

Disability Sports from Charity towards Partnerships – Case: The Finnish Paralympic Committee

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<p>The main goal of this Master's Thesis is to analyse what motivates the business stakeholders to support disability sport. Future support from the government is uncertain so there is a huge need for this study to understand and attract more business stakeholders to support sports for people with disabilities in Finland.</p> <p>The Finnish Paralympic Committee (Suomen Paralympiakomitea ry) and the Finnish Sports Association for Persons with Disabilities (VAU ry) merged on 1.1.2020 forming one large disability sports organisation in Finland. Until 2019, the Finnish Paralympic Committee supported mainly elite sporting activities. From 2020, the newly formed Paralympic Committee supports a broad perspective of sports activities for people with disabilities.</p> <p>What are the existing business partners' reasons for cooperation? What do the partners expect from future cooperation with disability sports? This study gives concrete suggestions to improve business stakeholder communication to help associations, organizations, clubs and athletes to attract more business partners to support disability sports.</p> <p>The new non-governmental umbrella of disability sport organization requires its own strong fundraising operations and strategy to be able to support disability sports from children's to adults' and from hobby activities to elite sports. The subject is highly important as the Paralympic Committee seeks to support its members and other organizations organizing disability sports. Better understanding of business stakeholders will have a huge influence on the future of disability sports support.</p> <p>The literature review covers stakeholder communication, stakeholder management and corporate social responsibility (CSR). The study notes the special role of these theories in the non-profit and sports organization environment at the same time as it explains the special role of disability sport and the importance of the Paralympic movement.</p> <p>The research is based on a case study method with a constructive approach. The primary data consisted of semi-structured interviews with existing business stakeholders, which took place before the formation of the new organization. The analysis of the data draws on qualitative methods and quantification.</p> <p>The discussion explains the concrete findings and suggests a partnership stakeholder model based on the framework of a Key Account Management Relational Development Model. Supporting disability sports brings value for business stakeholders and is important for their corporate social responsibility (CSR) and brand image. All the interviewed partners (100%) would recommend cooperation with the Paralympic Committee to other companies. In the future, many companies in Finland could benefit from cooperation with disabled athletes and be part of the fundamental change from charity towards partnerships.</p>	
Keywords stakeholder communication, stakeholder management, corporate social responsibility, CSR, non-profit organization, sports, disability sport, Paralympic sports, Special Olympics, sports association, Finnish Paralympic Committee, case study	

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1. Introduction

Disability sport has a long history in Finland since the beginning of the 20th century. Over the past 100 years there have been many organizations supporting different physically and intellectually disabled people. This study focuses on the Finnish Paralympic Committee (later: Paralympic Committee) which until 2019 mainly supported elite sports activities. This merged in 2020 with the Finnish Sports Association for Persons with Disabilities (later: VAU ry) and it formed one large disability sports organisation in Finland.

The newly formed Paralympic Committee supports a broad scope of sporting activities for persons with disabilities in Finland. In the future, support from the government is uncertain, so there was a huge need for this study to understand and attract more business stakeholders to support disability sports. Sports organizations must have more resources to understand private sector support and this study aims to help by engaging with existing and new business partners.

The organizations operating with the disability sports need strong fundraising operations and a strategy. The subject is highly important and there is also a huge need to support other disability sports organizations in Finland. Succeeding in this matter will have a strong influence on the future of disability sport in Finland and will probably even positively influence its socio-economic impact.

The writer works at the Paralympic Committee. In 2018 the Paralympic Committee was able to hire one person to concentrate fully on business cooperation, probably the first full-time employee in this sector of disability sports. The main goal of this Master's Thesis is to find out what motivates the business stakeholders to support disability sports? What are existing business partners' reasons for cooperation? What do business stakeholders expect from future co-operation with disability sport?

1.1 Background

This introduction explains the background of the Paralympic Committee introduces Paralympic sports and the special role of non-profit and sports associations. The literature review consists stakeholder communication, stakeholder management and corporate social responsibility (CSR) in a non-profit and sports organization view and it describes the special role of the Paralympic movement.

The findings section includes the results of the research of the semi-structured interviews and workshop with the existing business partners. The suggestions section recommends

actions for various disability sports actors on how these organizations could attract more business stakeholders to support disability sports.

This research project started before the above-mentioned merger in October 2018 and the semi-structured interviews were completed before the decision to merge the two organizations was made. The workshop was organized in December 2019 as an important step before the actual merger took place on January 1st 2020. The final report was made available by the end of 2020.

Before this research there was only limited information available about business cooperation with disability sport in Finland. Hopefully, this study will encourage other research for example from the perspective of sports associations', clubs' or individual para-athletes' sponsorships.

This research started in October 2018 when the Finnish Paralympic Committee had eleven official business partnerships. All these organizations had a key person responsible for their cooperation with the Paralympic Committee. Ten of these eleven business partners were thematically interviewed starting from the end of 2018 and before the first important meeting regarding the possible merger in May 2019. In December 2019 a workshop took place for 39 attendees from an increased number of partners - 17 businesses. The final report was published in December 2020.

The research is based on a case study method with constructive approach. The aim of the study is to research existing stakeholders' perspectives and to collect data that can be used to develop these existing co-operation relationships further alongside attracting new business partners.

The main data collection method was semi-structured interviews which lasted 25 to 30 minutes each. They are analysed using qualitative methods. The second data collection method was a yearly workshop which was conducted as a focus group interview prior to the merger in December 2019. It is notable that the number of the business partners increased to 17, and all of these partners took part in the workshop.

The main findings of the research are described in the findings section of this thesis. The discussion section describes what the findings mean for disability sports in Finland and discuss value of this cooperation for the business stakeholders. The main findings delineate potential cooperation partners' combined values and develop a possible business stakeholder strategy for the organization.

The assumptions are that governmental financial support for sports will not increase. Sports and especially disability sports are in a great need of their own strong fundraising strategies and a business stakeholder value-based model. The background of this study is the great importance needed for understanding business stakeholder motivations in supporting disability sports. The umbrella organization in disability sports in Finland is Paralympic Committee.

1.2 Finnish Paralympic Committee

“The Finnish Paralympic Committee is a non-governmental umbrella sports organization for persons with disabilities in Finland. Paralympic Committee plans, executes and develops sports and physical activity for physically and intellectually disabled people, visually impaired people and transplant recipients.” (Finnish Paralympic Committee, 2020.)

