition and retention with the goal of increasing funding in the parasport sector and, thus, furthering parasports professionalization. Based on a review of external communication elements, twelve interviews, and two focus group sessions, the author identified the themes of pioneering through innovation and professional family as key cultural elements in leveraging relationship marketing in sponsorship acquisition. Approachability and building rapport emerged as cultural elements leveraged for sponsorship retention. These elements were leveraged in building trust, affective and value-based commitment, as well as network breadth and composition. This study outlines the significance of considering culture to leverage RM practices for successful sponsorship acquisition and retention in the disability sport sector.

**Key words:** Disability Sport, Sponsorship, Organizational Culture, Relationship Marketing

Worldwide, athletes with disabilities face unequal sport participation opportunities compared to able-bodied athletes. This discrepancy is perpetuated by lack of access, fewer available participation opportunities, and a lack of talent identification structures (Patatas et al., 2018). Additionally, driven by disproportionately low levels of public funding directed to the disability sport grassroots system and scarce disability sport funding on the local levels, disability sport programs lack funding to sustain programming (Cottingham et al., 2017; Sørensen & Kahrs, 2006). To compound these financial challenges, disability sports require higher participation costs due to the often expensive equipment (e.g., prostheses, racing wheelchairs) and additional sufficiently trained staff needed (e.g., athlete guides for athletes with visual impairment). In conjunction with the fact that Paralympic athletes receive significantly less sponsorship funding than Olympic athletes (Patatas et al., 2018) and the financial challenges these athletes face become apparent. Cottingham et al. (2017) support this notion and point out

Disability sport cannot rely on scarce local governmental funding as the majority of resources are allocated to able-bodied sport, nor can they depend on fair and accurate media coverage, which further propagates the super skewed “supercrip” mentality and the idea that sponsoring an event merely is an act of charity (pp.18-19).

The current lack of understanding of organizational culture in adapted sport – and how it can be leveraged (through relationship marketing) to increase strategic partnerships – results in limited sponsorship opportunities and, consequently, funding for

adapted sport organizations. To combat the financial challenges faced by disability sport, sponsorship – the main revenue source of able-bodied sport teams – offers a viable alternative. By understanding organizational culture and how to leverage it in sponsorship acquisition and retention, we can address the limited sponsorship investment in adapted sport. Corporate partnerships expand exposure of a given sport, publicize athletes competing in that sport, and promote sport properties (i.e., sport teams, programs, and organizations), all of which lead to increased awareness and potential expanded media coverage.

Sponsorship acquisition and retention is driven by an organization's ability to form relationships and showcase attractive elements of their organization to potential sponsors. It is essential for organizations to be aware of their culture to identify matches among the values, mission, and philosophy of potential sponsors (Macdougall et al., 2014). In order to maximize sponsorship effectiveness, sponsors have long turned away from setting up simple one-way exchanges of financial resources (Renard & Sitz, 2011) and moved to building strategic alliances which underlie relationship marketing (RM) efforts (Farrelly & Quester, 2005b). Through RM, an organization's favorable and attractive cultural attributes can be leveraged to maximize sponsorship acquisition and retention and minimize sponsorship discontinuation (Farrelly & Quester, 2005a; Farrelly et al., 2006; Morgan et al., 2014; Morgan et al., 2020; van Rijn et al., 2019). The current lack of understanding of organizational culture in adapted sport and how it can be leveraged (through RM) to increase strategic partnerships, results in limited sponsorship opportunities and consequently, funding, for adapted sport organizations. Sponsorships,

as vital capital for operation, increase funding (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013b) and decrease financial barriers to offering and participating in disability sport programs.

As disability sport still lacks professionalism worldwide, the purpose of this study was to determine what role the organizational cultural elements play in leveraging relationship marketing (RM) for sponsorship acquisition and retention. By utilizing an exemplar case study approach based on the RSV Lahn-Dill, a sport club for people with disabilities which has been successful in sponsorship acquisition and retention and has a history of building a fan and organizational culture, this study identifies the role RM plays in leveraging the cultural elements of a disability sport club for sponsorship acquisition and retention to increase funding in the parasport sector and, thus, further parasports professionalization. This study also seeks to advance the theoretical application of organizational culture and RM for sponsorship acquisition and retention. Practitioners can benefit from this study through addressing which cultural elements of sports teams for people with disabilities can be leveraged through relationship marketing in acquiring and retaining sponsorships in order to increase and sustain organizational funding.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Role of Culture in Sponsorship Acquisition and Retention**

Sponsors can be attracted through elements of an organization's culture. Culture, which forms the core of an organization and holds that organization together, plays the leading role in developing an organizational identity which can in turn be leveraged to showcase that identity to the external environment (Jo Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Renard & Sitz, 2011). Culture can attract external partners through cultural coherency (Beugelsdijk



et al., 2009) and nurture relationships by raising awareness of organizational context (Cousens et al., 2001; Pettigrew, 1987; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Thus, culture plays an essential role in forming external relationships (Barney, 1986). Additionally, inter-firm relationships have been found to be more successful (sustained retention) when the firms involved had coherent cultures (Beugelsdijk et al., 2009). When a disability sport organization knows which of their cultural elements are attractive to external partners, they can attract sponsors by highlighting those elements and creating sponsorship offerings including those elements. For example, Siegfried (2021a) identified a community theme exemplified by a family atmosphere. This cultural element can be leveraged to attract family businesses which reflect similar cultural values.

### **Relationship Marketing**

The RM framework can provide valuable insight into successful sponsorship relationships, which are illustrated by a long-term engagement between a sponsor and sport property (Morgan et al., 2020). The long-term nature and involvement of an exchange between a sponsor and a sport property make sport sponsorship a perfect phenomenon to explore through the RM lens (Jensen & Cornwell, 2017). Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 22) defined RM as “all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges” while establishing commitment and trust as the key tenants of successful relationships. *Commitment* indicates maximum efforts by exchange partners to continue the relationship and is driven by the value of the relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). As a driver of value creation in sponsorship research, commitment was further separated into affective and value-based commitment. Affective commitment is classified by favorable feelings

toward the future of the business relationship. This type of commitment is key in forming emotional connections between a sponsor and a sport property and helps the partners understand, perceive, and calculate the business value of their relationship. It is also a prerequisite for value-based commitment. Value-based commitment focuses on results such as profits, resource and information access, and increased efficiency. As the most significant element for relationship continuation, commitment has a strong direct effect on value creation (Hessling et al., 2018).

The *trust* tenant emphasizes confidence in the reliability and integrity of the exchange partners (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). As a driver of economic and non-economic sponsorship satisfaction, trust is foundational for collaborative partnerships (Farrelly & Quester, 2005a). Within sponsorship relationships, trust has a significant connection with commitment as it conditions and increases commitment (Farrelly & Quester, 2005b; Hessling et al., 2018). A study by Brown et al. (2019) on channel members revealed that the value of trusted partners is of such undebatable nature that the other party will engage in extra effort to maintain the trusted relationship. When higher switching costs are perceived (e.g., cost of finding a new partner), however, commitment was found to erode trust. This comes as partners feel more vulnerable the more committed they are to the relationship. Hessling et al. (2018) also found that greater perceived vulnerability was found to erode trust (i.e., perceived vulnerability to partner's opportunistic tendencies is a mediator between commitment and trust). Hence, increased levels of affective commitment can be achieved by exchange partners believing they are engaged in an honest relationship with the other party (Hessling et al., 2018). Trust can decrease,

however, if they feel locked in the relationship as it leads to decreased perceptions of partner reliability and benevolence (Brown et al., 2019).

Taking RM beyond relationship quality (i.e., commitment and trust), Palmatier (2008) discovered additional factors influencing inter-firm relationship outcomes, such as involvement in the Business-to-Business (B2B) sponsorship relationships (Hessling et al., 2018). Specifically, Palmatier (2008) identified how RM also encompassed relationship breadth and composition. *Relationship breadth* is defined by the number of interpersonal relationships existing between two partners (Palmatier, 2008) such as between different employees of the sponsoring team and athletes of the sport property. RM effectiveness is increased through relationship breadth as increased interorganizational relational bonds between the exchange partners can reveal key information, provide profit-increasing opportunities, and resist disruptions of interpersonal bonds. Broad interorganizational relationships are more resistant to personnel changes and are driven by the variety of connections between two organizations (Palmatier, 2008). *Relationship composition* is underlined by the decision-making capabilities of the relational connection of exchange partners (Palmatier, 2008). Hence, a diverse and authoritative portfolio of contacts with the exchange partner drives the relationship composition and allows the seller to access critical decision makers, triangulate information, and influence decisions. Through relationship breadth and quality, relationship strength is built to withstand stress and potential interorganizational conflicts. Based on relationship quality and composition, relationship efficacy determines the interorganizational ability to achieve objectives (Palmatier, 2008).

Shared values in form of shared beliefs about behaviors, goals, and policies within the relationship are instrumental to RM and increase the level of commitment between partners (Johanson & Roxenhall, 2009, as cited in Hessling et al., 2018; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Shared values are impactful from the start of the relationship as they connect to the expectations and perceived benefits of the exchange before parties enter the partnership (Johanson & Roxenhall, 2009, as cited in Hessling et al., 2018). Developing a common understanding of the interorganizational relationship's value and obligations in the relationship encourages equity and relationship continuation (Farrelly, 2010).

### **Relationship Marketing in Sponsorship Acquisition and Retention**

As RM originates in exchange theory, its underlying assumption is that through a relational exchange reciprocal benefits are received by both parties involved in an agreement (Berry, 1983; Grönroos, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Hence, its role in leveraging culture in sponsorship acquisition and retention cannot be underestimated. Also, several studies have highlighted the importance of considering the context of an organization when exploring a firm's capacity to embrace RM as a dominant philosophy (Cousens et al., 2001; Pettigrew, 1987; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Considering the importance of being aware of one's organizational culture for external relations and the power of relationship marketing for sponsorship acquisition and retention, disability sport and the Paralympic Movement can widely benefit from an in-depth understanding of how elements of a disability sport organization's culture can be leveraged through RM for external relations.

#### ***Sponsorship Acquisition***

Sponsorship formation involves several stages including planning, selection, and negotiation. In the following, the stages are outlined in relation to niche sport and disability sport sponsorship acquisition.

**Planning Stage.** During the *planning stage*, sponsors identify their target group and sport properties conduct research to develop a strategy for acquisition (Schönberner et al., 2020). Niche sports have the power to attract companies whose target market matches their fan base such as in the case of the International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) and Subaru (Brenner, 2003). Further, considering disability sport, congruency with sponsorship portfolio and target market were revealed as important selection and reselection criteria by corporate sponsors (Macdougall et al., 2014). Sponsors of niche sports have expressed target market awareness, community involvement, and image enhancement as objectives for their sponsorship engagements. Thus, niche sport properties need to identify and articulate the psychographics and demographics of their fan base and each of the different communities the sport property influences to attract potential external partners (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013b).

**Selection Stage.** Company and sport property fit is key to the *selection stage* for sponsors. The most important selection criteria within niche sports were found to be cost effectiveness, company image fit within target market, flexibility of sports property, spectator demographics, and company product/service image fit with sports image. Image awareness by sport properties and potential fit with sponsors' image can yield positive results in the selection stage (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013a; 2013b). Supporting Greenhalgh and Greenwell's (2013a; 2013b) findings, Schönberner et al. (2020) noted niche sport properties should emphasize their cost effectiveness which can be achieved

by articulating their perceived ability to achieve sponsorship objectives for a proportionately low cost (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013a).

Within disability sport sponsorship specifically, selection criteria include alignment with company strategy, strategic alignment of company mission with the sport property, a value match between sponsors and property, and broad communication and brand objectives (Macdougall et al., 2014). Further, Siegfried (2021b) found that for teams in the National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA) identifying operational needs and cost, understanding program intangible assets, creating sponsorship packages, creating program and sport awareness, identifying decision makers, and building relationships were key factors for successful disability sport sponsorship acquisition and retention. While these are many of the traditional tactics found in sponsorship acquisition, Siegfried highlighted the importance of relationships/networks. NWBA teams achieved relationship breadth through word of mouth (network density) and relationship composition through comprehensive sponsor relations. Trust was built by (over)delivering upon contracts and promises and providing proof sponsorship money was spent as intended. Providing co-branding (value-based commitment) and volunteer (affective commitment) opportunities created commitment between sponsors and NWBA teams.

**Sponsorship Negotiation and Acquisition.** The last stage of the sponsorship acquisition process, sponsorship *negotiation and acquisition*, is underpinned by negotiating agreements, implementing agreements, and establishing the alliance (Urriolagoitia & Planellas, 2007). Urriolagoitia and Planellas (2007) posited that for successful sponsorship relationships, sponsors and sport properties should focus on value

match and brand alignment, as well as high levels of specific (relational) investments and specialized expenditures which are not transferable. These investments can include time, effort, and money invested in planning a detailed co-marketing campaign. Objectives and norms governing the relationship should be expressed and linked to broader marketing and corporate relationships for maximum sponsorship relationship effectiveness (Farrelly & Quester, 2005a; Urriolagoitia & Planellas, 2007) such as identified by Greenhalgh and Greenwell (2013b). Tying back to the flexibility that sponsors look for in niche sport properties (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013a), sponsors demand the development of collaborative capabilities by sport properties which drives trust in the relationship as previously outlined. Increased trust in return leads to increased economic and non-economic sponsorship satisfaction (Farrelly & Quester, 2005a).

During the acquisition stage, disability sports have the capability to leverage their uniqueness by sharing compelling stories of programs and athletes, highlighting the fact that they serve an underserved population, and allowing potential sponsors to try out their sport as in the case of NWBA teams (Siegfried, 2021b). At the collegiate level, adaptive sport programs showed some of the similar unique characteristics. Sponsors looking to engage in cause-related marketing (CRM) are attracted by college adaptive sport programs' unique characteristics of meeting the needs of an underserved population. Additionally, the programs' impact on the disability community and their positive impact on the lives of collegiate athletes beyond college are unique characteristics attractive to sponsors (Siegfried et al., 2021).

Further, Siegfried (2021b) found both sponsorship acquisition and retention for NWBA teams was driven by their social impact. The volunteer opportunities they offer to

sponsor employees and the disability expertise they possess are attractive attributes to sponsors. Continuation of sponsorship was strengthened by mutual benefits of the relationship and the personal attachment of the sponsoring party with the sport property. Based on the findings, the researcher suggested that disability sport properties focus on storytelling and keep building relationships to (a) change the narrative from charity to impact and (b) build relationships into partnerships (Siegfried, 2021b).

**RQ3:** What role does culture play in building relationships to acquire sponsors?

### *Sponsorship (Dis)Continuation*

Sponsorship acquisition is only the beginning of the sponsorship relationship and Siegfried (2021b) was the first to examine RM within disability sport. Other factors affecting sponsorship continuation and discontinuation in addition to RM must also be considered to establish the success of long-term strategic partnerships between disability sport properties and sponsors. Some studies have taken the approach from the sponsor perspective (e.g., Jensen & Cornwell, 2017, 2021); however, Morgan et al. (2020) examined the management of the sponsor-property relationship mid-life from the sponsored property perspective. Findings showed the roots of effective relationships were having a clear and compatible strategy, development of positive inter-organizational culture, inter-personal relationships, and stability. On the opposing side, sponsorship clutter can drive sponsorship discontinuation, emphasizing the need for sponsorship exclusivity (Jensen & Cornwell, 2017; van Rijn et al., 2019). Further, any incidents with the potential of a negative image transfer from the sport property to the sponsor (doping scandals, athlete abuse, losing records) increase the chance of discontinuation. Van Rijn et al. (2019) also looked at the discontinuation of sport sponsorship relationships and



suggested finding approaches which divert the sponsorship dependency away from sporting results (i.e., winning) as sporting results still cause potential discontinuation. One approach is offering different levels of sponsorship as higher levels of sponsorship significantly reduce the probability of sponsorship discontinuation (Jensen & Cornwell, 2021).

From the perspective of the sponsoring firm, congruency, and high levels of brand equity with the sport property reduce the likelihood of sponsorship dissolution in global sponsorship (Jensen & Cornwell, 2017). Regional proximity of the sponsor to the sport property also further decreases the chance of dissolution (Jensen & Cornwell, 2021). Regional sponsors tend to have a perceived better fit with the sport property, hence, inducing more successful, longer-term sponsorship partnerships. In return, longer-term partnerships were found to increase perceived congruency among consumers (Woisetschläger et al., 2017). This comes as Olson and Thjømmøe (2011) discovered announcements of the continuation of existing partnerships as opposed to the announcement of a new partnership enhanced perceived match of the partners more so than the announcement of a new partnership. Business-to-Business (B2B) firms compared to consumer-facing firms have a lower probability of sponsorship discontinuation, with the exception of high-tech firms which were found to significantly increase the probability of sponsorship dissolution (Jensen & Cornwell, 2021). Other factors influencing a sponsor's choice to discontinue their sponsorship engagement are a change in marketing strategy or financial situation as well as having achieved the sponsorship objectives (Jensen & Cornwell, 2017). Additionally, sponsors sometimes choose to send a signal to society by ending a sponsorship relationship such as in the case

of an insurance company which could not justify increased insurance rates while being a jersey sponsor (van Rijn et al., 2019). External conditions, such as the economic, legislative, and regulatory environment can also impact the choice of sponsorship dissolution, however, they cannot be controlled for by sport properties and sponsors (Jensen & Cornwell, 2017; van Rijn et al., 2019).

While many factors influence sponsorship (dis)continuation, managers of sport properties can only influence a few of them. Disability sport properties not only provide entertainment but also provide social good for society by being a source of inspiration for spectators<sup>5</sup> (Cottingham et al., 2014), bridging social divides (European Commission, 2018), and improving the lives of participants (Swanson et al., 2008). Therefore, sponsors may not be as socially forced (e.g., society pushing sponsors to minimize their spending on entertainment purposes and increase salaries instead) to justify their sponsorship engagement, leading to a higher chance of sponsorship continuation.

**RQ4:** What role does culture play in building relationships to retain sponsors?

### **Method**

To address the purpose and research questions, a bounded single case study utilizing a successful international disability sport club as an exemplar was conducted.

Given the limited number of exemplars in the disability sport context, a single case study

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<sup>5</sup> The inspiration narrative in relation to individuals with disabilities has been widely debated, particularly the idea of ‘inspiration porn’. Grue (2016) defined inspiration porn as “the representation of disability as a desirable but undesired characteristic, usually by showing impairment as a visually or symbolically distinct biophysical deficit in one person, a deficit that can and must be overcome through the display of physical prowess” (p. 1). The author highlighted isolating disability-as-impairment in visual, symbolical, and conceptual ways as problematic.

is justified and provides merit to begin the conversation around disability sport culture and sponsorship (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Case Study Design**

This study followed an intrinsic design as it was concerned with a unique case of a successful disability sport club which has excelled in sponsorship acquisition and retention. More specifically, an exemplar methodology was employed which is a “sample selection technique that involves the intentional selection of individuals, groups, or entities that exemplify the construct of interest in a highly developed manner” (Bronk, 2012, p. 1).

### ***Nomination Criteria***

Based on the purpose of this case study, several nomination criteria were employed to identify and choose the exemplar. Germany was chosen as the country in which the exemplar is based as Germany has been a pioneer in disability sport. This is illustrated by the first disability sport club being founded in Germany, as well as the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) being established in Bonn, Germany, where it is still headquartered today (DePauw & Gavron, 1995). Additionally, Germany has taken the lead in professional wheelchair basketball leagues (IWBF, 2016) and wheelchair basketball is the most popular disability sport in the country. The exemplar is a sport club which is successful in their sport (wheelchair basketball) as identified by national and international achievements. Furthermore, the disability sport club is successful in sponsorship relations as signified by a number of continuing sponsorship engagements.

### **Study Site**

Based on the nomination criteria, through network sampling, the RSV Lahn-Dill was identified. Network sampling allows for access to hard-to-reach populations for empirical data collection purpose (Glesne, 2016). The RSV Lahn-Dill was chosen as it has an international presence, players, and reputation. The RSV is considered ‘by far’ to be the most successful wheelchair basketball team in Germany (German record holder in national championships) (Kehrer, 2019; Roltt, 2018), Europe, and even worldwide. The club has played a key role in revolutionizing wheelchair basketball. Even the players consider the RSV as “the most prestigious wheelchair basketball club in the world. They have built a culture of excellence by always remaining at the top of the game” (Roltt, 2020, para 2). The team’s home games in the RBBL (German Wheelchair Basketball League) and in the European Champions League of wheelchair basketball are the most highly attended Paralympic sport events outside the Paralympic Games (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c). The team’s budget is also one of the two highest in the league (Hamburger Abendblatt, 2019), primarily due to the extensive partner network of 145 sponsors (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019b), including sponsors such as Buderus, IBC, and Leica (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019b). The sport is the most successful and popular Paralympic sport in Germany, and Germany is seen as the pioneer of professional wheelchair basketball leagues (IWBF, 2016). Wheelchair basketball has seen enormous growth in recent years in Germany on both athletic and structural levels, leading to wide media interest in the RBBL and the RSV Lahn-Dill specifically (IWBF, 2016). Clubs are independently responsible for their marketing and securing of sponsorships (IWBF, 2016) and thus RSV Lahn-Dill provided an ideal setting for this study.

## **Data Collection**

This case study included a review of external communication elements, individual interviews, and focus groups. The interviews and focus groups targeted internal actors and members of the organization. Interviews included employees of the organization while focus groups included fans who were members of the official fan club and can be considered as members of the organization.

As an initial step, a review of external communication elements was conducted. External communication elements that are visible to sponsors including the website, sponsor prospectus, and media data were reviewed. The website is publicly available and when searching for the RSV Lahn-Dill on the web, it appears as the first result (<https://rsvlahndill.de>). Thus, external actors such as potential sponsors are likely to encounter the website first when researching the club. The website is available in both German and English but was reviewed in German as it is more complete in German and direct language comparisons with the prospectus and media data were made. Stake (1995) maintains most case studies need some form of document review and highlights the need to evaluate the usefulness of documents in advance. In this case study, reviewing the organization's website explored how external individuals first encounter the organization when gathering information about the RSV. Additionally, the organization provided the researcher with the official prospectus and media data given to potential sponsors when they first contact the club. The prospectus and media data were also reviewed. Findings from the review of external communication elements were used to inform interviews and focus group sessions and compare findings across data collection.

To recruit interview participants, purposive and quota sampling were utilized. Purposive sampling is suitable for the unique context of case studies as participants

relevant to the case can be specifically chosen (Miles et al., 2014). Quota selections involve “identifying the major subgroups and then taking an arbitrary number from each” (Miles et al., 2014, p.67). Interviewees were recruited via email. To reflect all major subgroups of the RSV, the interviewees included two national players, two international players, two people from the coaching staff, one person from the crew, the General Manager, two board members, a volunteer, and an administrative employee to represent the internal actors of the club (n = 12; Table 2).

**Copy of Table 2**

*Interviewee Demographics*

Code Name	Gender Identity	Position	Sponsorship Management (Yes/No)	Number of years with the organization	German/ International
Uwe	Male	General Manager	Yes	21-30	German
Peter	Male	Board Member	Yes	21-30	German
Lasse	Male	Board Member	Yes	11-20	German
Tim	Male	Administrator	No	1-3	German
Alexandra	Female	Coach	No	4-10	International
Florian	Male	Coach	No	1-3	German
Georg	Male	Player	No	11-20	German
Sarah	Female	Player	No	1-3	German
Bill	Male	Player	No	4-10	International
Sean	Male	Player	No	1-3	International
Lukas	Male	Crew	No	1-3	German
Franz	Male	Volunteer	No	11-20	German

All interviewees were chosen based on age (over 18 years old), their position with the club (national players/international players/coaching staff/crew member/general manager/ board member/volunteer/administrative employee), and their tenure with the

club (must have been with the club at least one year to ensure they have immersed themselves into the culture).

The focus groups in this study included participants who are avid fans of the RSV Lahn-Dill and are members of the RSV fan club. Founded in 1999, the RSV fan club was Germany's first and is now the oldest wheelchair basketball fan club. The club currently has over 200 members (RSV Fanclub, 2020; RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c). Fans were chosen to be part of the study for multiple reasons. First, the organization itself refers to fan club members as part of the RSV family (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c). Second, the fan club itself communicates in similar language on their website, noting that their fan club is part of the "RSV-Family" (RSV Fanclub, 2020). Third, previous research has shown fan club members have a greater perception of team brand equity than non-members and thus, are likely to have a greater perception of organizational culture as well (Biscaia et al., 2014). Therefore, fan club members can be considered an extension of the organization which take part in organizational culture life and the shaping thereof.

To ensure their familiarity with the club and its culture as well as a high level of attachment to the organization, only active official fan club members were included. Purposive and snowball sampling were employed for recruiting participants for the focus groups with attempts made to reflect different gender identities, disability status, and age groups. Focus group members were chosen based on their age (over 18 years old), consent capacity, and their tenure with the club (must have been with the fan club at least one year to ensure they have immersed themselves into the culture). Although there is no perfect size for a focus group, Trainor and Graue (2013) suggest a size of four to six participants for small in-depth approaches. Two focus groups were conducted for data

saturation purposes and to compare findings with four and five participants respectively (n = 9, Table 5).

Both the interview and focus group questions focused on identifying the artifacts, unraveling the espoused beliefs and values of the organization, as well as gaining an understanding of the organization's basic underlying assumptions. Based on the questions used in Bailey et al.'s (2019) study which investigated the organizational culture of CrossFit and on the basis of the literature review, interview questions were adapted for an initial interview guide and translated into German. This line of questioning was revised after the review of the external communication elements was completed as the data collection process was iterative. The final interview guide included a section with organizational culture and community related questions, one section with sponsor related questions, and one section of questions on sponsorship relations only for administrators involved in sponsorship management. The final focus group guide a section with organizational culture and community related questions, one section with sponsor related questions, and one section on the fan's identification with the organization.

### **Data Analysis**

The review of external communication elements was approached through structural coding, focusing on context and concepts. To further analyze structural codes, Miles et al. (2014) suggest thematic analysis as one of the key approaches. The goal of thematic analysis is to seek commonalities in how a topic is spoken or written about. The thematic codes in this study are a deeper analysis of the structural codes first identified. The findings of the review of external communication elements were used to compare and validate the findings from the interviews and focus groups.



Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data coding was approached first by In Vivo coding and descriptive coding. In Vivo coding uses words or phrases from the participants' own language (the language in which the interview is conducted - in this study either German or English). This coding technique is appropriate for qualitative researchers in the beginning phases and to prioritize and honor the participants' voices (Miles et al., 2014). In Vivo codes were generated in the language of the conducted interviews and focus groups and then translated into English where needed.<sup>6</sup> Through descriptive coding, also referred to as "topic coding", a passage of data is summarized in a word or short phrase. The advantage of descriptive coding is its appropriateness for beginning researchers as well as studies with several data sources such as in this study (Saldaña, 2013). For the second coding cycle, pattern coding was applied to organize the In Vivo and descriptive codes into smaller numbers of categories, themes, and constructs (Miles et al., 2014). The data was segregated into categories by codes which were identified through a progressive process of sorting and defining data to yield results relative to the theoretical basis of the relationship marketing concept (Glesne, 2016). The pattern codes followed the summarizations of categories or themes, causes/explanations, relationships among people, and/or theoretical constructs (Miles et al., 2014). A thematic organizational framework was established by grouping data together based on the same descriptive or theoretical idea (Glesne, 2016). Based on the

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<sup>6</sup> Translation followed Squires' (2009) methodological recommendations for cross-language qualitative research. In Vivo coding was first conducted in the participants native language to honor their voices. Translation followed and was done contextual rather than by words to ensure meaning was not lost. The translator is a German citizen and native and fluent in English. The translator was the main researcher of this study and responsible for all data collection and analysis. The translations were validated by a second bilingual researcher to ensure accuracy.

relationship marketing framework, the themes were used to identify the role RM played in leveraging those cultural elements in sponsorship acquisition and retention.

Focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data analysis was conducted at the group and individual level. The analysis of the focus group sessions followed a constant comparison approach. First, data was split into smaller units to which descriptors or codes were assigned. The focus groups were conducted in German; however, descriptors and codes were assigned in English to allow for comparison with findings from the other methods employed in this study. Secondly, the units were grouped into categories and finally, themes were developed for each of the groups. The advantage of using this approach with more than one focus group is that an emergent-systematic focus group design can be leveraged. One focus group will serve as the emergent focus group to explore themes and the other focus group will serve as the systematic focus group for verification purposes. Through comparison of the themes of both focus groups, general saturation and saturation across groups was reached (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

### **Ensuring Trustworthiness**

Several strategies were employed in the research study to ensure trustworthiness. Credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Analytic memoing with reflexive notes was utilized to document reflection and analytic thinking processes and ensure dependability and confirmability transparency throughout the data collection and

analysis (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Finally, the researcher's positionality was also considered to strengthen trustworthiness<sup>7</sup>.

## **Findings**

From the review of external communication elements, twelve interviews, and two focus groups with a total of nine participants four major themes and six sub-themes emerged. The following section outlines the themes for RQ3 and RQ4.

### **RQ3: What role does culture play in building relationships to acquire sponsors?**

An examination of the data revealed the following themes: (a) pioneering through innovation, and (b) professional family, with several subthemes for each.

#### ***Pioneering through Innovation***

The first major theme which emerged from the analysis was *pioneering through innovation*, highlighting the RSV's culture of constant innovation which underlines its trendsetter and changemaker position. Two sub-themes emerged under the pioneering through innovation theme. The RSV was seen both as a business pioneer in the disability sport sector and as an inclusion pioneer in society. It was undebated by all interviewees and focus group members that the RSV is a pioneer. This is leveraged in sponsorship acquisition by providing an innovative, internationally successful, state-of-the-art program to associate with, putting together a team which is competitive, yet appealing to

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<sup>7</sup> The author of this study identifies as an able-bodied, white, cisgender woman who grew up in Germany. She had her first experience working with athletes with disabilities twelve years ago as an intern in the front office of the RSV Lahn-Dill, the site of the present research. Since the start of her academic career, her research has focused extensively on the disability sport sector. The researcher comes to the topic of disability sport having been trained in disciplines such as international business and management (undergraduate degree) and sport administration (graduate and terminal degrees). The researcher's experience as a scholar and practitioner as well as her history with the organization under analysis have helped her build rapport with participants throughout the study.

sponsors, and “successful and lived inclusion” (media data, p.3) through a diverse fan base and players. Overall, these assets make the RSV an “authentic brand ambassador in CSR for companies” (media data, p.3). First, the RSV as a business pioneer in the disability sport sector and its role in sponsorship acquisition is outlined. Secondly, the RSV as an inclusion pioneer in society and its role in sponsorship acquisition is highlighted.

**Business Pioneer in the Disability Sport Sector.** In its pioneering role, the RSV was the first professional wheelchair basketball team to have a marketing budget, official office, host sponsor events, and to advertise in traditional and new media, according to the General Manager who has been with the team for over 20 years. Innovation has been key to the organization’s development from a volunteer club to a limited liability company with a seven-figure budget. General manager Uwe stated, “We saw at the beginning of the 2000s or the end of the 90s that we do not possess enough knowhow in the sport in Germany”, which is why the club was also the first to hire international players in RBBL. Whereas now international players are commonly found on almost all teams, the club’s management realized they needed to change direction as “regional identifiers for fans, sponsors, and the public are important” (Uwe). Thus, RSV invests more into home grown talent to best serve their sponsors who often are focused on investing in local teams and talent. Through its innovation and risk taking, the “RSV in this sector, this construct of wheelchair basketball, stands out extremely when it comes to professionalism... because they are ahead of its time and the state of the sport, especially in its reach and international success” (Tim, administrator). The club has established

itself as a “trendsetter” (Uwe) and pioneer, exemplified by Uwe’s statement that “many things we do nowadays are copied quickly.”