“The Finnish Paralympic Committee wishes to raise awareness of the Paralympic Games as an elite sporting competition and to broaden our view of elite sports. It also encourages young athletes with disabilities to test their limits in sport and promotes cross-cultural communication between disabled athletes. The Committee promotes clean, fair and ethical elite sports. The Committee works in close cooperation with the Finnish Olympic Committee and it is a member of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC).” (Finnish Paralympic Committee, 2020.)

“Paralympic Committee offers knowledge and education that helps to develop accessibility in sporting facilities. Paralympic Committee is also a national sports federation which organizes sports activities for disability specific sports that don't have its own national sports federation in able-bodied sports (e. boccia and goalball).” (Finnish Paralympic Committee, 2020.)

There are broad variety of disability sport and especially disability sports organizations history in Finland from the beginning of the 20th century to this moment. Which will be discussed later in this study. The Finnish Paralympic Association was founded in 1994 and developed into Finnish Paralympic Committee in 2004. VAU ry was founded as an outcome of a merger of four disability sports organizations in 2009. In a process that occurred during this study, VAU ry and the “old” Finnish Paralympic Committee finally formed the “new” Finnish Paralympic Committee. From 2020, there is only one umbrella organization - The Finnish Paralympic Committee - supporting disability sports in Finland. Its name was decided in 2019. (Finnish Paralympic Committee, 2020.)

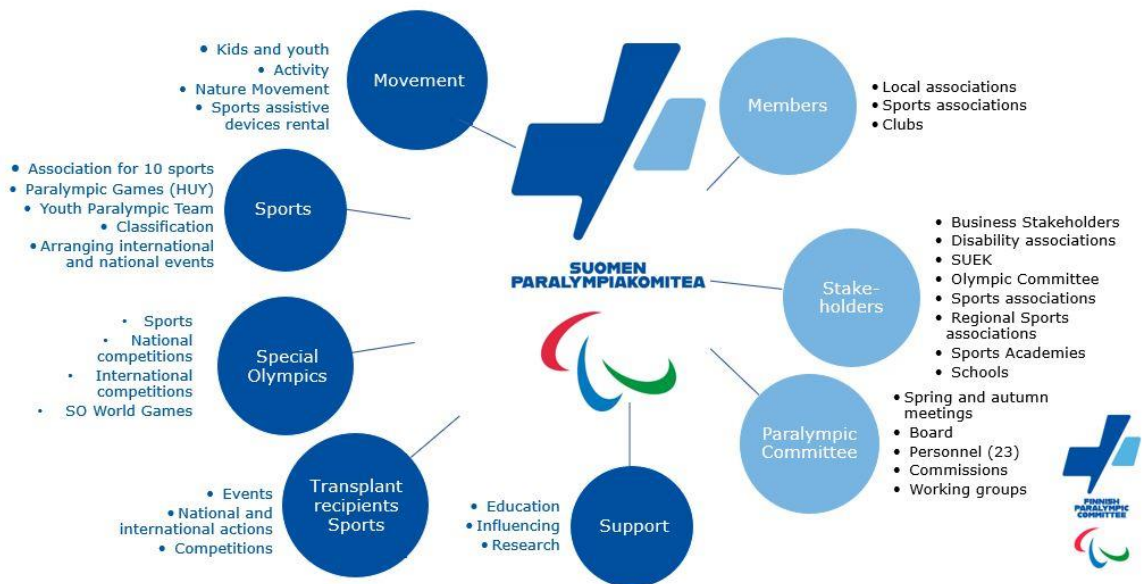


Figure 1. Association presentation. The Finnish Paralympic Committee in May 2020.

Until 2019, the Paralympic Committee organized activities for kids, youth and, for example, focused on classification and recruiting. However, it mainly supported elite sports. VAU ry organized most of their activities at a more grass-roots level. From 2020 all these activities are combined under one umbrella association. (Finnish Paralympic Committee, 2020.)

1.3 Scope and limitations

The primary focus of this study is on stakeholder management, because of the writer's own role in the organization. Related to that, this study also suggests recommendations to stakeholder communication, especially in corporate social responsibility perspective.

Developing stakeholder management gives the organization more knowledge and understanding from the stakeholder in communication perspective. This study and the proposed model gives tools for this specific organization, and also to other organizations supporting disability sport.

Various stakeholder groups of the Paralympic Committee would be interesting to research, but this study concentrates on the business stakeholders. The number of partners in 2018 set certain limitations for this study in the number of interviews. The research problem is important to solve in many sports organizations. Research problem and objectives are discussed more detail in the next chapter.

1.4 Research problem and objectives

The main problem and reason conducting this study is that the Paralympic Committee does not have enough information regarding its existing business partners' reasons for supporting disability sport. It aims to find out existing business partners' reasons for cooperation and to ascertain what the partners expect from their future cooperation with disability sports.

This research data is highly important in developing insights and attracting new partners to support disability sports. The main goal of this Master's Thesis is to find out what motivates the existing business stakeholders to support disability sports. There is only limited data available on existing business partners' reasons for cooperation and knowledge of what business stakeholders expect from the future co-operation with the Paralympic Committee. This study aims to develop cooperation partnerships.

At the beginning of the study in October 2018 there was already the possibility and public discussions were taking place surrounding the potential for a merger in 2020 between Paralympic Committee and VAU ry. This study has served as a background for the new disability sport umbrella organization as it began its operations in 2020.

This thesis also suggests how the Paralympic Committee and other sports organizations might attract more business stakeholders to support disability sports. It does not only have an organizational view, because increasing resources would help the situation of the athletes, coaches and other active members engaged in disability sport.

This study will aim to enhance the communication between business stakeholders and disability sport organizations. With more resources and financial background, disability sport would have the greater possibility to more visibility. Doing sports should be made possible for all.

This study tries to understand business stakeholders' views and improve cooperation with disability sport in general on a larger scale. This study itself will make disability sports more visible to a general audience (i.e., the public), existing disability sport business stakeholders and potential new partners.

Before this research there were only limited number of studies available on business stakeholders' perspectives on support disability sports in Finland, which makes this thesis highly important. Internationally, key research regarding business stakeholder

communications and visibility in Paralympic Sports and the visibility of the Paralympic Games have been conducted by Nielsen Sports (2018).

This thesis suggests ways that sports organizations or non-profit organizations might attract more business stakeholders to support disability sports. With better understanding of business stakeholders, this research will have a positive influence on stakeholder communication, stakeholder management and overall co-operation with business stakeholders. Its main goal is to develop greater understanding of business stakeholders, their values, and the kind of things they appreciate in their cooperation with disability sport.