**Inclusion Pioneer in Society.** According to Uwe, RSV has not only been a pioneer on the business side of wheelchair basketball but also “broken barriers, made people think, and broke up social inequalities because we did not talk hugely about the topic of inclusion but simply lived it”. The RSV has worked to provide “sustainable social recognition for these athletes and all individuals with disabilities” (sponsor prospectus, p. 6) and place a “great importance to the integration of disabled and non-disabled people” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019c, para 3). The inclusion characteristic of the RSV is represented in the diverse fan base of “people of all ages. No matter if young, old, tall, short, with or without disability” (Lukas, crew member). Fan club member Helena sees the RSV as a “promotion for sport for people with disabilities.” Helena’s thought was further supported by fan Max who as a person with a disability himself stated how the RSV for him stands for “inclusion” and further indicated “for example I am here, and I have a mental disability.” In the organization’s external presentation, “breaking societal barriers and setting new standards” (media data, p. 3), the management “never marketed the players as athletes with disabilities but professional athletes” while they also “did not disregard disability because we are not ashamed of it” (Uwe). The RSV believes the “diversity of individuals makes the team stronger” (sponsor prospectus, p. 7), and is currently home to two Iranian refugees which the organization also supports outside the court “to become a valuable part of society” (sponsor prospectus, p. 7). Sponsors are attracted through the “unique combination of sporting success and social responsibility”

highlighted as a “basis for internal and external communication of partners” (sponsor prospectus, p. 2).

### ***Professional Family***

The second theme that emerged was that of *professional family*, underlining a culture of professionalism which still acts like a family. The athletes, coaching staff, crew member, administrator, and volunteer agreed the management effort to build a professional sports team while preserving the family feeling has been a success. While the focus group members observed the growth and changes of the RSV, they identified the family character as most prominent. The professional family culture is leveraged by the RSV in its sponsorship acquisition by offering a professional sponsorship experience while generating approachability among all members of the organization and its fans, exemplifying the RSV family.

As one of the most successful sport clubs in Germany and the world, the RSV prides itself and is well-known for professionalism. The professionalism of the club is shown in its “communication platforms” (sponsor prospectus, p. 2), “external presentation” (Uwe), and “media experience” (sponsor prospectus, p. 5), as well as the “new arena” (Franz, volunteer) - its competition venue, which attracts players and sponsors alike. Since 2020, games are played at the same 6000 seat arena as the local major league handball team. For player Sarah, the arena is key to the RSV “because we identify with it.” Similar to most able-bodied professional sport teams, a business area and suites for sponsors are offered, adding to the professional appeal of the club. However, keeping it down-to-earth and to generate approachability, general manager Uwe pointed out the management chose only standing tables for the business area while

simply serving sausage in a bread roll and cake provided by the local bakery sponsor.

Player Sean has been extremely impressed by the club's professionalism, stating: "I don't think many other clubs, maybe two or three clubs in the whole of Europe or the world, even manage to sell club tickets and merchandise. As a player with the professional contracts, you kind of ... you feel like an employee rather than just like a player, you feel like you're part of an organization."

Additionally, the organization has built itself around the concept of being a family with the core management team and board members remaining "almost unchanged for decades" (Uwe). The 'RSV family' which also includes sponsors, has encouraged connections to be formed among all members of the organization. Georg, a veteran player of the team, pointed out his close relationship with sponsors thanks to his ten years of being a player for the RSV. He also credited club-based sponsor events as an opportunity to get into closer contact with the sponsors and for sponsors to "understand what and whom they sponsor." The RSV hosts four events throughout the year specifically for their sponsors, each typically attended by over 200 people. Both current and potential sponsors have the opportunity to attend most events and gain an insight into the organization. Board member Peter pointed out it is key to "keep the events short, and not exhausting" and provide an atmosphere where direct exchanges among sponsors, players, and the management can occur to build relationships.

The longevity of the RSV-family has maintained many traditions, one being the famous "Donauwellen" cake, baked by a member of the RSV fan club for every game and sold to spectators, which was noted as key to the fan experience by fan Helena. While it has been more difficult to keep the family feeling given the club's growth,

several interviewees noted the RSV constantly puts great effort into keeping that feeling, such as striking a deal with the new arena's catering to continue the selling of the self-baked goods as well as volunteers working the concession stands. The family characteristic of the RSV is also reflected in its close-knit sponsor network. Uwe went as far as calling the RSV network "lobbyists" for the organization as sponsors are "getting more people involved" (Bill, player), "growing community awareness" (Bill), engaging in "word of mouth" (Alexandra, head coach), and supporting the club by putting up game day "posters in their businesses" (Alexandra). In a sport that is not as well-known as mainstream sport, Uwe highlighted the importance of how having this network of ambassadors increases the chances of successfully acquiring sponsors.

**RQ4: What role does culture play in building relationships to retain sponsors?**

For RQ4, an examination of the data revealed the following themes: (a) approachability and (b) building rapport with several sub-themes each.

***Approachability***

The first major theme which emerged from the analysis was approachability, reflecting the RSV's culture of nurturing proximity between members through a culture of transparency as well as individual care. RSV's culture of approachability was highlighted by four fans in the focus groups and eight of the interviewees. Two sub-themes emerged under the approachability theme – culture of transparency, and individual care. Within sponsorship retention, the RSV leverages its approachability culture by building open and honest sponsor relations through transparency, and providing individual care through sponsorship newsletters, individual meetings, social



engagements, and personal Christmas gift deliveries while not being afraid of turning down sponsors which could tarnish current sponsors.

**Culture of Transparency.** Nurturing approachability, the management, coaches, administrator, crew member, and volunteer all highlighted the RSV's culture of transparency when dealing with sponsors. Assistant coach Florian described the culture of the RSV as "professional at a high level but still open and honest with each other" and "value[s] the proximity to the team." Board member Peter supported Florian's statement describing it as "extremely friendly and open, very proper and fair, pleasant." Board member Lasse went as far as identifying the core values of the RSV as "open and honest with each other." Crew member Lukas who has only been with the team for less than three years supported the notion of a culture of transparency and highlighted he "can ask anyone questions." Through transparency, loyalty was built as "without it would have not been possible that three and up to two years ago, five people with different characters and preferences worked together for 20 years without fighting" (Uwe).

The culture of transparency is also reflected in the organizational members' relationships to sponsors. Board member Peter called his relationship to sponsors "very pleasant, positive, friendly, open, respectful", and volunteer Franz supported the notion saying he has an "open and honest relationship" to sponsors.

**Individual Care.** Driven by a culture valuing approachability among its members, the RSV provides personal support to all its members, including the sponsors. Administrator Tim highlighted the organization's "support in my growth", exemplified by "I can always work in the best interest, make mistakes, ask questions, and not get criticized for it." Regarding sponsors, the management team tries to always keep them up

to date through their personal sponsorship manager and a sponsor newsletter. Personal support is given by providing individual sponsor meetings outside of sponsor events, as well as personal engagements outside of official meetings. For example, board member Lasse golfs with many of the sponsor partners he is responsible for. He noted “I look after 80 sponsors, and I know 80 of them in private” further highlighting the close personal connection with each of the sponsors. To build and keep these connections besides golfing, he is also part of several social clubs such as the Lion’s Club. Personal efforts and connections were also highlighted by veteran volunteer Franz who personally helps drop off Christmas gifts each year as the RSV chooses not to mail them. The management team is also “self-confident enough to say no to sponsors” (Uwe) which could hurt their brand or their sponsors, indicating their dedication to current sponsors and relationships.

### ***Building Rapport***

The second theme which emerged was building rapport. This theme highlighted a culture which constantly builds relationships and connections for and with sponsors based on the RSV’s family and professional character. The sub-themes under the building rapport theme were sponsors as fans and “networking” the network. The theme was supported by the management team, coaching staff, two players, administrative employee, and volunteer. For sponsorship retention, the RSV leverages its professional family culture to build rapport with sponsors by instilling an emotional connection of sponsors to the organization through player partnerships, post-game player engagement, and treating sponsors as family in good and bad times. Additionally, the RSV leverages

its own networking culture to connect their network with each other through games and events.

**Sponsors as Fans.** To retain sponsors, general manager Uwe pointed out “if the decision-maker, the marketing manager, the managing director, if they are fans of ours, then it is not necessarily the mind that rules, but possibly also the gut when it comes to their commitment.” While the sponsoring events are a great avenue for turning sponsors into fans, the organization has also gone as far as inviting sponsors onto the team bus. Additionally, sponsors at a certain level of investment can be ‘player partners’ with their logo being displayed on a particular player’s jersey and their company name being mentioned whenever the player is introduced. Player partnerships have generated a bond between players and sponsors, with player Sean calling his relationship to his personal sponsor a “close connection. We text all the time”, and player Bill taking “great pride in them [personal sponsor].” After the game most players noted they head into the business area to engage with the sponsors, further nurturing the personal connection and emotional involvement of the sponsors and conveying the RSV family characteristic. While sponsors have encountered economic challenges and even bankruptcy in the past, the club has continued to treat them as family and “kept all their advertisements and banners as if they paid” (Uwe), which built rapport and increased their loyalty to the RSV post-economic crisis.

**“Networking” the Network.** The RSV has an “intensively practiced network concept” (RSV Lahn-Dill, 2019b). Networking is not only key for sponsorship acquisition but also retention as Lasse pointed out “overall with all partners, we try to ensure of course that we build up the appropriate network.” The management’s effort to

build the right network for their sponsors helps the sponsorship managers regularly connect sponsors with each other, with RSV games and events serving as a platform for this exchange. According to Lasse, Uwe, and Peter, at games, management members can be found interacting with sponsors, explaining the sport to sponsors if needed, and keeping those sponsors up to date on the games which they cannot attend. While the business area also nurtures exchange, board member Lasse continuously “connect[s] sponsors with each other so no one is standing by themselves.” Besides the sponsor events, the RSV hosts a golf tournament together with the local major league handball team where players of both teams and sponsors play together, further providing network opportunities and engagement between sponsors and players. Additionally, RSV players, coaches, and management members “go to sponsors for their events. No sponsor pays more when we show up at their open house or event” (Uwe).

### **Discussion**

The findings outlined above show that the RSV leverages its pioneering through innovation and professional family culture in sponsorship acquisition by building relations based on these cultural characteristics and retains sponsors by leveraging its culture of approachability and building rapport. Addressing and providing recommendations on the cultural elements that can be leveraged through relationship marketing for sponsorship acquisition and retention, the exemplar case study of the RSV Lahn-Dill revealed cultural elements of pioneering through innovation, professional family, approachability, and building rapport being leveraged through relationship marketing for sponsorship acquisition and retention. Previous sport management research has examined RM within market orientation, collaborative communication, trust, and

commitment in sponsor organizations of sport properties (Farrelly & Quester, 2005a; Farrelly et al., 2006), RM factors and conditions which potentially jeopardize sponsorship relationships (Jensen & Cornwell, 2017) and sponsorship discontinuation (van Rijn et al., 2019), as well as relationship management for shared values (Morgan et al., 2014) and RM in sport event sponsorship management (Morgan et al., 2020). This study builds on previous research in RM and outlines a novel tie between a sport organization's culture and their relationship marketing practices in the acquisition and retention of sponsors. The unique ways culture can be leveraged through RM are explained in detail below.

### **Leveraging Cultural Elements through Relationship Marketing in Sponsorship Acquisition and Retention**

#### ***Relationship Quality***

Within RM, trust and commitment constitute the key tenants of the relationship quality between exchange partners (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The RSV leveraged their cultural elements in creating relationship quality in the forms of both trust and commitment in several ways.

**Trust.** The RSV's position as a business pioneer whose "sponsor pool exists out of many sponsors which have been with the RSV for 10 to 20 years" (Uwe) indicates how long-term partnerships increase the trust from (potential) sponsors. Showing a track record of growth and innovation, the RSV is a proven reliable partner. This is further underlined by the almost unchanged management over the years. This pattern of findings is consistent with the previous literature indicating within sponsorship relationships trust has a significant connection with commitment by conditioning and increasing commitment (Farrelly & Quester, 2005b; Hessling et al., 2018).

Uwe and Peter highlighted how sponsors experienced unforeseen economic challenges mid-season, and in an effort to show their commitment and trust in their sponsors, the RSV allowed them to reduce or delay their payments and still keep their banners up and advertisements going as if they paid in full. The findings are consistent with Brown et al.'s (2019) claim that the value of trusted partners is of such undebatable nature that the other party will engage in extra effort to maintain the trusted relationship. It also further exemplifies the need for high levels of specific (relational) investment which are not transferable for successful sponsorship relationships as highlighted by Urriolagoitia and Planellas (2007), and the need for flexibility by niche sport properties (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013a). RSV's effort to show trust to their sponsors in economic crises, yielded increased sponsorship investment and, hence, long term commitment by the sponsor to the RSV. This finding supports Morgan and Hunt's (1994) idea of trust increasing the confidence in the reliability and integrity of the exchange partner. It also showcases collaborative capabilities by sport properties drive trust in the relationship, leading to increased economic and non-economic sponsorship satisfaction (Farrelly & Quester, 2005a).

Moreover, further building trust, the management's culture of individual care focuses on a value match and brand alignment with individual sponsors, meeting the criteria Urriolagoitia and Planellas (2007) identified for successful sponsorship relationships. While previous research has found sponsorship clutter can drive sponsorship discontinuation, emphasizing the need for sponsorship exclusivity (Jensen & Cornwell, 2017; van Rijn et al., 2019), the findings of this study indicate sport organizations need to not only be aware of any sponsorship clutter but also sponsor

reputations in society. The RSV consciously turns down sponsorship requests which could harm or tarnish their current sponsors' brands.

The RSV's culture of transparency was reflected in open and honest relationships with its sponsors, acting as a major driver of sponsor trust. Considering sponsors which believe they are engaged in an honest relationship with the other party show increased levels of affective commitment (Hessling et al., 2018), the culture of transparency is also increasing sponsor affective commitment to RSV.

**Commitment.** Affective commitment is built by forming an emotional connection between the sport property and the sponsor (Hessling et al., 2018). Over time the RSV has leveraged its culture of being a pioneer through innovation and attracted sponsors to be part of this journey by building affective commitment. When approaching sponsors, Peter noted, "do not try to sell your partners what you currently have but where you want to be... allow them to be part of the journey." As an inclusion pioneer in society, the RSV is also setting a positive example for diversity, inclusion, and social responsibility and provides a culture appealing to organizations looking to engage in cause-related marketing efforts (Siegfried et al., 2021). The "successful and lived inclusion" (media data, p.3) of the RSV builds the basis for affective commitment. An emotional connection between a (potential) sponsor and a sport property is built through the cultural elements involved in being an inclusion pioneer in society (Palmatier, 2008). Additionally, by acknowledging the importance of regional identifiers for sponsors, fans, and the community, the RSV is investing in home grown talent for both the team and management. The management's commitment in building affective commitment through the RSV's culture goes even further as the RSV's initial effort of finding players and

sponsors who want to stay connected long-term helps bolster the family characteristic and approachability and increases affective commitment which in return has been found to improve sponsor retention (Hessling et al., 2018). Events hosted particularly for sponsors allow a personal exchange between sponsors and members of the RSV, promoting the RSV's cultural family feeling and igniting an emotional attachment (i.e., affective commitment; Hessling et al., 2018) with sponsors to the organization.