Through semi-structured interviews this research examines the association's existing stakeholders' views regarding the most efficient communication tools, timings, plans and most important communication perspectives. This thesis suggests practical solutions and develops a business stakeholder model for the organization, which can be utilised in disability sport. Some questions in the interviews used a scale of one to five (i.e. Likers scale), which transformed the rather open-ended interviews into semi-structured format.

The aim of this work, then, is to communicate non-profit organizations and stakeholders' key values more efficiently, by influencing and attracting new business stakeholders. This study aims for better co-operation with the stakeholders, to communicate the association's and stakeholders' combined values more effectively, and to influence and attract new stakeholders for para sports. This study will be a tool to help the association develop communication that they represent same values as its sponsors.

1.5 Research questions

The main goal of this study is to find out the motivation of business stakeholders for supporting disability sports. The main research question is:

- **What motivates business stakeholders to support disability sports?**

The sub-questions are:

- What are the existing business partners' reasons for cooperation?
- What do business stakeholders expect from future cooperation with disability sport and the new Finnish Paralympic Committee?

The main research question and the sub-questions are implemented through a study that suggests how sports organizations or non-profit organizations may attract more business stakeholders to directly support disability sports.

Understanding the reasons for supporting para-athletes and the Paralympic Committee, will help to understand the reasons for supporting disability sport in general, sports associations, clubs, teams, and athletes.

Disability sport should not be seen as a cost, but rather as a possibility. For sports associations and clubs this also brings the possibility of implementing diversity, attracting more members, athletes in the organizations, and a view of sports that supports the persons with disabilities. This will bring together diverse views, teams and communities which has many positive potential outcomes.

2. Disability sports

This study emphasises the special role of the disability sport in cooperation with the business partners, and it also highlights the importance of the Paralympic Games and the Paralympic movement. Literature is discussed from a non-profit and sports association perspective.

In the literature it is noted that the non-profit associations are different from the business organizations, but the discussion of corporate social responsibility is used in trying to understand the motivations of business stakeholders in supporting disability sports.

To understand the main literature about stakeholder communication, stakeholder management and corporate social responsibility in this context, it is first important to discuss first the background and history of the disability sport in Finland and globally.

2.1 Background

The Finnish Paralympic Committee is the governing body of disability sports in Finland. Paralympic Committee is a non-governmental umbrella sports organization for persons with disabilities in Finland. Paralympic Committee plans, executes and develops sports and physical activity for physically disabled people, intellectually disabled people, visually impaired people and transplant recipients. Internationally disability sports organizations are divided into four different organizations, which are described in the following section. (The Finnish Paralympic Committee, 2020.)

The Paralympic movement is the best known, and according to Saari (2015, 18), the furthest in the process of integrating disability sport into the sports associations. The governing body of the Paralympic movement is the International Paralympic Committee, and the most important event of the disability sports is the Paralympic Games. Paralympics are held every other year around two weeks after the Olympic Games in the same locations and venues as the Olympics.

The Special Olympics is the world-leading organization for the people with intellectual disabilities, Saari (2015, 18) explains. The former United States president's John F. Kennedy's sister Eunice Kennedy Shriver started the Special Olympics movement in the 1960's, which was brought to Finland in the 1990's, and the first Finnish athletes participated to the Special Olympics Winter Games in 1993. The main event Special Olympics World Games is held every two years. (Finnish Paralympic Committee, 2020.)

In Finland the Finnish Association of the Deaf (Suomen Kuurojen Liitto) was founded in 1905 and it still operates as an individual organization. The International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (ICSD, 2020) is the main governing body responsible for the organization of Deaflympics and other World Deaf Championships. (Finnish Paralympic Committee, 2020.)

The European Transplant & Dialysis Sports Federation (ETDSF) and European Heart and Lung Transplant Federation (EHLTF) are responsible for the sports of their own patient group as individual organizations. The World Transplant Games Federation (WTGF) is the leading transplant organization recognized by the International Olympic Committee. The Finnish model where transplant sports are organized under the Paralympic Committee is not yet that common in other countries. The first transplant events were organized in 1978 and Finland has participated to the main international event, the World Transplant Games since 1979. As such, Finland has been active participant in the international events from the beginning of these events. (Finnish Paralympic Committee, 2020.)

One of the special aspects of the parasports, a rising topic especially under Paralympic Games, is classification. In classification athletes are grouped by their degree of the activity limitation resulting from a physical or intellectual impairment. According to the International Paralympic Committee (IPC, 2020) classification is the way to prevent to the least impaired athletes from always winning. This is why para-athletes are classified into categories for competition based on their impairment, which are called sport classes.

In disability sport there is a special International Paralympic Committee IPC classification system in place that is comparable with, for example, weight classes in non-disabled sports. According to the IPC (2020) "the IPC classification system determines which athletes are eligible to compete in a sport and how athletes are grouped together for competition. This, to a certain extent, is similar to grouping athletes by age, gender or weight." Different sports have their own classification systems.

To be able to understand disability sport and especially the Paralympic Games' classes, it is important to understand some of the classification system. This will give the observer the ability to understand and follow the Paralympic Games classes. Participants at the current Summer and Winter Paralympic Games (IPC, 2020) are drawn into different impairment groups: athletes with spinal cord injuries, cerebral palsied athletes, athletes with amputations, blind and visually impaired athletes and so called *les autres* athletes who do not fit to the other classes in the earlier explained IPC classification system.

2.2 The history of the disability sports globally

The first sport clubs for the deaf already existed in 1888 in Berlin, but it was not until after the second world war that they were widely introduced. The purpose of the deaf sports at that time was to assist the large number of war veterans and civilians who had been injured during wartime. (IPC, 2020.)

Dr. Ludwig Guttmann opened a spinal injuries center at the Stoke Mandeville Hospital in England in 1944 at the request of the British Government. After that rehabilitative sport evolved into recreational sport and later into competitive sport. (IPC, 2020.)

The first sports and leisure clubs in the world for disabled people in the early part of the 20th century were organized by the Disabled Drivers Motor Club in 1922 and the British Society of One-Armed Golfers in 1932. The first international organization responsible for a particular impairment group and its involvement in sport was called Comité International des Sports des Sourds (CISS) which was set up by the deaf Frenchman E. Rubens-Alcais in 1924 with the support of six national sports federations for the deaf. (Brittain 2010, 7.)