Once sponsors are acquired, the RSV turns sponsors into fans through a culture which builds rapport, making sponsoring decisions less return on investment based by building an emotional connection to the sport organization (Hessling et al., 2018). Uniquely nurturing the affective commitment by leveraging its culture of approachability, the RSV offers player partnerships where an individual sponsor is matched with an individual player. The sponsor receives the rights to their jersey logo and is mentioned whenever the player is introduced at home games. Players Sean, Bill, and Georg all highlighted their close relationship to their personal sponsors, indicating the affective commitment built (Hessling et al., 2018). Sean enjoys photo shoots with his personal sponsor and getting to know them better. This unique strategy not only increases affective commitment but also builds value-based commitment, as sponsors receive access to players as resources for company branding (Hessling et al., 2018). Post-home games, affective commitment is further built by the culture of approachability as players visit sponsors in the business area, engaging in conversation, and meet new sponsors. The exchange is very personal, with players being allowed to have their post-game beer with the sponsors.



Furthermore, the management leverages their culture of approachability for affective commitment through providing individual care. A newsletter tailored specifically to sponsors is sent out and individual sponsor meetings outside of sponsor events are set up. Board member Lasse engages in relationship building by connecting with sponsors privately such as meeting up for a round of golf, hence promoting affective commitment (Hessling et al., 2018).

Value-based commitment in the sponsorship acquisition is driven by the RSV's culture of being a business pioneer in the disability sport sector. Leveraging its innovation and professionalism, the findings are the first demonstration of a disability sport organization offering sponsorship inventory focused on achieving results such as increased profits or awareness for sponsors. Through the culture of being a business pioneer, RSV has acquired inventory offerings including LED-banners around the court, on court company stickers, livestreaming, a videowall, team bus advertisements, business club access, and event suites for sponsors to host clients, attractive to sponsors. Additionally, the RSV has built a strong fan and media culture through innovative measures such as being the first wheelchair basketball club with a marketing budget. Sponsors can tap into the "1,300 average game day attendance", "two million website visits yearly", and up to "1000 livestream viewers" (media data, p.3) to achieve their (results oriented) sponsorship objectives.

In RSV's position as a trendsetter, being "exotic in the sports landscape" and thus, enjoying "a certain freedom of fools" (Uwe), they are not afraid of trying something new. Most recently, the RSV acquired a new main sponsor. The unique arrangement is the combining of a sponsorship for both an Olympic and Paralympic sport team. The contract

includes the main sponsoring of the RSV and also of the HSG Wetzlar, the local major league handball team which plays and is housed in the same arena (Buderus, 2021). Additionally, the company acquired the naming rights to the arena (mittelhessen, 2021). While being an inclusion pioneer in society supports the building of affective commitment, it also brings value to (potential) sponsors. The diverse fan base, with people of all ages, social statuses, backgrounds, disability status, sizes, and gender identities provides RSV sponsors with diverse target customers and can attract sponsors whose target market matches their fan base (Brenner, 2003). Additionally, considering image awareness by sport properties and potential fit with sponsors' image can yield positive results in sponsorship acquisition (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013a; 2013b), as the RSV identifies itself as an “authentic brand ambassador in CSR for companies” (media data, p.2). Hence, the club's inclusive culture and image also provides a basis for CSR engagement and communication.

The RSV continuously nurtures value-based commitment through its individual care. International player Bill is impressed by “how well they get and maintain sponsors for so long” and credits the RSV for “showing sponsors how they can show their brand and advertise their brand using our brand”, as well as “good relationship, good correlation with each other, mutual understanding, mutual agreement.” Acting on their collaborative capabilities (Farrelly & Quester, 2005a), this commitment to the results driven success of the sponsors is further supported by Peter who points out they how actively “consult our partners how they can leverage the image we cultivate to make it profitable for their organization.” Additionally, the RSV management and players attend events hosted by sponsors without charging the sponsor. Being another specific

(relational) investment of time and effort, which is not transferable, also supports RSV's successful sponsorship relationships (Urriolagoitia & Planellas, 2007).

As previous research has identified commitment as the driver of value creation in sponsorship (Hessling et al. 2018), the RSV's engagement in creating commitment, results in increased value for both the RSV and its sponsors. The findings of this study uniquely presented the value creation not just for the sponsors as illustrated previously but also for the RSV. For example, through the sponsors' commitment, current sponsors, attract new sponsors from their network, or recruit fans by displaying game posters in their stores, providing increased value to RSV.

### ***Relationship Breadth and Relationship Composition***

Relationship breadth, indicated by the density of the relational bonds, and relationship composition, underlined by the decision-making capabilities of the relational connection of exchange partners (Palmatier, 2008), were both nurtured by the RSV through its cultural elements.

Attractive to sponsors, the RSV has built a close-knit sponsor network, reflecting the organization's family characteristic. In line with Palmatier's (2008) identification of relationship breadth and composition as the density and diversity of the network, RSV's sponsor network, exemplified by the 'RSV-family' culture, showed relations ties between several members of the organization with its sponsors and at different levels. Leveraging their dense and diverse network when attracting sponsors, RSV realized "business-to-business business is essential, especially for companies not catering to consumers" (Uwe), and therefore promotes their family-like sponsor network as a business opportunity to attract (potential) sponsors.

While Palmatier (2008) identified what relationship breadth is, the findings of this study highlight how relationship breadth can be nurtured by sport organizations. To build relationship breadth, the RSV offers a business area for its sponsors during home games. Reflecting its professional family culture, approachability between sponsors is nurtured and encouraged through a standing table only set up. The club's sponsor events further drive both relationship breadth and composition by bringing together sponsors, players, coaches, management, administrators, and crew members. According to Peter, in order to build relationships, sponsor events are held in an atmosphere where exchanges between attendees can occur. The events are usually held at a sponsor's company building, allowing individual sponsors to showcase their work while connecting sponsors with each other and the RSV members. In this process, network breadth is increased by creating interorganizational bonds between the RSV and individual sponsors (Palmatier, 2008). Additionally, relationship composition is improved increasingly diverse bonds between members of both organizations are formed (Palmatier, 2008). Outside of sponsor events and game days, the management builds relations among sponsors by connecting them with each other, according to board member Lasse. Additionally, a golf tournament brings together both RSV and HSG Wetzlar sponsors and players, further driving the breadth and composition of the sponsor relationships.

Based on this exemplar case study, it is apparent that the role of culture in successfully leveraging RM for sponsorship acquisition and retention cannot be underestimated. Cultural awareness and coherency provide a sport organization for people with disabilities with the basis for successful sponsor relations. The finding of this study not only provide unique insights into how relationship marketing practices are

rooted in organizational culture but also represent the first direct demonstration of ways sport organizations (for people with disabilities) can leverage their culture to build trust, commitment, relationship breadth, and relationship composition with their (potential) sponsors, thus, increasing their chance of successful sponsorship relations.

### **Practical Implications**

When attracting sponsors, disability sport properties, especially with limited resources and sponsorships, should focus on selling potential sponsors where they want to be (vision), rather than what they currently have to offer. This can make the sport property more attractive to sponsor, as it allows the sponsor to buy into the future of the program. Disability sport properties need to look beyond the tangible assets which they have to offer and identify which cultural elements may be attractive to sponsors. Cultural elements deal with what the organization is all about and what makes them unique and can, for example, include being a driver of diversity and inclusion in society.

Additionally, for practitioners, it is important to consider the current sponsor pool and a potential sponsor's reputation in society before entering into the sponsorship engagement in order to not clutter the sponsorship space with similar sponsors, and/or tarnish the reputation of sponsor by, for example, placing a sex toy company advertisement next to a childcare advertisement.

Once sponsors are acquired, it is important to discuss the expectations for the relationship with sponsors. This can include asking the sponsors for their preferred mode of communication and for their preferred frequency of communication. Individual and personal care can take place through holding individual sponsorship meetings and

providing suggestions on how the sponsor can best leverage the sport property's brand and values.

To best maintain sponsors, practitioners need to nurture the relationship building between sponsors and management, staff, coaches, and most importantly players. This can be done by hosting specific sponsor events during which sponsors can engage with the different organizational members. These events can also allow for relationship building between sponsors, further growing their connection and bond to the organization. Additionally, by implementing player specific sponsorships, individual bonds between a single sponsor and a single player can be fostered.

### **Limitations**

Limitations applying to this research study are based in the single cultural context of the case study, the exemplar's unique position as a high resource disability sport organization, the lack of sponsor inclusion, and potential participant social desirability. This case study was conducted in a singular cultural context as RSV is situated in Germany. Findings on the role culture plays in building and retaining sponsorship relationships may not be applicable in different cultural contexts. Additionally, as a high resource disability sport organization, RSV has significantly more financial means than most disability sport organizations. As this study took the approach to only explore organizational culture and relationship marketing practices from the internal organizational perspective, no sponsors were interviewed.

As the interviewees were all employed members of the organization, and the fan focus group members are considered as part of the organization's "family", a potential limitation of this study is a social desirability bias. Subjects may have responded with

what they thought is considered socially desirable by other organizational members, particularly when inquiring about the organization's culture (Nederhof, 1985). To address this limitation, interviews were conducted on an individual basis with anonymity given to the interviewees and focus group sessions included the use of index cards on which members noted their responses to selected questions before discussing the answers.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Future research should focus on a comprehensive cultural analysis of a sport organization for people with disabilities to receive insights into cultural coherence and the drivers behind the cultural elements attractive to sponsors. These insights can provide practitioners with strategies to attract sponsors. Additionally, the role of culture in leveraging RM for sponsorship acquisition and retention in other disability and niche sport organizations should be explored. As disability sport can be considered a niche sport, gaining insight into different niche sport context can provide valuable insights into RM strategies which may not currently are leveraged in disability sport. It is also important to get insight into sponsors' culture, the cultural attributes of sport organizations for people with disabilities that attract sponsors, and the potential match of a sport property's and sponsor's organizational culture. By understanding the organizational culture of disability sport properties and their sponsors, strategies to leverage the culture elements of disability sport properties in sponsorship acquisition can be drafted. Lastly, the sponsor perspective of disability sport properties needs to be explored. Hereby, a specific focus should be given on the elements of the disability sport property which are attractive to the sponsors and ways they are leveraging their

relationship with the sport property. Additionally, research should identify the reasons for sponsorship continuation and discontinuation disability sport sponsors.



## Summary

Exploring how organizational culture can be leveraged to increase strategic partnerships, the purposes of this study were to examine (a) the elements of the organizational culture that make a successful international wheelchair basketball sport club attractive to external partners and (b) to determine what role the organizational cultural elements play in leveraging relationship marketing (RM) for sponsorship acquisition and retention. The first manuscript identified the basic underlying assumptions of being a pioneer, approachability, and organizational excellence and the espoused beliefs and values and artifacts based in those as the key cultural elements making the RSV attractive to sponsors. In the second manuscript, pioneering through innovation and professional family were identified as the key cultural elements to leverage relationship marketing for sponsorship acquisition. Approachability and building rapport emerged as cultural elements which could be leveraged for sponsorship retention.

The findings of this study represent the first direct demonstration of organizational culture driving sponsorship potential and success particularly for disability sport properties. They also highlight how organizational culture research outside of sports can help inform sport organizational culture and sponsorship success. Despite Schein's (2010) model only looking at the shared elements of organizational culture, organizational culture seldom comes without its inconsistencies and ambiguities (Meyerson & Martin, 1987), as this organizational culture analysis illustrated. Additionally, it is apparent that the role of culture in successfully leveraging RM for sponsorship acquisition and retention cannot be underestimated. Cultural awareness and

coherency provide a sport organization for people with disabilities with the framework for successful sponsor relations. The findings of this study not only provide unique insights into how relationship marketing practices are rooted in organizational culture but also represent novel ways sport organizations (for people with disabilities) can leverage their culture to build trust, commitment, relationship breadth, and relationship composition with their (potential) sponsors, thus, increasing their chance of successful sponsorship relations.

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## APPENDICES

### **Appendix A – Recruitment Email Interviews English**

Dear RSV Team,

My name is Nina Siegfried and I am a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Louisville. Under the direction of Dr. Mary Hums (mary.hums@louisville.edu; 502-435-6291), I am investigating the organizational culture of the RSV Lahn-Dill and the elements attractive to external partners. The purposes of this study are to examine (a) the elements of the organizational culture of that make a successful international wheelchair basketball sport club attractive to external partners and (b) what role relationship marketing (RM) plays in leveraging the cultural elements for sponsorship acquisition and retention.

To participate in this study participants must be 18 years of age or older and be currently working for the RSV Lahn-Dill fulltime or parttime. Additionally, you will have to have been with the RSV for a minimum of one year. This study takes an interview approach. Participants are asked to complete an in-person interview of about forty-five (45) to sixty (60) minutes. Participation in this interview is completely voluntary and all information received will be kept confidential.

Findings from this study are going to provide information to help disability sport organization in leveraging their culture to better secure and retain sponsors in the future. I really believe this is going to be very impactful as we move forward. I appreciate you taking the time to read this email and if you have any questions or comments, please feel free to email me. If you are interested in helping be part of this important research study, please feel free to send me an email and we can set up a time for you to speak with me.

Best,

Nina Siegfried

## Appendix B - Recruitment Email Interviews German

Liebes RSV Team,

Mein Name ist Nina Siegfried und ich bin Ph.D. Kandidatin an der University of Louisville. Unter der Leitung von Dr. Mary Hums (mary.hums@louisville.edu; 502-435-6291) untersuche ich die organisatorische Kultur des RSV Lahn-Dill und die Elemente der Kultur, die für externe Partner attraktiv sind. Ziele dieser Studie sind es, (a) die Elemente der Organisationskultur zu untersuchen, die einen erfolgreichen internationalen Rollstuhlbasketball-Sportverein für externe Partner attraktiv machen und (b) zu identifizieren welche Rolle Beziehungsmarketing bei der Nutzung der kulturellen Elemente für die Rekrutierung und Erhaltung von Sponsoren spielt.

Um an dieser Studie teilnehmen zu können, müssen die Teilnehmer mindestens 18 Jahre alt sein und derzeit in Voll- oder Teilzeit beim RSV Lahn-Dill beschäftigt sein.

Außerdem müssen Sie mindestens ein Jahr beim RSV angestellt gewesen sein. Diese Studie nutzt Interviews zur Datensammlung.

Die Teilnehmer werden gebeten, ein persönliches Interview von etwa fünfundvierzig (45) bis sechzig (60) Minuten zu absolvieren. Die Teilnahme an diesem Interview ist vollkommen freiwillig und alle erhaltenen Informationen werden vertraulich behandelt.

Die Ergebnisse dieser Studie werden Informationen liefern, um Behindertensportorganisationen dabei zu helfen, ihre Kultur zu nutzen, um Sponsoren in Zukunft besser zu gewinnen und zu binden. Ich freue mich, dass Sie sich die Zeit genommen haben, diese E-Mail zu lesen, und wenn Sie Fragen oder Kommentare haben, können Sie mir gerne eine E-Mail senden. Wenn Sie daran interessiert sind an dieser wichtigen Forschungsstudie teilzunehmen, senden Sie mir bitte eine E-Mail und wir können einen Termin für Sie vereinbaren, um mit mir zu sprechen.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen,

Nina Siegfried



## Appendix C – Recruitment Email Focus Groups English

Dear RSV Fan,

My name is Nina Siegfried and I am a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Louisville. Under the direction of Dr. Mary Hums (mary.hums@louisville.edu; 502-435-6291), I am investigating the organizational culture of the RSV Lahn-Dill and the elements attractive to external partners. The purposes of this study are to examine (a) the elements of the organizational culture of that make a successful international wheelchair basketball sport club attractive to external partners and (b) what role relationship marketing (RM) plays in leveraging the cultural elements for sponsorship acquisition and retention.