Five-time Paralympic-athlete, nowadays researcher and professor Ian Brittain (2010, 7-10) describes that Dr. Ludwig Guttman as the universally accepted founder of the “modern day” Paralympic movement. In September 1943 the British Government commissioned Guttmann as the Director of the National Spinal Injuries Unit at the Ministry of Pensions Hospital, Stoke Manderville. In the first Stoke Manderville Games in July 1948 archery was the only sport with 2 teams and all together 16 competitors competing. The Stoke Manderville Games between 1948 and 1959 are seen “the previous version” of the Paralympic Games.

Prior to the Second World War there is only little evidence of organized efforts to develop or promote sport for individuals with disabling conditions, especially those with spinal injuries who were considered to have no hope of surviving their injuries. After the war medical authorities were promoted to re-evaluate traditional methods of rehabilitation which were not satisfactorily responding to the medical and psychological needs of the large number of soldiers disabled in the war. (Brittain 2010, 7-8.)

In the early years much of the driving force for the growth appears to have been down to former patients of Dr. Guttmann, who were transferred to other spinal units and took with them what they had learnt, and their enthusiasm for it. Many of them returned year after year to take part in the Stoke Manderville Games. Dr. Guttmann’s persistence in forging a

link between the Stoke Manderville Games and the Olympic Games took a giant leap forward at the annual meeting of the World Veterans Federation in Rome in May 1959. Here, it was agreed that Rome would host the 1960 Games just a few weeks after the Olympic Games in the same city. (Brittain 2010, 10-11.)

Dr. Ludwig Guttman organized the first competition for wheelchair athletes in 1948, which he named the Stoke Mandeville Games. It was a milestone in Paralympic history and it started on the same date as that year's Olympic Games in London. The Stoke Mandeville Games involved 16 injured servicemen and women who took part in archery. These Games later became the Paralympic Games, which first took place in 1960 in Rome, Italy with 400 athletes from 23 countries. Since then the Paralympic Games have taken place every four years. The word "Paralympic" derives from the Greek preposition "para" (beside or alongside) and the word "Olympic". Its meaning is that Paralympics are the parallel Games to the Olympics and illustrates how the two movements exist side-by-side. (IPC, 2020.)

The idea for a Winter Paralympic Games was first suggested at the annual general meeting of the International Sports Organisation for the Disabled in 1974. The idea came from the Swedish delegation, known from their strong winter sports tradition. These first Winter Games only catered athletes with amputations or visual impairments and the first six Winter Games took place in Europe. (Brittain 2010, 13.)

The first Winter Games in Paralympic history were held in Sweden 1976, and since then they have taken place every fourth year like the Summer Games. Since the Summer Games of Seoul, Korea in 1988 and the Winter Games in Albertville, France in 1992 the Paralympic Games have taken part in the same cities and venues as the Olympics due to an agreement between the International Paralympic Committee and International Olympic Committee. (IPC, 2020.)

Finland has been one of the most successful countries in the Paralympic Games. In the Paralympic Winter Games Finland is one of the top countries and in the Summer Games among the 11 top countries. (Finnish Paralympic Committee, 2020.)

The Paralympic Games have speeded up the attitude change into more positive reactions towards disability sports, and in the 21st century this change has been strongly personified to wheelchair racer Leo-Pekka Tähti. A five time Paralympic champion. Tähti was in the running for the Finnish Athlete of The Year for the first time in 2004 and was selected as an Athlete of The Year in Finland in January 2017 when he received more than half of the

votes beating tennis player Henri Kontinen and Olympic bronze medalist boxer Mira Potkonen (Yle, 17.1.2017).

Tähti has been a great role model for the disability sports in Finland and he has shown the way for business cooperation. It is surprising that even though an athlete with disability has been widely recognized and has even been voted as an Athlete of The Year in Finland, there are still numerous business organizations in Finland who have decided to only support only the non-disabled sports. As a respected front figure, Tähti will hopefully make it easier for the other athletes and for future talent to find the sponsors for disability sports in the future.

2.3 The history of the disability sports in Finland

The disability sports started in Finland in the 1920s when the people with hearing loss started the sports actions, and other impairment groups were formed in the 1940s following the Second World War. The events before the 1960s were small and disability institutions and departments organized the sports. (Kummu 2007, 11.)

Competitions in the 1940s and 1950s for the people with physical disabilities and the visually impaired were organized in the form of summer and winter event days. In the beginning peer support was strong, and the events created the sense of community, which made it easier to be different. In the 1960s the competitive sports started to lift up, which was seen as a key to increasing appreciation for and the acceptance of disability sports. (Kummu 2007, 84.)

In the first disability sports book in Finland Leena Kummu (2007, 3) divides disability sports in Finland into three phases: 1. Disability sports organizing phase 1960-1980, 2. Disability sports stabilizing phase 1980-1994, and 3. Stabilized Paralympic Sports phase 1994-2005.

The 1960s brought about large changes to the field of disability sport. Disability sport started to organize under associations which built more permanent and wider base for disability sports operations. The events broadened and the different associations engaged in lots of equality work to gain a better standing in Finnish sporting culture. (Kummu 2007, 34.)

Disability sport organized in Finland during the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1980s the Finnish sports law (*Liikuntalaki*) brought disability sports onto a more equal footing within the culture of sports. Increased funding made it possible to scale up operations into wider

audience. The government took a stronger role in developing sports facilities for the disabled, and from the 1986 to 1990 governmental support for disability sport associations increased within the overall sports association support from 3.2 percent into 4.1 percent. This support increased when heading into 21st century. (Kummu, 47-56.)

At the beginning of the 21st century the strengthening position of the disability sports started to show in Finnish sporting culture (for example, in integrating the disabled athletes to non-disabled sports). Practically this integration means that sports associations take their particular elite sports under their responsibility. Integration has been a wide discussion since the very first days of organizing disability sports. Disability sports is a sector that fits very well into the integration process and when correctly organized results can be fruitful. (Kummu 2007, 77.)

The very first disability World Championship Games were organized in Finland in 2005, when the Athletics World Championships for people with disabilities were held in Espoo. These Games were organized two weeks after the Athletics World Championships in Helsinki. These first World Championships in Finland included 700 participants from 34 European countries and 12 countries outside Europe. (Kummu 2007, 68.)