To participate in this study participants must be 18 years of age or older and have been an active member of the RSV Fanclub for a minimum of one year. This study takes a focus group approach.

Participants are asked to complete an in-person focus group session with five (5) to seven (7) other fan club members. The session will take about sixty (60) minutes to ninety (90) minutes. Participation in this focus group is completely voluntary and all information received will be kept confidential.

Findings from this study are going to provide information to help disability sport organization in leveraging their culture to better secure and retain sponsors in the future. I appreciate you taking the time to read this email and if you have any questions or comments, please feel free to email me. If you are interested in helping be part of this important research study, please feel free to send me an email.

Best,

Nina Siegfried

## **Appendix D – Recruitment Email Focus Groups German**

Liebe/r RSV Fan,

Mein Name ist Nina Siegfried und ich bin Ph.D. Kandidatin an der University of Louisville. Unter der Leitung von Dr. Mary Hums (mary.hums@louisville.edu; 502-435-6291) untersuche ich die organisatorische Kultur des RSV Lahn-Dill und die Elemente der Kultur, die für externe Partner attraktiv sind. Ziele dieser Studie sind es, (a) die Elemente der Organisationskultur zu untersuchen, die einen erfolgreichen internationalen Rollstuhlbasketball-Sportverein für externe Partner attraktiv machen und (b) zu identifizieren welche Rolle Beziehungsmarketing bei der Nutzung der kulturellen Elemente für die Rekrutierung und Erhaltung von Sponsoren spielt.

Um an dieser Studie teilnehmen zu können, müssen die Teilnehmer mindestens 18 Jahre alt sein und seit mindestens einem Jahr beim RSV Fanclub Mitglied sein. Diese Studie nutzt Fokusgruppen zur Datensammlung.

Die Teilnehmer werden gebeten, eine persönliche Fokusgruppensitzung mit fünf (5) bis sieben (7) anderen Fanclubmitgliedern zu absolvieren. Die Sitzung dauert etwa sechzig (60) Minuten bis neunzig (90) Minuten. Die Teilnahme an dieser Fokusgruppe ist völlig freiwillig und alle erhaltenen Informationen werden vertraulich behandelt.

Die Ergebnisse dieser Studie werden Informationen liefern, um Behindertensportorganisationen dabei zu helfen, ihre Kultur zu nutzen, um Sponsoren in Zukunft besser zu gewinnen und zu binden. Ich freue mich, dass Sie sich die Zeit genommen haben, diese E-Mail zu lesen, und wenn Sie Fragen oder Kommentare haben, können Sie mir gerne eine E-Mail senden. Wenn Sie daran interessiert sind an dieser wichtigen Forschungsstudie teilzunehmen, senden Sie mir bitte eine E-Mail.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen,

Nina Siegfried

## **Appendix E – Preamble Interviews English**

### **The Role of Organizational Culture and Relationship Marketing in Disability Sport Sponsorship: An Exemplar Case Study**

Dear Participant:

You are being invited to participate in a research study about the role of organizational culture and relationship marketing in disability sport sponsorship by answering interview questions. The purposes of this study are to examine (a) the elements of the organizational culture of that make a successful international wheelchair basketball sport club attractive to external partners and (b) what role relationship marketing (RM) plays in leveraging the cultural elements for sponsorship acquisition and retention. This study is conducted by Dr. Mary Hums and Ms. Nina Siegfried of the University of Louisville. There are no known risks for your participation in this research study. The information collected may not benefit you directly. The information learned in this study may be helpful to others. The information you provide will help disability sport organization in leveraging their culture to better secure and retain sponsors in the future. The recording of your interview will be stored at in Cardbox, a secured university sanctioned cloud storage and encrypted via FileVault. The interview will take approximately forty-five (45) to sixty (60) minutes to complete.

Individuals from the Department of Health and Sport Sciences, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPO), and other regulatory agencies may inspect these records. In all other respects, however, the data will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Should the data be published, your identity will not be disclosed. The team name (RSV Lahn-Dill) will be disclosed however. Study data will be shared outside of this country.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. By answering audio recorded interview questions, you agree to take part in this research study. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study you may stop taking part at any time. If you decide not to be in this study or if you stop taking part at any time, you will not lose any benefits for which you may qualify.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office at +1 (502) 852-5188. You can discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject, in private, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is an independent committee made up of people from the University community, staff of the institutions, as well as people from the community not connected with these institutions. The IRB has reviewed this research study.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research study, please contact:

Dr. Mary Hums: + 1 502 435 6291

Nina Siegfried: +49 1512 6997933 / +1 270 702 7780

If you have concerns or complaints about the research or research staff and you do not wish to give your name, you may call 1-877-852-1167. This is a 24 hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

Sincerely,

Dr. Mary Hums & Nina Siegfried

## Appendix F – Preamble Interviews German

Die Rolle von Organisationskultur und Beziehungsmarketing im Behindertensport-Sponsoring: Eine beispielhafte Fallstudie

Liebe/r Teilnehmer:in,

Sie werden eingeladen, an einer Forschungsstudie über die Rolle von Organisationskultur und Beziehungsmarketing im Sponsoring von Behindertensport teilzunehmen, indem Sie Interviewfragen beantworten. Ziel dieser Studie ist es, (a) die Elemente der Organisationskultur zu untersuchen, die einen erfolgreichen internationalen Rollstuhlbasketball-Sportverein für externe Partner attraktiv machen und (b) welche Rolle Beziehungsmarketing bei der Nutzung der kulturellen Elemente für den Erwerb und der Beibehaltung von Sponsoren spielt. Diese Studie wird von Dr. Mary Hums und Frau Nina Siegfried von der University of Louisville durchgeführt. Es sind keine Risiken für Ihre Teilnahme an dieser Forschungsstudie bekannt. Die gesammelten Informationen kommen Ihnen möglicherweise nicht direkt zugute. Die in dieser Studie gewonnenen Informationen können für andere hilfreich sein. Die von Ihnen bereitgestellten Informationen helfen Behindertensportorganisationen dabei, ihre Kultur zu nutzen, um Sponsoren in Zukunft besser zu gewinnen und zu binden. Die Aufzeichnung Ihres Interviews wird in Cardbox, einem gesicherten, von der Universität genehmigten Cloud-Speicher, gespeichert und über FileVault verschlüsselt. Das Interview dauert ungefähr fünfundvierzig (45) bis sechzig (60) Minuten.

Personen des Ministeriums für Gesundheits- und Sportwissenschaften (Health & sport Sciences), das Institutional Review Board (IRB), das Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPPO) und anderer Aufsichtsbehörden können diese Aufzeichnungen einsehen. Im Übrigen werden die Daten jedoch im gesetzlich zulässigen Umfang vertraulich behandelt. Im Falle einer Veröffentlichung der Daten wird Ihre Identität nicht preisgegeben. Der Teamname (RSV Lahn-Dill) wird im Falle einer Veröffentlichung jedoch offenbart. Die Studiendaten werden außerhalb dieses Landes weitergegeben.

Die Teilnahme an dieser Studie ist freiwillig. Durch die Beantwortung mit Audio aufgenommenen Interviewfragen stimmen Sie der Teilnahme an dieser Forschungsstudie zu. Sie müssen keine Fragen beantworten, die Ihnen unangenehm sind. Sie können sich entscheiden, überhaupt nicht teilzunehmen. Wenn Sie sich für die Teilnahme an dieser Studie entscheiden, können Sie die Teilnahme jederzeit beenden. Wenn Sie sich entscheiden, nicht an dieser Studie teilzunehmen oder die Teilnahme zu irgendeinem Zeitpunkt abbrechen, verlieren Sie keine Leistungen, für die Sie möglicherweise Anspruch haben.

Wenn Sie Fragen zu Ihren Rechten als Forschungssubjekt haben, können Sie das Büro des Programms zum Schutz von Menschen unter +1 (502) 852-5188 anrufen. Fragen zu Ihren Rechten als Forschungssubjekt können Sie privat mit einem Mitglied des Institutional Review Board (IRB) besprechen. Das IRB ist ein unabhängiges Gremium,

das sich aus Personen der Universitätsgemeinschaft, Mitarbeitern der Einrichtungen sowie Personen aus der nicht mit diesen Einrichtungen verbundenen Gemeinschaft zusammensetzt. Das IRB hat diese Forschungsstudie überprüft.

Bei Fragen, Anliegen oder Beschwerden zur Forschungsstudie wenden Sie sich bitte an:

Dr. Mary Hums: + 1 502 435 6291

Nina Siegfried: +49 1512 6997933 / +1 270 702 7780

Wenn Sie Bedenken oder Beschwerden bezüglich der Forschung oder des Forschungspersonals haben und Ihren Namen nicht nennen möchten, können Sie 1-877-852-1167 anrufen. Dies ist eine 24-Stunden-Hotline, die von Personen beantwortet wird, die nicht an der University of Louisville arbeiten.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen,

Dr. Mary Hums & Nina Siegfried

## **Appendix G – Preamble Focus Groups English**

### **The Role of Organizational Culture and Relationship Marketing in Disability Sport Sponsorship: An Exemplar Case Study**

Dear Participant:

You are being invited to participate in a research study about the role of organizational culture and relationship marketing in disability sport sponsorship by answering focus group questions. The purposes of this study are to examine (a) the elements of the organizational culture of that make a successful international wheelchair basketball sport club attractive to external partners and (b) what role relationship marketing (RM) plays in leveraging the cultural elements for sponsorship acquisition and retention. This study is conducted by Dr. Mary Hums and Ms. Nina Siegfried of the University of Louisville. There are no known risks for your participation in this research study. The information collected may not benefit you directly. The information learned in this study may be helpful to others. The information you provide will help disability sport organization in leveraging their culture to better secure and retain sponsors in the future. The recording of your focus group will be stored at in Cardbox, a secured university sanctioned cloud storage and encrypted via FileVault. The focus group will take approximately sixty (60) minutes to ninety (90) minutes to complete.

Individuals from the Department of Health and Sport Sciences, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPO), and other regulatory agencies may inspect these records. In all other respects, however, the data will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Should the data be published, your identity will not be disclosed. The team name (RSV Lahn-Dill) will be disclosed however. Study data will be shared outside of this country.

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Sincerely,

Dr. Mary Hums & Nina Siegfried



## Appendix H – Preamble Focus Groups German

Die Rolle von Organisationskultur und Beziehungsmarketing im Behindertensport-Sponsoring: Eine beispielhafte Fallstudie

Liebe/r Teilnehmer:in,

Sie werden eingeladen, an einer Forschungsstudie über die Rolle von Organisationskultur und Beziehungsmarketing im Sponsoring von Behindertensport teilzunehmen, indem Sie Fokusgruppenfragen beantworten. Ziel dieser Studie ist es, (a) die Elemente der Organisationskultur zu untersuchen, die einen erfolgreichen internationalen Rollstuhlbasketball-Sportverein für externe Partner attraktiv machen und (b) welche Rolle Beziehungsmarketing bei der Nutzung der kulturellen Elemente für den Erwerb und der Beibehaltung von Sponsoren spielt. Diese Studie wird von Dr. Mary Hums und Frau Nina Siegfried von der University of Louisville durchgeführt. Es sind keine Risiken für Ihre Teilnahme an dieser Forschungsstudie bekannt. Die gesammelten Informationen kommen Ihnen möglicherweise nicht direkt zugute. Die in dieser Studie gewonnenen Informationen können für andere hilfreich sein. Die von Ihnen bereitgestellten Informationen helfen Behindertensportorganisationen dabei, ihre Kultur zu nutzen, um Sponsoren in Zukunft besser zu gewinnen und zu binden. Die Aufzeichnung Ihrer Fokusgruppe wird in Cardbox, einem gesicherten, von der Universität genehmigten Cloud-Speicher, gespeichert und über FileVault verschlüsselt. Die Fokusgruppe dauert ungefähr sechzig (60) bis neunzig (90) Minuten.

Personen des Ministeriums für Gesundheits- und Sportwissenschaften (Health & sport Sciences), das Institutional Review Board (IRB), das Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPO) und anderer Aufsichtsbehörden können diese Aufzeichnungen einsehen. Im Übrigen werden die Daten jedoch im gesetzlich zulässigen Umfang vertraulich behandelt. Im Falle einer Veröffentlichung der Daten wird Ihre Identität nicht preisgegeben. Der Teamname (RSV Lahn-Dill) wird im Falle einer Veröffentlichung jedoch offenbart. Die Studiendaten werden außerhalb dieses Landes weitergegeben.

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Mit freundlichen Grüßen,

Dr. Mary Hums & Nina Siegfried

# Appendix I – Accuracy of Translation

	HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM	<b>Affidavit of Accuracy for Translation</b>	Human Subjects Protection Program Office MedCenter One 501 E. Broadway, Suite 200 Louisville KY 40202-1798 P: 502-852-5188 Service Acct: <a href="mailto:hspopf@louisville.edu">hspopf@louisville.edu</a>
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

I, Nina Siegfried, hereby declare that I am fluent in English and  
German. I hereby certify that I have translated the attached document and to the best of  
my knowledge, the attached document is a true, accurate and complete translation of  
English ICF Short Form for Translation 11-2-2016.  
(Description of document(s) including version #/version date)

N. Siegfried Date: 08/25/2021  
(Signature of Translator)

Nina Siegfried  
(Printed name of Translator)

Page 1 of 1

## Appendix J – Interview Guide English

Interview Question	Research Question addressed	Source of Question	Original Question/Literature Findings	
<b><i>Organizational Culture and Community Related Questions</i></b>				
1	If you think of the RSV, what comes to your mind?  <i>Probe:</i> What specifically suggests/signals this?	2	Literature	Identifying the organization's artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions which are on top of organizational members' minds (Schein, 2010)
2	Describe a visual picture of what the RSV is to you. <i>Probe:</i> What pictures would fill a collage that describes RSV?	2	Bailey et al. (2019)	Could you describe a typical CrossFit Gym?
3	What do you see as unique about the RSV?	2,3,4	Literature	Disability sport as a unique context (Cottingham et al., 2014; Siegfried et al., 2021)
4	In general, describe the feelings and emotions that you associate with being a coach/player/employee/board member of the RSV?	2	Bailey et al. (2019)	In general, describe the feelings and emotions that you associate with being a member of the gym?
5	In your mind, what are some core values of the RSV? <i>Follow up:</i> In your mind, what does the RSV stand for?	2	Bailey et al. (2019)	What are the core values of CrossFit?
6	Describe a typical RSV fan.  <i>Follow-up:</i> Describe a fan's attitude and beliefs?	2	Bailey et al. (2019)	Describe a typical CrossFitter. - How do they dress? - How do they behave? - Describe their attitude and beliefs?
7	What terms do members of the RSV regularly use? <i>Follow-up:</i> What is the significance of these terms to members?	2	Bailey et al. (2019)	What are terms that only a CrossFit gym member would know?
8	Describe the role the RSV has played in your life.	2	Bailey et al. (2019)	Describe the role CrossFit has played in your life?
9	Can you identify any aspects of your experience with the RSV that have influenced you to continue to be an employee/player/coach?	2,3,4	Bailey et al. (2019)	Can you identify any aspects of your experience with CrossFit that have influenced you to continue to be a member?

10	Do you feel a strong bond or sense of connection with your teammates/team/co-employees? Probe for a yes response: Describe this connection with your teammates/team/co-employees? <i>Probe for a no response: Why do you think this is?</i>	2	Bailey et al. (2019)	Do you feel a strong bond or sense of connection with your gym mates? - Probe for a yes response: Describe this connection with your gym mates? - Probe for a no response: Why do you think this is?
11	How would you describe the RSV community? <i>Follow-up: Do you have an example how community is fostered with the RSV fans?</i> <i>Follow-up: Do you have an example how community is fostered with the RSV sponsors?</i>	2 2 3&4	Bailey et al. (2019)	Describe the CrossFit community? - Do you have an example of how community is fostered with the members at CrossFit? - And extends beyond the gym?
12	What role do you see the RSV play in the greater Wetzlar region? <i>Follow-up: Do you have an example how the RSV community extends beyond the games?</i>	2	Bailey et al. (2019)	Describe the role CrossFit has played in your life?