For the first time the Paralympic athletes didn't have to pay competition fee at the 2004 Paralympic Games in Athens. One of the milestones for disability sport came at the 2008 Paralympic Games in Beijing, where disabled and non-disabled athletes had the same advantages and benefits: If the organizer compensated for the travel expenses of the non-disabled then the disabled athletes received the same compensation too. (Kummu 2007, 68.)

In Finland's history, the disability sport organizations have played a huge role in organizing disability sports and in increasing the support for and the visibility of the disability sport. Disability sport has a long history dating back to the beginning of the 19th century in Finland, and this organizing history and its possible future is discussed in the following section.

2.4 Organizing disability sports in Finland

The history of the Finnish disability sports can be tracked into the beginning of the 20th century and first decade of 1900 when first sports clubs for the deaf started to organize sports. The clubs founded the oldest organization for the deaf in 1920 (Suomen Kuuromykkäin Urheiluliitto) which operates still under the association called SKUL (Suomen Kuurojen Urheiluliitto). (Finnish Paralympic Committee, 2020.)

In the Winter War (1939-1940) and Continuation War (1941-1944) approximately 70,000 Finnish citizens were permanently injured. The first disabled sports association (Sotainvalidien Veljesliitto, sports section) was founded in 1945 directly following the war, and visually injured or impaired sports events started in 1948. The Second World War and the injuries sustained by its veterans were a remarkable reason as to why disabled sport was predominantly male for a long time, but the situation has been changing more recently. (Finnish Paralympic Committee, 2020.)

In the 1960s decade Finnish disabled sports started to re-organize. The sports section of the Sotainvalidien Veljesliitto was separated to form the Sotainvalidien Urheiluliitto in 1960. In 1962 the organization for the deaf (Sokeain Keskusliitto) established a sports section and this became an association (Suomen Invalidien Urheiluliitto) in 1964. Sports for the visually impaired stayed under the Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired's sports section (Näkövammaisten Keskusliitto), which was founded 1948, until the 21st century. The main reason for this was the well negotiated support from Finnish government's gambling monopoly's (Raha-automaattiyhdistys, RAY) budget, though they were still part of the main association. In 1980, Sokeain Keskusliitto, the Federation of the Blind changed its name to Näkövammaisten Keskusliitto and nowadays the association is named Näkövammaisten Liitto. One of the first disability sports associations Sotainvalidien Urheiluliitto (the War Invalid's Sports Federation) ended their operations in 2001. (Finnish Paralympic Committee, 2020.)

In the 1980s sports for persons with mental disabilities got a huge boost when two main mental disability organizations (Kehitysvammaliitto and Kehitysvammaisten Liikuntaliitto) started to receive governmental support. In 1994 three sports organizations for the mentally disabled (Kehitysvammaliitto's sports section & Kehitysvammaisten Liikuntaliitto & Förbundet De Utvecklingsstördas) merged into SKLU (Suomen Kehitysvammaisten Liikunta ja Urheilu ry). (Finnish Paralympic Committee, 2020.)

1994 was the year of new disability sport associations. In the same year SKLU, Finnish Paralympic Association and the Transplant & Dialysis Sports Federation ELLI (Elinsiirtoväen Liikuntaliitto) were founded. Until the beginning of 1990s the Finnish disability sports associations sent the Finnish athletes to the Paralympic Games. In 1994 the Finnish Paralympic association was founded to take charge of elite sports and they later changed their name into Finnish Paralympic Committee in 2004. (Finnish Paralympic Committee, 2020.)

In Finland the 21st century has resulted in an integration era for disability sports. The first large change was in 2010 when SIU (Suomen Invalidien Urheiluliitto), SKLU (Suomen Kehitysvammaisten Liikunta ja Urheilu), ELLI (Elinsiirtoväen Liikuntaliitto) and NKL sports section (Näkövammaisten Keskusliiton liikuntatoimi) formed VAA ry. (Finnish Paralympic Committee, 2020.)

Finally, on January 1st in 2020 VAA ry (founded in 2010) and the Finnish Paralympic Committee (founded in 2004) merged into one large umbrella organization for disability sport - except for sports organized for the deaf which is still under SKUL (Suomen Kuurojen Urheiluliitto), which was founded in 1920. At the end of 2019, the name of the new organization was decided to be the Finnish Paralympic Committee. (Finnish Paralympic Committee, 2020.)

The name issue of the new organization is also one topic researched in the business stakeholder semi-structured interviews, which will be discussed later in this research. Comments about the possible new name for the organization were also asked from business stakeholders in this research before the final decision. Until 2020, sports associations have taken responsibility for almost all disability sports where a natural sports association exists.

One of the great sports examples in Finland is judo, where the Finnish Judo Association has organized Applied Judo since 1989 - the same year as the International Paralympic Committee was founded - for people who have problems with movement, understanding, learning or visual impairment. The first Finnish Championships took place in 2002 and have been part of the overall Finnish Judo Championships since 2008. In Finland, Reino Fagerlund and Marita Kokkonen started the applied judo actions, and in 2019 Kokkonen even published a book on 30 years of applied judo. (Finnish Judo Association, 2020.)

Athletics has been one of the most visible disciplines in parasports, mainly because of the many successful wheelchair racers who have won medals at the World Championships and in Paralympic Games. In 2019, the board of the Finnish Athletics Association (SUL) made a remarkable decision, when the athletics parasports team was raised to an equal footing with other athletes under SUL (14.9.2019). The Parasports Athletics team was then integrated to the actions of elite sports, which made the para-athletes equal with non-disabled athletes, for example in funding and support for training. "I hope that other sports associations also learn from our example and advance the athletes' equality in their decision making", SUL coaching director Kari Niemi-Nikkola stated when summarizing the decision.

The new Finnish Paralympic Committee has close relations and many joint operations with the Finnish Olympic Committee and their offices are located in the same building in the Pitäjänmäki, district of Helsinki. After 2020, for the first time the Olympic Team Finland and Paralympic Team Finland will head to the next Olympic and Paralympic Games under same look called “The Northern Stars” (“Pohjoisen Tähdet”).

For future consideration, Saari (2020) describes in an article how sports associations in Finland, who are responsible their disability sports activities, have changed to become more inclusive organizations. The Olympic and Paralympic Committees of other countries (for example the Netherlands, Norway and United States) have already merged and formed one organization.