### ***Sponsor Related Questions***

13	Write down the first sponsor that comes to mind.  <i>Follow-up: Note down the second and third sponsor you can think of.</i> <i>Follow-up: Note down the any other sponsor you can think of.</i>	3&4	Literature	Top of mind' sponsorship awareness (Biscaia et al., 2014)
14	Coming back to the first sponsor you listed, Why do you think sponsor X is a sponsor?	3&4	Literature	Shared values (Johanson & Roxenhall, 2009, as cited in Hessling et al., 2018; Macdougall et al., 2014; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and congruency between sponsors and sport property (Macdougall et al., 2014; Woisetschläger et al., 2017).
15	What does that sponsor have in common with the RSV?	3&4	Literature	Shared values (Johanson & Roxenhall, 2009, as cited in Hessling et al., 2018; Macdougall et al., 2014; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and congruency between sponsors and sport property (Macdougall et al., 2014; Woisetschläger et al., 2017).

16	In general, why do you think sponsors choose the RSV?	3&4	Siegfried (2021)	Why do you think sponsors choose to sponsor your team?
17	How would you describe your relationship with the sponsors of the RSV? <i>Follow up:</i> If any, what does your interaction with sponsors look like during the day?	3&4	Literature	Probing that sponsorships are underlined by relationship marketing efforts (Farrelly & Quester, 2005b)

***Questions Only for Administrators Involved in Sponsorship Management:***

18	How do you build your relations with your sponsors?	3&4	Siegfried (2021)	How do you form these relationships?
19	What factors do you see as key to successful sponsorship relationships?	3&4	Siegfried (2021)	What factors do you see as key to successful sponsorship relationships?
20	Have you encountered any conflicts with your sponsors and if so, what was your strategy in dealing with it?	3&4	Siegfried (2021)	Have you encountered any conflicts with your sponsors and if so, what was your strategy in dealing with it?

***Final Question to Everyone:***

21	Is there anything else you would like to share about the RSV, its culture, and/or its sponsors?	2,3,4	Literature	"Is there anything else you would like me to know?" (Bolderston, 2012, p. 70) suggested final question for interview research
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## Appendix K – Interview Guide German

### Organisationskultur und gemeinschaftsbezogene Fragen

1. Was fällt Ihnen ein, wenn Sie an den RSV denken?
  - a. *Nachfrage:* Was legt dies konkret nahe/signalisiert dies?
2. Beschreiben Sie ein visuelles Bild dessen, was der RSV für Sie bedeutet.
  - a. *Nachfrage:* Welche Bilder würden eine Collage füllen, die für Sie den RSV beschreibt?
3. Was ist für Sie das Besondere am RSV?
4. Beschreiben Sie die Gefühle und Emotionen, die Sie als Trainer/Spieler/Mitarbeiter/Vorstandsmitglied mit dem RSV verbinden?
5. Was sind Ihrer Meinung nach einige Kernwerte des RSV?
  - a. *Nachfrage:* Wofür steht Ihrer Meinung nach der RSV?
6. Beschreiben Sie einen typischen RSV-Fan.
  - a. *Nachfrage:* Beschreiben Sie die Einstellungen und Überzeugungen eines Fans?
7. Welche Begriffe verwenden Mitglieder und Angestellten des RSV regelmäßig?
  - a. *Nachfrage:* Welche Bedeutung haben diese Begriffe für die Mitglieder und Angestellten?
8. Beschreiben Sie die Rolle, die der RSV in Ihrem Leben spielt.
9. Können Sie Aspekte Ihrer Erfahrung mit dem RSV identifizieren, die Sie dazu beeinflusst haben, weiterhin Mitarbeiter/Spieler/Trainer/ Vorstandsmitglied zu sein?

10. Fühlen Sie eine starke Bindung oder ein Gefühl der Verbundenheit mit Ihren (Team)Kollegen?
- Ja-Antwort: Können Sie diese Verbindung mit Ihren (Team)Kollegen für mich beschreiben?
  - Nein-Antwort: Warum denken Sie ist das so?
11. Wie würden Sie die RSV-Gemeinschaft beschreiben?
- Nachfrage:* Haben Sie ein Beispiel, wie die Gemeinschaft mit den RSV-Fans gepflegt wird?
  - Nachfrage:* Haben Sie ein Beispiel, wie die Gemeinschaft mit den RSV-Sponsoren gepflegt wird?
12. Welche Rolle hat der RSV für Sie im Großraum Wetzlar?
- Nachfrage:* Haben Sie ein Beispiel dafür, wie sich die RSV-Gemeinschaft über die Spiele hinaus zeigt?

**Fragen zu Sponsoren:**

13. Schreiben Sie den ersten Sponsor auf, der Ihnen in den Sinn kommt.
- Nachfrage:* Notieren Sie nun bitte den zweiten und dritten Sponsor, der Ihnen einfällt.
  - Nachfrage:* Notieren Sie nun bitte alle anderen Sponsoren, die Ihnen einfallen.
14. Zurück zum ersten Sponsor, den Sie aufgelistet haben: Warum ist Sponsor X Ihrer Meinung nach ein Sponsor?
15. Was hat dieser Sponsor mit dem RSV gemeinsam?



16. Warum entscheiden sich Sponsoren Ihrer Meinung nach generell für den RSV?

17. Wie würden Sie Ihr Verhältnis zu den Sponsoren des RSV beschreiben?

a. *Nachfrage*: Wie sieht Ihre Interaktion mit Sponsoren während eines Spieltages aus?

**Fragen nur an Administratoren, die am Sponsoring-Management beteiligt sind:**

18. Wie bauen Sie Ihre Beziehungen zu Ihren Sponsoren auf?

19. Welche Faktoren sehen Sie als Schlüssel zu erfolgreichen Sponsoren Beziehungen?

20. Gab es Konflikte mit Ihren Sponsoren und wenn ja, wie war Ihre Strategie, damit umzugehen?

**Abschließende Frage an alle:**

21. Möchten Sie noch etwas über den RSV, dessen Kultur und/oder die Sponsoren mitteilen?

## Appendix L – Focus Group Guide English

<b>Focus Group Question</b>	<b>RQ</b>	<b>Source of Question</b>	<b>Original Question</b>
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### **Organizational Culture Related Questions**

*Questions are asked together. Members may be asked to write down answers on index cards first. Then questions are discussed in the group setting.*

1	If you think of the RSV, what "words" or "feelings" come to your mind?  <i>Probe: What specifically suggests/signals this?</i>	2	Literature	Identifying the organization's artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions which are on top of organizational members' minds (Schein, 2010)
2	Describe a visual picture of what the RSV is to you. <i>Probe: What pictures would fill a collage that describes RSV?</i>	2	Bailey et al. (2019)	Could you describe a typical CrossFit Gym?

### **Organizational culture and context related questions**

*Questions are asked together. Members are asked to write down answers on index cards first. Then questions are discussed in the group setting.*

3	What do you see as unique about the RSV?	2&3	Literature	Disability sport as a unique context (Cottingham et al., 2014; Siegfried et al., 2021)
4	In general, describe the feelings and emotions that you associate with being a fan of the RSV?	2&3	Bailey et al. (2019)	In general, describe the feelings and emotions that you associate with being a member of the gym?

### **Questions are posed to the group:**

5	In your mind, what are some core values of the RSV? <i>Follow up: In your mind, what does the RSV stand for?</i>	2	Bailey et al. (2019)	What are the core values of CrossFit?
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6	Describe a typical RSV fan. (For example, how do they dress for a game, what behaviors do they exhibit at a game).  <i>Follow-up:</i> Describe their attitudes and beliefs?	2	Bailey et al. (2019)	Describe a typical CrossFitter. - How do they dress? - How do they behave? - Describe their attitude and beliefs?
7	What terms do fans of the RSV regularly use? <i>Follow-up:</i> What is the significance of these terms to fans?	2	Bailey et al. (2019)	What are terms that only a CrossFit gym member would know?
8	Describe the role the RSV has played in your life.	2	Bailey et al. (2019)	Describe the role CrossFit has played in your life?

### Sponsor Related Questions

*Members are asked to write down their response for the following question: (on index card)*

9	Write down the first sponsor that comes to mind. <i>Follow-up:</i> Note down the second and third sponsor you can think of. <i>Follow-up:</i> Note down the any other sponsor you can think of.	3	Literature	Top of mind' sponsorship awareness (Biscaia et al., 2014)
10	Coming back to the first sponsor you listed, Why do you think sponsor X is a sponsor?	3	Literature	Shared values (Johanson & Roxenhall, 2009, as cited in Hessling et al., 2018; Macdougall et al., 2014; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and congruency between sponsors and sport property (Macdougall et al., 2014; Woisetschläger et al., 2017).
11	What does that sponsor have in common with the RSV?	3	Literature	Shared values (Johanson & Roxenhall, 2009, as cited in Hessling et al., 2018; Macdougall et al., 2014; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and congruency between sponsors and sport property (Macdougall et al., 2014; Woisetschläger et al., 2017).

12	What influence does a sponsors support of RSV have on your purchasing habits?	3	Literature	Target market and fan base match (Brenner, 2003; Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013a; 2013b) and mutual beneficial sponsorship relationships and ROI (Siegfried et al., 2021)
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**Fan Connection and Community Related Questions**

*Focus group members are asked to first write down their answers, then the follow-up question is asked.*

13	On a scale from 0 to 10 plot yourself on your connection to the RSV. 0 is the lowest and 10 the highest. <i>Probe:</i> How closely connected do you feel with the RSV? <i>Follow-up:</i> Describe this connection with the club.	2	Bailey et al. (2019)	Do you feel a strong bond or sense of connection with your gym mates? - Probe for a yes response: Describe this connection
14				
15	What aspects of your experience with the RSV keeps you connected as a fan?	2&3	Bailey et al. (2019)	Can you identify any aspects of your experience with CrossFit that have influenced you to continue to be a member?
16	How would you describe the RSV community?  <i>Follow-up:</i> Do you have an example how community is fostered with the RSV fans?	2	Bailey et al. (2019)	Describe the CrossFit community? - Do you have an example of how community is fostered with the members at CrossFit? - And extends beyond the gym?
17	What role do you see the RSV play in the greater Wetzlar region? <i>Follow-up:</i> Do you have an example how the RSV community extends beyond the games?	2	Bailey et al. (2019)	Describe the role CrossFit has played in your life?

*Focus group members are given an handout and are asked to write down their answers to the following questions:*

18	What terms would you use to describe your relationship with any specific player or the team as a whole?	3	Siegfried (2021)	How do you form these relationships?
19	What have you heard about the management of RSV or personally seen or experienced?	3	Siegfried (2021)	What factors do you see as key to successful sponsorship relationships?

## Wrap-Up Questions

*Questions are posed to the group:*

20	Is there anything else you would like to share about the RSV, its culture, and/or its sponsors?	2&3	Literature	"Is there anything else you would like me to know?" (Bolderston, 2012, p. 70) suggested final question for interview research
Optional	Describe the routine you go through during a home game day. If any, what does your interaction with sponsors look like during the day?	2	Bailey et al. (2019)	Describe the routine you go through when at the gym. - Structure of workout?

## **Appendix M – Focus Group Guide German**

### **Fragen zur Organisationskultur**

*Fragen werden zusammen gestellt. Mitglieder werden gebeten, Antworten zuerst auf Karteikarten zu notieren. Anschließend werden Fragen mit der Gruppe besprochen.*

1. Wenn Sie an den RSV denken, welche „Worte“ oder „Gefühle“ kommen Ihnen in den Sinn?
  - a. *Nachfrage:* Was legt dies konkret nahe/signalisiert dies?
2. Beschreiben Sie ein visuelles Bild dessen, was der RSV für Sie bedeutet.
  - a. *Nachfrage:* Welche Bilder würden eine Collage füllen, die für Sie den RSV beschreibt?

### **Organisationskultur und kontextbezogene Fragen**

*Fragen werden zusammen gestellt. Mitglieder werden gebeten, Antworten zuerst auf Karteikarten zu notieren. Anschließend werden Fragen mit der Gruppe besprochen.*

3. Was ist für Sie das Besondere am RSV?
4. Beschreiben Sie die Gefühle und Emotionen, die Sie als Fan mit dem RSV verbinden?

*Fragen werden an die Gruppe gestellt:*

5. Was sind Ihrer Meinung nach einige Kernwerte des RSV?
  - a. *Nachfrage:* Wofür steht Ihrer Meinung nach der RSV?
6. Beschreiben Sie einen typischen RSV-Fan. (Zum Beispiel, wie kleiden sie sich für ein Spiel, welches Verhalten zeigen sie bei einem Spiel).
  - a. *Nachfrage:* Beschreiben die Einstellungen und Überzeugungen eines Fans?

7. Welche Begriffe verwenden Fans des RSV regelmäßig?
  - a. *Nachfrage*: Welche Bedeutung haben diese Begriffe für die Fans?
8. Beschreiben Sie die Rolle, die der RSV in Ihrem Leben spielt.

**Fragen zu Sponsoren:**

9. Schreiben Sie den ersten Sponsor auf, der Ihnen in den Sinn kommt.
  - a. *Nachfrage*: Notieren Sie nun bitte den zweiten und dritten Sponsor, der Ihnen einfällt.
  - b. *Nachfrage*: Notieren Sie nun bitte alle anderen Sponsoren, die Ihnen einfallen.
10. Zurück zum ersten Sponsor, den Sie aufgelistet haben: Warum ist Sponsor X Ihrer Meinung nach ein Sponsor?
11. Was hat dieser Sponsor mit dem RSV gemeinsam?
12. Welchen Einfluss hat die Unterstützung eines Sponsors des RSV auf Ihr Einkaufsverhalten?

**Fragen zur Fanverbindung und zur Gemeinschaft**

*Die Mitglieder der Fokusgruppe werden gebeten, zuerst ihre Antworten aufzuschreiben, dann werden die Folgefragen gestellt.*

13. Tragen Sie ihre Verbindung zum RSV auf einer Skala von 0 bis 10 ein. Hierbei ist 0 die niedrigste Verbindung (keine) und 10 die höchste.
  - a. *Nachfrage*: Wie eng fühlen Sie sich mit dem RSV verbunden?
  - b. *Folgefrage*: Beschreiben Sie diese Verbindung mit dem Club.
14. Welche Aspekte Ihrer Erfahrungen mit dem RSV halten Sie als Fan in Verbindung?

15. Wie würden Sie die RSV-Gemeinschaft beschreiben?

- a. *Folgefrage:* Haben Sie ein Beispiel, wie die Gemeinschaft mit den RSV-Fans gepflegt wird?

16. Welche Rolle hat der RSV für Sie im Großraum Wetzlar?

- a. *Folgefrage:* Haben Sie ein Beispiel dafür, wie sich die RSV-Gemeinschaft über die Spiele hinaus erstreckt?

*Die Mitglieder der Fokusgruppe erhalten ein Handout und werden gebeten, ihre Antworten für die folgenden Fragen aufzuschreiben:*

17. Welche Begriffe würden Sie verwenden, um Ihre Beziehung zu einem bestimmten Spieler oder dem Team als Ganzes zu beschreiben?

18. Was haben Sie über die Geschäftsführung des RSV gehört oder persönlich gesehen / erlebt?

### **Abschließende Fragen**

*Fragen werden an die Gruppe gestellt:*

19. Möchten Sie noch etwas über den RSV, dessen Kultur und/oder dessen Sponsoren mitteilen?

20. *Optionale Frage:* Beschreiben Sie die Routine, die Sie während eines Heimspieltages durchlaufen.

- a. *Folgefrage:* Wie sieht Ihre Interaktion mit Sponsoren während des Tages aus, falls Sie mit den Sponsoren interagieren?



## Appendix N – GDPR Data Privacy Consent English

### GDPR Data Privacy Consent

The University of Louisville may be treated as a Data Controller (as defined by the European Union (EU)'s GDPR Article 12) for individuals who are currently located in or are a citizen of the EU. Other countries may have applicable privacy laws that require notification or consent regarding the collection and use of your personal information.

UofL provides you with the following information:

- (1) The information you provide and questions you answer (including any personal data you provide) are needed in order for the study team and others associated with the study at UofL to conduct the study and evaluate the information provided in order to complete the study and associated results of the study. The purposes of this study are to examine (a) the elements of the organizational culture of that make a successful international wheelchair basketball sport club attractive to external partners and (b) what role relationship marketing (RM) plays in leveraging the cultural elements for sponsorship acquisition and retention. As a part of the processing of the information collected, UofL may provide the information to third parties in the regular course of business who are providing services for UofL for the study. Such third parties may be considered data processors and would be under an obligation to protect that information from disclosure. For additional details see UofL's Privacy Statement at <https://louisville.edu/privacy-statement>.
- (2) A refusal to supply this information could make it impossible for you to participate in this study as well as any obligations required by law.
- (3) Your information provided including any personal data may be stored and/or used from now until 3 years after your role as a participant in the study at UofL has ended.
- (4) You can withdraw your consent, if granted below, at any time, but this will not affect the processing of your information including any personal data based on your consent before withdrawal (and such withdrawal could impact our ability to continue processing your data as a study participant).
- (5) You have legal rights and remedies regarding any breach of your personal information.

Having read the above notice, I give my consent for the use of my personal data (including any sensitive data as defined in the GDPR) for the purposes outlined above.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Should you have questions about what information we collect and how we process it, please contact us via email at: [privacy@louisville.edu](mailto:privacy@louisville.edu) or [hsppofc@louisville.edu](mailto:hsppofc@louisville.edu).

## Appendix O – GDPR Data Privacy Consent German

### Einwilligung zum Datenschutz

Die University of Louisville kann als Datenverantwortlicher behandelt werden (wie in Artikel 12 der DSGVO der Europäischen Union (EU) definiert) für Personen, die sich derzeit in der EU befinden oder Bürger der EU sind. Andere Länder haben möglicherweise andere anwendbare Datenschutzgesetze, die eine Benachrichtigung oder Zustimmung bezüglich der Erfassung und Verwendung Ihrer personenbezogenen Daten erfordern. UofL stellt Ihnen die folgenden Informationen zur Verfügung:

- (1) Die von Ihnen gemachten Angaben und die von Ihnen beantworteten Fragen (einschließlich der von Ihnen angegebenen personenbezogenen Daten) sind für die Durchführung und Auswertung der Studie durch das Studienteam und andere mit der Studie in Verbindung stehende Personen an der UofL zum Abschluss der Studie und der damit verbundenen Studienergebnisse erforderlich.

Ziel dieser Studie ist es, (a) die Elemente der Organisationskultur zu untersuchen, die einen erfolgreichen internationalen Rollstuhlbasketball-Sportverein für externe Partner attraktiv machen und (b) welche Rolle Beziehungsmarketing bei der Nutzung der kulturellen Elemente für den Erwerb und der Beibehaltung von Sponsoren spielt. Im Rahmen der Verarbeitung der erhobenen Informationen kann die UofL die Informationen im normalen Geschäftsverkehr an Dritte weitergeben, die Dienstleistungen für die UofL im Rahmen der Studie erbringen. Diese Dritten können als Datenverarbeiter betrachtet werden und wären verpflichtet, diese Informationen vor Offenlegung zu schützen. Weitere Einzelheiten finden Sie in der Datenschutzerklärung von UofL unter <https://louisville.edu/privacy-statement>.

- (2) Eine Verweigerung der Bereitstellung dieser Informationen könnte Ihre Teilnahme an dieser Studie sowie gesetzlich vorgeschriebene Verpflichtungen unmöglich machen.
- (3) Ihre Angaben einschließlich jeglicher personenbezogener Daten können ab sofort bis 3 Jahre nach Beendigung Ihrer Teilnahme an der Studie an der UofL gespeichert und/oder verwendet werden.
- (4) Sie können Ihre unten erteilte Einwilligung jederzeit widerrufen, dies hat jedoch keine Auswirkungen auf die Verarbeitung Ihrer Daten, einschließlich personenbezogener Daten, die auf Ihrer Einwilligung vor dem Widerruf beruhen (und ein solcher Widerruf könnte unsere Fähigkeit zur weiteren Verarbeitung Ihrer Daten als Studienteilnehmer beeinträchtigen).
- (5) Sie haben Anspruch auf gesetzliche Rechte und Rechtsmittel in Bezug auf jede Verletzung Ihrer personenbezogenen Daten.

Nachdem ich den obigen Hinweis gelesen habe, stimme ich der Verwendung meiner personenbezogenen Daten (einschließlich aller sensiblen Daten im Sinne der DSGVO) für die oben genannten Zwecke zu.

Unterzeichnet \_\_\_\_\_ Datum \_\_\_\_\_

Sollten Sie Fragen dazu haben, welche Informationen wir sammeln und wie wir sie verarbeiten, kontaktieren Sie uns bitte per E-Mail unter: [privacy@louisville.edu](mailto:privacy@louisville.edu) oder [hsppofc@louisville.edu](mailto:hsppofc@louisville.edu).

## Appendix P – IRB Outcome Letter

Human Subjects Protection Program Office  
 300 E. Market Street, Suite 380  
 University of Louisville  
 Louisville, KY 40202



<b>DATE:</b>	October 04, 2021
<b>TO:</b>	Mary Hums, PhD
<b>FROM:</b>	The University of Louisville Institutional Review Board
<b>IRB NUMBER:</b>	21.0703
<b>STUDY TITLE:</b>	<b>THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND RELATIONSHIP MARKETING IN DISABILITY SPORT SPONSORSHIP: AN EXEMPLAR CASE STUDY</b>
<b>REFERENCE #:</b>	732862
<b>DATE OF REVIEW:</b>	10/01/2021
<b>CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS:</b>	Jackie Powell, CIP 852-4101 jspowe01@louisville.edu

This study was reviewed on 10/01/2021 by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board and approved through Expedited Review Procedure, according to 45 CFR 46.110(b), since this study falls under Category 7: Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

This study was also approved through 45 CFR 46.116 (C), which means that an IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to obtain a signed informed consent form for some or all subjects.

The following items have been approved:

Submission Components			
Form Name	Version	Outcome	
Submit for Initial Review	Version 1.0	Approved as Submitted	
Review Response Submission Form	Version 1.0	Approved as Submitted	
IRB Study Application	Version 1.0	Approved as Submitted	
Study Document			
Title	Version #	Version Date	Outcome
Recruitment Email Interviews English Clean	Version 1.1	09/15/2021	Approved
Recruitment Email Interviews German Clean	Version 1.1	09/15/2021	Approved

Recruitment Email Focus Groups English Clean	Version 1.1	09/15/2021	Approved
Recruitment Email Focus Groups German Clean	Version 1.2	09/15/2021	Approved
Interview Guide English	Version 1.0	09/01/2021	Approved
Interview Guide German	Version 1.0	09/01/2021	Approved
Focus Group Guide English	Version 1.0	09/01/2021	Approved
Focus Group Guide German	Version 1.0	09/01/2021	Approved
Research Protocol	Version 1.0	09/01/2021	Approved
Data Privacy Consent English	Version 1.1	09/29/2021	Approved
Unsigned Consent Focus Groups German Clean	Version 1.1	09/15/2021	Approved
Unsigned Consent Focus Groups English Clean	Version 1.1	09/15/2021	Approved
Unsigned Consent Interviews German Clean	Version 1.1	09/15/2021	Approved
Unsigned Consent Interviews English Clean	Version 1.1	09/15/2021	Approved
Data Privacy Consent German	Version 1.0	09/29/2021	Approved

IRB policy requires that investigators use the IRB “stamped” approved version of informed consents, assents, and other materials given to research participants. For instructions on locating the IRB stamped documents in iRIS visit: <https://louisville.edu/research/humansubjects/iRISSubmissionManual.pdf>

Your study does not require continuing review per federal regulations. Your study has been set with a three-year expiration date following UofL local policy. If your study is still ongoing at that time, you will receive automated reminders to submit a continuing review form prior to the expiration date. If you complete your study prior to the expiration date, please submit a study closure amendment.

All other IRB requirements are still applicable. You are still required to submit amendments, personnel changes, deviations, etc... to the IRB for review. Please submit a closure amendment to close out your study with the IRB if it ends prior to the three year expiration date.

Human Subjects & HIPAA Research training are required for all study personnel. It is the responsibility of the investigator to ensure that all study personnel maintain current Human Subjects & HIPAA Research training while the study is ongoing.

**Site Approval**

Permission from the institution or organization where this research will be conducted **must** be obtained before the research can begin. For example, site approval is required for research conducted in UofL Hospital/UofL Health, Norton Healthcare, and Jefferson County Public Schools, etc...

**Privacy & Encryption Statement**

The University of Louisville's Privacy and Encryption Policy requires identifiable medical and health records; credit card, bank account and other personal financial information; social security numbers; proprietary research data; and dates of birth (when combined with name, address and/or phone numbers) to be encrypted. For additional information: <http://louisville.edu/security/policies>.

**Implementation of Changes to Previously Approved Research**

Prior to the implementation of any changes in the approved research, the investigator must submit modifications to the IRB and await approval before implementing the changes, unless the change is being made to ensure the safety and welfare of the subjects enrolled in the research. If such occurs, a Protocol Deviation/Violation should be submitted within five days of the occurrence indicating what safety measures were taken, along with an amendment to revise the protocol.

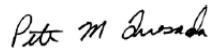
**Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others (UPIRTSOs)**

A UPIRTSO is any incident, experience, or outcome, which has been associated with an unexpected event(s), related or possibly related to participation in the research, and suggests that the research places subjects or others at a greater risk of harm than was previously known or suspected. The investigator is responsible for reporting UPIRTSOs to the IRB within 5 working days. Use the UPIRTSO form located within the iRIS system. Event reporting requirements can be found at: <http://louisville.edu/research/humansubjects/lifecycle/event-reporting>.

**Payments to Subjects**

In compliance with University policies and Internal Revenue Service code, payments to research subjects from University of Louisville funds, must be reported to the University Controller's Office. For additional information, please call 852-8237 or email [controll@louisville.edu](mailto:controll@louisville.edu). For additional information: <http://louisville.edu/research/humansubjects/policies/PayingHumanSubjectsPolicy201412.pdf>

The committee will be advised of this action at a regularly scheduled meeting.



Peter M. Quesada, Ph.D., Chair  
Social/Behavioral/Educational Institutional Review Board  
PMQ/jsp

We value your feedback; let us know how we are doing: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CCLHXRP>

## CURRICULUM VITAE

# Nina Siegfried

nina.siegfried@icloud.com – 270.702.7780

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### Curriculum Vitae

#### EDUCATION

- Ph.D. University of Louisville, Louisville, KY** **Spring 2022**  
Educational Leadership and Organizational Development,  
Specialization: Sport Administration  
Advisor: Mary Hums, Ph.D.  
**Dissertation:** The Role of Organizational Culture and Relationship  
Marketing in Disability Sport Sponsorship: An Exemplar Case Study  
*Recipient of the University of Louisville Fellowship*
- M.S. University of Louisville, Louisville, KY** **2019**  
Sport Administration  
*Recipient of the Fulbright Scholarship*
- B.B.A. Arnhem Business School, Arnhem, NL** **2018**  
Major: International Business and Management Studies  
Minor: Doing Business in China
- Minor Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, HK** **2017**  
Marketing
- High School Exchange Student, Owensboro, KY** **2011/2012**

#### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

**University of Louisville Health and Sport Sciences (HSS), Louisville, KY**  
**08/2019 – present**

*Instructor*

- Instructor of record
- Creating and improving class portfolios and lectures
- Instructing and assessing students

**University of Louisville Cardinal Athletic Fund (CAF), Louisville, KY 09/2018 – 05/2019**

*CAF Intern (volunteer)*

- Gain insight into the fundraising process
- Assist donors via day-today interaction through CAF main phone line and email
- Help build and maintain database of Student CAF membership
- Implement a social media plan for Student CAF to build awareness and provide relevant content

**RSV Sportvermarktungs GmbH, Wetzlar, GER**

**01/2018 - 06/2018**

*Bachelor Thesis Position*

- Researched the Strategic Paralympic Sport Partnerships for the professional wheelchair basketball team
- Met and interviewed current partners on their motives and goals in their partnership decision
- Attended and supported events for partners
- Conducted internal research on the brand

**Innova Market Insights, Arnhem, NL**

**02/2016 - 08/2016 & 09/2017 - 01/2018**

*Sales Support Analyst*

- Provided sales support through promotional campaigns, reports and analyses
- Researched German food retail market, specifically companies and market share
- Supported Customer Relationship Management
- Analyzed reports for customers and prospects based on FMCG Database

**Lufthansa Technik**

**03/2017 - 09/2017**

*Key Account Management Internship*

- Provided project support, planning and execution
- Analyzed databases (SQL & Oracle & Tableau)
- Acted as Key Account contact and support
- Provided independent reporting on weekly Aeroflot maintenance rates
- Independently researches and streamlined the communication and process for placing workorders with Lufthansa

**RSV Lahn-Dill Sportvermarktungs GmbH**

**01/2017 - 03/2017**

*Social Media Strategist*



- Developed and helped implement a comprehensive social media strategy for the professional wheelchair basketball team RSV Lahn Dill with a special strategy focusing on the Champions League.

## **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

### **Instructor of Record**

#### **Sport Marketing, University of Louisville**

*January 2022 – May 2022*

Primary instructor for the undergraduate Sport Marketing (SPAD 383) class of two sections (35 and 40 students) taught in-person

- Create and present lectures (2x a week for each section)
- Create and update case study
- Grading and feedback to students

#### **Sport Marketing, University of Louisville**

*August 2021 – December 2021 (teaching evaluation: 4.2/5)*

Primary instructor for the undergraduate Sport Marketing (SPAD 383) class of 35 students taught online

- Create and present lectures (Panopto software)
- Grading and feedback to students

#### **Sport Finance, University of Louisville**

*August 2021 – December 2021 (teaching evaluation: 4.38)*

Primary instructor for the undergraduate Financial Principles of Sport (SPAD 404) class of 36 students taught in person

- Create and present lectures (2x a week)
- Grading and feedback to students

#### **Issues and Ethics in Sport, University of Louisville**

*January 2021 – May 2021 (teaching evaluation: 4.37)*

Primary instructor for the undergraduate Issues and Ethics in Sport (SPAD 284) class of 35 students taught remotely

- Create and present lectures (2x week via MS Teams)
- Grading and feedback to students

#### **International Sport, University of Louisville**

*August 2020 – December 2020 (teaching evaluation: 4.47)*

Primary instructor for the undergraduate and graduate International Sport (SPAD 509) class of 36 students taught in virtually

- Redesigned the course content
- Create and present lectures (Panopto software)
- Organize and interview guest speakers
- Grading and feedback to students

#### **Sport Finance, University of Louisville**

*January 2020 – May 2020 (teaching evaluation: 4.51)*

Primary instructor for the undergraduate Financial Principles of Sport (SPAD 404) class of 21 students taught in person

- Create and present lectures (2x a week)
- Grading and feedback to students

**Sport Finance Online, University of Louisville**

*August 2019 – December 2019 (teaching evaluation: 4.22)*

Primary instructor for the undergraduate Financial Principles of Sport (SPAD 404) class of 35 students taught virtually

- Create and record lectures (Panopto software)
- Grading and feedback to students

**Teaching Assistant**

**Sport Entrepreneurship, University of Louisville**

*January 2019 – May 2019*

Teaching assistant for the undergraduate Sport Entrepreneurship class of 40 students

- Development of class portfolio
- Create class content and teach, grade and provide feedback to students

**Guest Lectures**

**Issues and Ethics in Sport, University of Louisville**

- Issues and Ethics in Disability in Sport **09&11/2021**
- Athlete Activism **02/2022**

**Athletics in Higher Education, University of Louisville**

**06/2021 & 06/2020**

- College Athletics Governance
- College Athletics Finances

**Sport Governance, University of Louisville**

**11/2020 & 11/2019**

- Sport in Germany

**Sport Finance, University of Louisville**

**11/2019**

- Economic Impact Analysis

**RESEARCH**

**Research Interest Area**

- Sport Partnerships in the Paralympic Sport Sector

**Refereed Journal Article**

**Siegfried, N., Green, E.R., Swim, N., Montanaro, A., Greenwell, C. (2021). An**

examination of college adaptive sport assets utilized in the sponsorship acquisition process. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 14, 483-500.