In the future this kind of one organization umbrella model could be possible to consider also in Finland. As a good example of the cooperation, on June 23rd, 2020 The United States celebrated a joint Olympic & Paralympic Day for the first time ever (IPC, 23.6.2020). Earlier the day had been The Olympic Day. Social media was filled with the celebration for this special day when Olympic and Paralympic movement celebrated together.

At an international level, Saari (2020) discusses possible options for the future of the International Paralympic Committee and the Paralympic Games. In the sight of processes increasing integration, there could be, for example, the possibility of integrating the Olympic and Paralympic Games. The Games are already organized in the same venues and cities, but with two weeks gap between.

Saari (2020) discusses how fully integrated Games could be an opportunity, but it would bring logistic challenges, possible classification changes and disabled athletes would not probably get the recognition that they do in the existing type of Paralympic Games. The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) already have close relations, and in 2020 they signed contract until 2032, which binds them strongly together about partnerships and business cooperation.

2.5 Cooperation with the business stakeholders

The early years of the disability sports organizations in the 1990s were difficult because of a lack of resources. A promised increase of the governmental support from the budget of the Ministry of Education did not materialize because of the recession and its influences in Finland. (Kummu 2007, 17 & 62.)

In 1994 the then existing Finnish Paralympic Association received support from the Ministry of Education first via Finnish Olympic Committee, and later as an individual association. Its first actual employee was hired in 1999, its second for coaching was hired in 2001 and a third responsible for marketing was hired in 2006. After the 2000 Paralympics in Sydney, the governmental support for disabled elite sports was changed to more be result-based, which meant that since 2002 support was directed to elite sports and national teams. This was a huge change towards more professional disability sports. (Kummu 2007, 17 & 61-62.)

In the beginning of the 21st century support for the Paralympic Committee mainly came from the government and Olympic Committee. Disability sports only had a few sponsors and their meaning to the financing of parasports was minimal. The biggest challenge was to get private businesses to support parasports. This has slowly started to change but has been steady increasing at the beginning of the 21st century. Finally, the Finnish Paralympic Committee negotiated three long sponsorship contracts in 2005. The most important aspects have been hard work, the increasing visibility of disability sports in the media, especially during the Paralympic Games, and that values match well with business stakeholders. Because of increased professionalism, disability sports have become more suitable targets for media attention and for companies. (Kummu 2007, 92.)

In 21st century business stakeholders started to understand the benefits associated with supporting disability sports in Finland, yet there are still lots of companies who have decided to only support the non-disabled sports and athletes. During the Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro in 2016 there was nine companies officially supporting Paralympic Team Finland at the Paralympic Games. In 21st century word parasport has started to replace disability sport and cover most of the events and activities around disability sports. This phenomenon influences on this study, where both terms are used.

The success of para-athletics star Leo-Pekka Tähti – Finland's 2016 Athlete of The Year - has boosted the meanings associated with and visibility of strong and emotional stories of the disabled athletes. Paralympic Team Finland, which heads to the Paralympic Summer and Winter Games every second year, has become more and more well-known in Finland and overseas.

Until the 2018 Paralympics in Sochi the funding from the business stakeholders was raised mainly by the Paralympic Committee's secretary general. However, at the end of 2018 the Paralympic Committee was able to hire probably the first full-time employee in

disability sports, to concentrate fully on cooperation with the business stakeholders. From the Rio Paralympics in 2016 to 2020 the number of companies supporting the Paralympic Committee has more than doubled. This study aims to understand this phenomenon.

Before the new organization started operating, support from business stakeholders was only approximately 20 percent of the funding received for the Paralympic Committee and just 2-3 percent of the funding received by VAU ry. (Secretary General Riikka Juntunen, 31.10.2020.)

How does the future look like in the next five years? Secretary General of the Paralympic Committee says that the share of the funding from the corporate partners will increase, despite fact that the economic situation is challenging due to the COVID-19 pandemic. "Society is going through a change, but I believe that the values that parasports represent are experienced more so that people want to show their support" (Riikka Juntunen, 31.10.2020).

If we go even further ten years from now, despite future challenges, Juntunen sees that the curve for business partners supporting parasports as continuing to grow. "The societal changes are slow. If the Olympic Committee and Paralympic Committee would be united during the next ten years in Finland, I hope the positive development will continue to show" (Riikka Juntunen, 31.10.2020).

3. Literature review

The literature review of this study consists three key topics: stakeholder management, stakeholder communication and corporate social responsibility (CSR). The literature pays particular attention to the “Key Account Management Relational Development Model” by Jobber and Lancaster (2015, 278). This model is used to combine the path from charity towards partnerships.

Stakeholder communication is important at every level of cooperation. Stakeholder communications is the key to being able to understand the nature of the communication, and the methods that would be especially suitable from an association’s perspective and for corporate communication.

Corporate social responsibility is important to understand from a non-profit perspective since the business partners are having their corporate social responsibility strategy as an important part of their actions. These three are the main literature of this study, while branding and sponsorship are briefly discussed.

3.1 Stakeholder Management

The most popular definition of a stakeholder is by Freeman (1984, 46), who states that a stakeholder is “any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement of an organization’s objectives”.

From a corporate social responsibility perspective stakeholders are the objects that the company is trying to influence or can influence with their own actions. And the objects that with their own actions influence, or can influence, also influence the company directly or indirectly. Stakeholders can be divided into three levels by their relation to their official status from the view of the company: 1. internal stakeholders (e. g. owners, management, employees), 2. economic stakeholders (partners, subcontractors, customers) and 3. social stakeholders (media, non-governmental organizations, industry sector organizations, the state and cities). (Harmaala & Jallinoja (2012, 65.)

In principle, stakeholders are a reference group. In this research the researched stakeholder group are business stakeholders that the association collaborating or aiming collaborate with. Partners are the organizations that engage and aim to do actions for

common goals. Partnerships are cooperation relationships, and especially in a non-profit environment, key partnerships can be seen as deep cooperative relationships.

Sponsorships and sponsors are often seen as stakeholders that support, for example, sports organizations and athletes with money under agreed terms and conditions (Valanko 2009, 49). Sponsorship will be discussed separately later in this literature.

Stakeholders can be mapped in different ways. A common way is to divide them into primary stakeholders and secondary stakeholders along with marginal stakeholders. The stakeholders can be further divided into different segments based on the strength or weakness of the relationship. Primary stakeholders can be, for example, organization employees, customers and sponsors. Other typical groups can be governmental influencers, decision makers, companies, schools and educational organizations, associations, other non-profits and the media. (Juholin 2009, 88.)