Hums, M.A., Frederick, E., Pegoraro, A., **Siegfried, N.**, & Wolff, E.A. (2020). What's in a name? Examining reactions to Major League Baseball's change from the Disabled List to the Injured list via Twitter. *Baseball Research Journal*.

### **Manuscripts in Preparation**

**Siegfried, N.** (In Review). An examination of relationship marketing as a strategy for acquisition of long-term strategic partnerships (sponsorships) in the disability sport sector.

**Siegfried, N.**, Greenwell, C. (In Progress). Disability Sport Sponsorship Perceptions. [IRB received & Data Collection in Progress]

Hums, M.A., **Siegfried, N.**, Frederick, E., Pegararo, A., & Wolff, E.A. (In Progress). The USOPC name change: The social media response. [Data collected & analyzed]

Kluch, Y., Frederick, E., **Siegfried, N.** (In Progress). Media Framing Analysis of Activism in German Sport. [IRB received & Data Collection in Progress]

Hu, T., **Siegfried, N.**, Cho, M. (In Progress). Sport Agents' Perspectives on the Marketing of Elite Disability Sport Athletes. [IRB received & Data Collection in Progress]

### **Research Presentations**

**Siegfried, N.**, Greenwell, C. (2022, May). Disability Sport Sponsorship Perceptions. Accepted for presentation at the North American Society for Sport Management held virtually.

**Siegfried, N.**, Hums, M.A., Kluch, Y. (2022, April). Understanding Organizational Culture in Disability Sport and its Relationship to External Partners: An Exemplar Case Study. Accepted for presentation at the annual conference of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport, Montreal, CAN.

Kluch, Y., Frederick, E., **Siegfried, N.** (2022, March). Media Framing Analysis of Activism in German Sport. Presented at the annual summit of the International Association for Communication and Sport, Philadelphia, PA.

**Siegfried, N.**, Hu, T., Cho, M. (2022, February). Sport Agents' Perspectives on the Marketing of Elite Disability Sport Athletes. Presented at the Applied Sport Management Association Conference, Indianapolis, IN.

**Siegfried, N.**, Green, E., Swim, N., & Montanaro, A. (2021, June). An examination of

college adaptive sport sponsorship assets and the role of cause-related marketing. Presented at the North American Society for Sport Management held virtually.

**Siegfried, N.** (2021, March). Leveraging Artifacts of a Paralympic Sport Organization to Increase Sport Partnerships: An Instagram Content Analysis. Presented at the annual summit of the International Association for Communication and Sport held virtually.

Hums, M.A., Frederick, E., Pegoraro, A., **Siegfried, N.**, & Wolff, E.A. (2021, March). What's in a Name? Examining Reactions to Major League Baseball's Change From the Disabled List to the Injured List via Twitter. Presented at the annual summit of the International Association for Communication and Sport held virtually.

Montanaro, A., **Siegfried, N.**, Swim, N., & Green, E. (2021, March). An examination of college adaptive sport sponsorship and the role of cause-related marketing. Presented at the Spring Research Conference held virtually.

**Siegfried, N.** (2021, February). Relationship Marketing: The Strategy for Acquisition of Long-Term Strategic Partnerships in the Disability Sport Sector. Top 3 Graduate Student Research Competition. Presented at the Applied Sport Management Association conference held virtually.

Hums, M.A., **Siegfried, N.**, Moorman, A.M. (2021, February). S.2330 - Empowering Olympic, Paralympic, and Amateur Athletes Act of 2020: Unintended Consequences. Presented at the annual conference of the Sport and Recreation Law Association Conference held virtually.

**Siegfried, N.**, Hums, M.A. (2020, November). Adaptive Collegiate Sport Programs: Inclusivity Starts with Resource Allocation. Presented at the annual conference of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport held virtually.

Hums, M.A., **Siegfried, N.** (2020, March). A Teaching Tool for Decision Making and Critical Thinking: Applying the SLEEP Model© to the USOC's Decision to Change its Name to the USOPC. Presented at the annual conference of the Sport and Recreation Law Association Conference, Louisville, KY.

#### Non-refereed publications

**Siegfried, N.**, Kluch, Y., Hums, M.A., Wolff, E.A., (2021). Activism starts with representation: IPC Section 2.2 and the Paralympics as a platform for social justice. *Olympic and Paralympic Analysis 2020: Mega events, media, and the politics of sport*. <https://olympicanalysis.org/section-5/activism-starts-with-representation-ipc-section-2-2-and-the-paralympics-as-a-platform-for-social-justice/>

Kluch, Y., **Siegfried, N.**, Hums, M.A., Wolff, E.A., (2021). At Tokyo Games, athlete activism takes front row seat despite IOC's attempts to silence athletes. *Olympic and Paralympic Analysis 2020: Mega events, media, and the politics of sport*. <https://olympicanalysis.org/section-5/at-tokyo-games-athlete-activism-takes-front-row-seat-despite-iocs-attempts-to-silence-athletes/>

**Siegfried, N.** (2021, April 6). A Foreign Territory of Opportunities: Experiences of a Sport Management International Student. *NASSM Blog*. <https://nassmblog.com/2021/04/06/a-foreign-territory-of-opportunities-experiences-of-a-sport-management-international-student/>

Hums, M.A., Wolff, E.A., & **Siegfried, N.** (2020, June 23). Making a case for athlete advocacy: Humanitarians, Olympism, and good governance. *Play the Game*. [https://playthegame.org/news/comments/2020/1006\\_making-a-case-forathlete-advocacy-humanitarians-olympism-and-goodgovernance/?fbclid=IwAR0zjeMLmJD0YREyUqR8pTAEVProxK6hmgncrkr3sPKW7mufsp0PVtA5lNk](https://playthegame.org/news/comments/2020/1006_making-a-case-forathlete-advocacy-humanitarians-olympism-and-goodgovernance/?fbclid=IwAR0zjeMLmJD0YREyUqR8pTAEVProxK6hmgncrkr3sPKW7mufsp0PVtA5lNk)

**Siegfried, N.** (2020, June 11). The “Fachhochschule” Experience: How USA Study Abroad Can Shape a Career. *Fulbright Germany*. <https://www.fulbright.de/news/our-fulbrighters/article/the-fachhochschule-experience-how-usa-study-abroad-can-shape-a-career>

## **BOOKS & BOOK CHAPTERS**

Presley, G., Shreffler, M., Hancock, M., **Siegfried, N.**, Cocco, A. (In Progress). *Global Issues & Ethics in Sport: A Practical Guide for Sport Managers* (3rd Ed.). Kendall-Hunt.

**Siegfried, N.** (In Press). Marketing in Disability Sport. In Pate, J. & Hardin, R., *Introduction to Parasport and Recreation*. Human Kinetics.

## **GRANT WRITING**

Frederick, E., Kluch, Y., Brown, L.E.C., Ferguson, T.L., Hancock, M., **Siegfried, N.** (accepted). *How can student-athletes utilize their media platforms for systemic change? Developing an evidence-based leadership program for strategic social justice communication*. ACC Innovation Initiative Research Grant Program fully funded by the Atlantic Coast Conference and the Center for Research in Intercollegiate Athletics at UNC-Chapel Hill in the amount of \$5,166.20.

**Siegfried, N.** (accepted). *The Role of Organizational Culture and Relationship Marketing in Disability Sport Sponsorship: An Exemplar Case Study*. Research Grant fully funded by the Graduate Student Council of the University of Louisville in the amount of \$500.

Cocco, A., Presley, R. (Co-PIs), Moorman, A.M (Investigator) & **Siegfried, N.**

(Implementation Manager) (submitted 2021, March, denied). *Achieving Sustained Social Impact through Sport for Tomorrow* (ASSIST). International Sports Program Initiative submitted to the Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Sports Diplomacy in the amount of \$2.1 M.

## **ACADEMIC AND INDUSTRY RESEARCH PROJECTS**

### **Thesis**

#### **Title: Strategic Paralympic Sport Partnerships for RSV Lahn-Dill, Wetzlar, GER**

*February 2018 – June 2018*

Bachelor thesis on “How can the RSV Lahn-Dill increase their strategic partnerships?” resulting in a strategy & framework for niche and Paralympic sports to acquire strategic partnerships and a specific recommendation and implementation for the RSV based on field and desk research. The thesis included a written research proposal and an oral defense (Grade 9.0 / A+) and was nominated for the FEM Afstudeerprijs, the faculty price for the best thesis.

### **Industry Research Projects**

#### **Cross-Border E-Commerce Plan, Arnhem, NL**

*Project Director, September 2017 – January 2018*

Desk and field research in China for a cross-border e-commerce plan with the goal of launching an existing Belgian praline brand in the Chinese market. Final presentation included strategic plan to enter the Chinese market.

#### **Customer Satisfaction Improvement of Lufthansa Passage Airlines Passengers during Internship for Lufthansa Technik (LHT), Frankfurt, GER**

*March 2017 – September 2017*

Research project on what LHT can do to increase the satisfaction of Lufthansa Passage Airlines passengers based on an analysis of the factors influencing customer satisfaction.

#### **Market Entry Strategy for Deep Water Energy, Arnhem, NL**

*Project Director, February 2016 – June 2016*

Research conducted for the company Deep Water Energy and its product the Oryon Waterwill in the Indonesian market. Desk research and field research were conducted by a team of six students. The final project plan was presented to the client. Additionally, we were nominated to present our project in front of an international jury during the Talent Event of the Arnhem Business School.

#### **Market Expansion Strategy Caffè Vergnano, X-Culture, Arnhem, NL**

*Research Team Member, September 2015 – December 2015*

X-Culture Project involved writing a business plan for a real company with a group of seven international students from Universities all over the world (USA, Pakistan, Oman, Germany, China). My main responsibilities were the project coordination, distribution and promotion strategy and identifying the market success factors of Caffè Vergnano.

**Operation Plan (OPL), Arnhem, NL**

*Head Researcher, February 2015 – June 2015*

Developed an HRQM plan for a fictitious business with the purpose of improving its overall performance, including setting up an implementation plan. Followed by an Advisory Report which was completed together with experts from other fields. Recommendations were presented to a jury.

**Business Plan Project (BSP), Arnhem, NL**

*Project Director, September 2014 – January 2015*

Business Plan for a fictitious, new, innovative product with a team of five international students in the areas of Marketing and Finance. Presented project in judged competition.

**SCHOLARSHIPS/AWARDS**

**Dr. M. Celeste Nichols Award**

*October 2021*

**Awarded by:** Women's Center, University of Louisville. One of three recipients from all disciplines across the University of Louisville. Award included \$500 to support academic and professional enrichment.

**Student Champion**

*April 2021*

**Awarded by:** President and Provost, University of Louisville

**2020 Profiles in Leadership**

*April 2020*

**Awarded by:** Office of Student Involvement, University of Louisville

**University Fellowship**

*August 2019*

**Awarded by:** The School of Interdisciplinary and Graduate Studies, University of Louisville. One of approximately only 25 PhD students selected from all disciplines across the University of Louisville. Four years award including tuition and stipend.

**Outstanding Graduate Student Award - Sport Administration**

*May 2019*

**Awarded by:** CEHD Honors and Scholarship Committee, University of Louisville

**Fulbright Grant**

*August 2018*

**Nominated by:** The German-American Fulbright Commission which is a binational agency funded by the U.S. and German governments serving to promote academic and cultural exchange between Germany and the U.S.A. through its scholarship program.

**Awarded by: The J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board (FFSB)** which is the presidentially appointed 12-member Board responsible for supervising the Fulbright program worldwide and approving selection of all Fulbright recipients. Full tuition funding for one academic year.

### **Holland Scholarship**

*August 2016*

**Awarded by:** The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science & The HAN University of Applied Sciences

One-time financial award meant for students who want to study outside of the European Economic Area (EEA). For academic year 2016-2017 a total of 36 scholarships were awarded. These scholarships were divided per semester amongst the four faculties. It is a very competitive award based on grades, motivation, and CV.

### **SERVICE**

#### **University Service**

**Learn Strategy L1 Subcommittee**, University of Louisville **01/2020 – present**

- Appointed and charged by Neeli Bendapudi, President

**International Recruitment Committee**, University of Louisville **10/2019 – present**

- Appointed as CEHD representative by Amy Lingo, Dean of the CEHD

**Club Programming Committee (CPC)**, University of Louisville **08/2019 – present**

- International Representative

#### **College Service**

**Student Mentor**, Arnhem Business School **02/2015 – 01/2018**

**Vice President & Secretary**, International Student Association (ISA) **08/2015 – 07/2016**

**ABS Representative**, Arnhem Business School **11/2015 – 06/2016**

**Editor & Chairperson Newsletter Team**, Arnhem Business School **08/2015 – 06/2016**

**Student Buddy**, Arnhem Business School **Intro Weeks 2015, 2016**

#### **Department Service**

**Student Engagement Committee**, HSS Department UofL **08/2019 – present**



### **Program Service**

<b>Student Research &amp; Professional Development Coordinator, UofL SPAD</b>	<b>09/2021 – present</b>
<b>Vice President, UofL Sport Administration (SPAD) Association</b>	<b>08/2019 – 05/2020</b>
<b>SRLA Conference Planning Committee, University of Louisville</b>	<b>01/2020 – 03/2020</b>
<b>Master Admission Interviews, SPAD Department UofL</b>	<b>02/2020</b>
<b>Social Media Director, UofL SPAD Association</b>	<b>09/2018 – 08/2019</b>
<b>Graduate Student Panel, SPAD Department UofL</b>	<b>08/2019</b>

### **Volunteer Service**

<b>Sustainability Volunteer, NCAA Final Four Green Team</b>	<b>04/2019</b>
<b>Researcher, Sport Market Research Institute, Breeders' Cup</b>	<b>11/2018</b>
<b>Volunteer, Urban Bourbon Half Marathon</b>	<b>10/2018</b>
<b>Social Media Coordinator and Strategist, IWBF Champions League</b>	<b>03/2017</b>

### **Professional Service**

<b>Social Media Coordinator and Strategist Muhammad Ali Center Athletes and Social Change Forum, Muhammad Ali Center</b>	<b>06/2021</b>
<b>X-Culture Associate Coach, Arnhem Business School</b>	<b>02/2016 – 05/2016</b>

### **Community Service**

<b>Volunteer, auction benefitting Tubac Center of the Arts' Hi-Art Program (\$16,725 raised)</b>	<b>2021</b>
<b>Speaker, Meet a German, Fulbright Germany</b>	<b>2019, 2020, 2021</b>
<b>Speaker, Reach the World</b>	<b>11/2018</b>
<b>University sponsored participant, HOPE Worldwide Great Santa Run</b>	<b>12/2017</b>