After the stakeholder mapping Juholin (2009, 88) suggests finding out what these stakeholders think about the cooperation, and what the expectations of different stakeholder groups are with regard the cooperation. Great tools for this would be, for example, questionnaires, or for more detailed information, thematic interviews and/or workshops. Stakeholder strategic planning is not only about knowing the stakeholder groups. Organizations must also know their key stakeholders.

The stakeholders of the Paralympic Committee can be divided in rehabilitation and health care institutes, sports institutes, social services, schools and educational institutions, public administration and the public sector, international cooperation organizations, business stakeholders, partners and sponsors. This study focuses on the business stakeholders which are determined as primary stakeholders from an economical perspective.

In prioritizing the stakeholders for public relations Rawlins (2006, 1-15) suggests stakeholder mapping in four steps:

1. Identify, recognize and acknowledge stakeholder and find the linkages
2. Determine the influence and interest of the stakeholders
3. Prioritize the stakeholders by level of involvement and activity
4. Establish a communications strategy and management plan and engage

In discussing the history of stakeholder management, Freeman et. al. (2010, 3) argue that “the business world of the twenty-first century has undergone dramatic change”. The

reasons for this change, they suggest, are globalization, the rise of information technology, liberalization of states, centralized state planning and increasing societal awareness. To understand this change over the last thirty years, "Stakeholder theory" has been developed.

Stakeholder theory answers the following three problems according to Freeman et al. (2010, 4-5): 1. The problem of value-creation and trade, 2. The problem of the ethics of capitalism and 3. The problem of managerial mindset. Freeman and colleague's stakeholder theory suggests that if we adopt this theory, the relationship between businesses, groups, stakeholders and individuals who are affected to it, can better solve these three problems.

The basic idea of the Freeman et al.'s (2010) stakeholder theory is that the interests of stakeholders are joint, and when utilized to create value, organizations must focus on how value gets created for each and every stakeholder. How value gets created is effected by the actions of others, as well as managers.

Stakeholder theory has been credited to the work of Edward Freeman in the 1980's, but the importance of stakeholders was noticed decades before. Chandler points out the importance of Howard Bowen's work in the 1950's in which the idea of stakeholders as "participation of workers, consumers and possibly other groups in business decisions" was developed. Chandler draws on a definition of a stakeholder by Eric Rhenman in 1964: "Stakeholders in an organization are the individuals and groups who are depending on the firm in order to achieve their personal goals and on whom the firm is depending for its existence". (Chandler 2017, 72.)

These views from the 20th century have a strong business mindset. Chandler, also expert in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), suggests the following definition to a stakeholder: "Any entity who is affected by the organization (either voluntarily or involuntarily) and possesses the capacity to affect the organization". (Chandler 2017, 72.)

This view has a much wider perspective on stakeholders than in past decades. CSR must also be carefully considered in the stakeholder management. It is important to understand how it affects the actions of the different organizations. The stakeholders may act different for example in the strong corporate responsibility related organizations.

When organizations seek to first answer the question *Who is a stakeholder?*, the second question that Chandler (2017, 78) follows with is highly important but more difficult to answer: *When interests conflict, which stakeholders should be prioritized?*

In my experience, this answer is not often prepared. Of course, on the other hand, this can depend on the type of the conflict where some issues are more important to certain organizations than they are to others. On the other hand, in stakeholder management in different organizations these issues are important to map and understand. One must be well prepared for possible conflict situations.

Harmaala & Jallinoja (2012, 75) notice an important view of the existing partnerships especially on the corporate social responsibility (CSR) view. Charity, fundraising campaigns or better benefits for personnel are great examples of voluntary activities that exceed the actual legal requirements of corporations. Especially, social media has made possible and easier for both customers and partners to participate in deciding the objects.

A strong stakeholder perspective is present in Strategic Corporate Social Responsibility (strategic CSR), where an organization recognizes the expectations of its stakeholders. Corporate social responsibility will be discussed later in this study, but what makes this stakeholder perspective strategic, is that corporate social responsibility goals and actions are a key part of the business strategy. (Harmaala & Jallinoja 2012, 77.)

Creating Shared Value (CSV) links strongly with the stakeholder co-creation perspective. As an example, Michael Porter sees the CSV model as a crucial part of business accountability and competitive advantage in markets. In this model the actions for the society and economic objectives are linked to business and decisions are made with a view of maximizing profits through a cost-advantage analysis. The aim of the co-creation is to create business models that strengthen the organization's profitability and support solving the environmental and societal issues. (Harmaala & Jallinoja 2012, 80.)

Corporate reputation influences the success of the company. A reputation is based mainly on the corporation and its stakeholders' relationship. By noticing the needs of the stakeholders, the organization is in the short term trying to improve its reputation, competitiveness and stakeholder loyalty. In the longer term, the company reaches competitive advantage and its ability to make profits increases. The importance of reputation has increased at the same time as the role of the media has increased. The media, one of the stakeholders, aims to reveal issues that can harm the company's reputation. That is why

leading by reputation gives strong motivations for companies to engage in voluntary corporate social responsibility. (Harmaala & Jallinoja 2012, 96.)

Duckworth & Moore (2010, 15) emphasize that “if members of an organization are behaving with accountability, transparency and ethics, they are already respecting some of the interests of their stakeholders”. They see that this principle goes beyond just accountability, transparency and ethical behavior. Respecting the dependency of interests, for example, between nonprofit organization and its business stakeholders is a key principle of social responsibility. The Respect for Stakeholder Interests -principle in the ISO 26000 program, is a recognition that without stakeholders and their interests, the organization itself cannot exist.

Stakeholder management gives an actual solution for the new organization in managing the stakeholders. As a conclusion the future of successful stakeholder management is a great value-adding combination of stakeholder management, understanding of social responsibility and what it means to the stakeholders and clear communication between stakeholders. Based on this example and on the non-profit view, the sponsors or business stakeholders are divided to Main Partners and Partners based on the cooperation inputs.

Stakeholder mapping, analysis and these questionnaires and semi-structured thematic interviews are the basis of the stakeholder communication. The planning and execution of the described mapping of stakeholder communication is be discussed in the next chapter.

3.2 Towards Partnership-KAM

Jobber & Lancaster (2015, 278) describe the key account management (KAM) in a “Key account management relational development model”. This model is divided simply in five phases: 1. Pre-KAM, 2. Early-KAM, 3. Mid-KAM, 4. Partnership-KAM and 5. Synergistic-KAM.

Different partners can be on different levels, depending for example on the level of engagement, active operations, trust, objectives and partnership length. The most important theme of these five is the partnership-KAM.

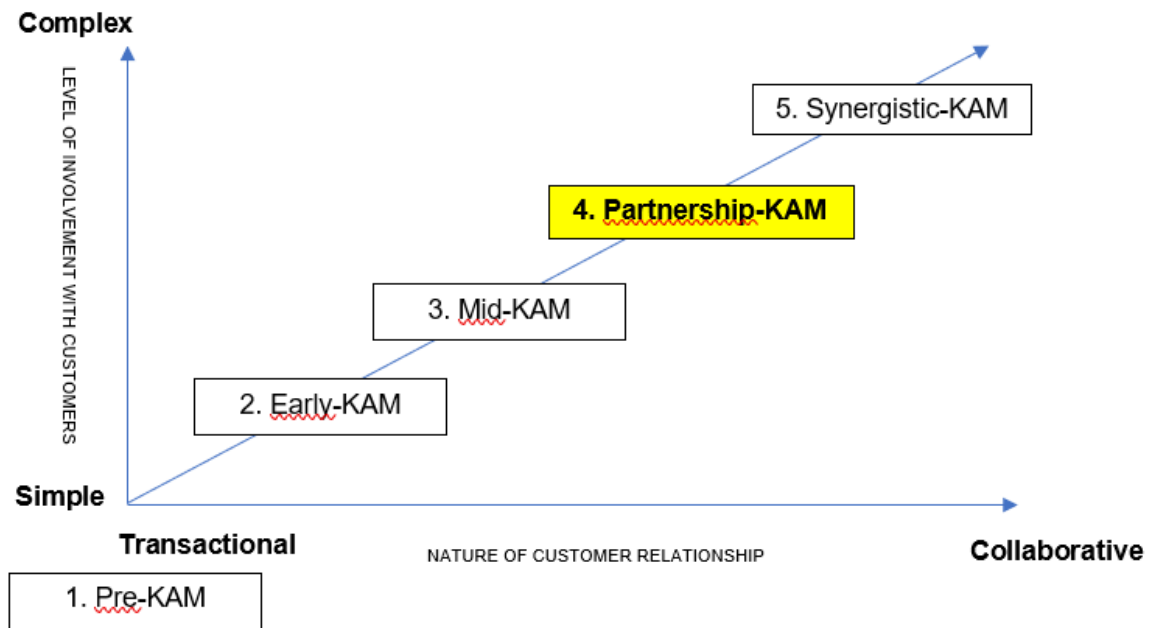


Figure 2. Key account management relational development model. (Jobber & Lancaster 2015, 278.)

In Jobber’s & Lancaster’s (2015, 278) *Key Account Management Relational Development Model* the first phase is Pre-KAM. Here the task is to identify those accounts with the potential for moving towards key account status and avoid wasting investments on the accounts that lack the potential. Here are the prospects, not the existing partners. This phase is important to recognize to be able to attract new partners.

The second phase of the framework is Early-KAM. Jobber & Lancaster (2015, 278) describe this level as involving the exploration of opportunities for closer collaboration in identifying the motives, culture and concerns of the customer. In this phase you need to convince the customer of the benefits of being a preferred customer. In this model most of the communication is through one salesperson or key account manager which makes this a fragile relationship, especially if some problems arise.

The third phase of the Jobber’s & Lancaster’s (2015, 278) framework is Mid-KAM where the trust has been established and the range of contracts or joint actions increase. These actions can include for example social events that help to deepen the relationships between the two organizations.

The fourth phase of the Key Account Management Relational Development Model by Jobber & Lancaster (2015, 279) is Partnership-KAM. This stage is where the “buying” organization sees the other party as an important strategic resource. Here the level of trust is

sufficient for both parties also to be willing to share sensitive information. Here actions move to joint problem-solving, collaborative product development and for example training for the other party's staff members.

Jabber and Lancaster (2015, 279) also describe an ultimate stage of the relational development model: Synergistic-KAM. Here the organizations see each other not as two separate organizations, but part of a larger entity together where for example joint research and development take place and decision making includes joint business planning.

3.3 Stakeholder Communication

Stakeholder communication is chosen to the main literature instead of marketing communications, which is only briefly discussed, because of the importance of the business stakeholders in providing disability sport with resources and value-based co-operation. Resources for the marketing communications are limited, and during the time of the study business stakeholders and stakeholder communication are more relevant in this value-based environment.

Cornelissen (2014,7) summarizes communications as “the tactics and media that are used to communicate with internal and external groups” and the strategies used are the ways or means in which the organization objectives are to be achieved and put into effect.

In corporate communications the management of relationships is one of its main purposes in theory and practice (Cornelissen 2014, 41). Stakeholder management in a non-profit environment was already discussed in the last chapter, where stakeholder management and communications were explained as needing a strong link with different stakeholder groups in order to succeed.

Stakeholder communications is important for understanding the nature of the communication and methods that would be especially suitable for corporate communication. Corporate communication has strong links to public relations. Stakeholders have been identified in the business literature according to their relationships to organizations. Publics, in the public relations and other mass media literature, are often identified according to their relationship to messages. (Rawlins 2006, 1-15.)

Stakeholder communication has a key role in stakeholder management as organizations move towards names and faces orientation with specific identification of and communication with stakeholders. According to Rawlins this is the key to avoid the anxiety caused by

facing huge number of persons who have interest in the organization or are affected by the organization. (Rawlins 2006, 1-15.)

Stakeholder communications and strategies depend on whether the stakeholders are supportive or non-supportive and active or inactive. Organizations should develop strategies for stakeholder communications based on four groups: advocate stakeholders (active and supportive), dormant stakeholders (inactive and supportive), adversarial stakeholders (active and non-supportive), and apathetic stakeholders (inactive and non-supportive). (Rawlins 2006, 1-15.)

For the non-profit organizations it is highly important to understand the two-way stakeholder mapping perspective. From a non-profit perspective, organizations often with the limited resources, should direct their communications towards their advocate stakeholders. From a corporate perspective, a non-profit sports organization that organizes the disability sports is probably often mapped within the societal stakeholder group. The reason for this is that the support from the companies could be considered in the same stage as the support for the other non-governmental organizations.

Considering the support from business organizations this two-way mapping is important to discuss and understand. Non-profit organizations work for common good, and can sometimes see each other as competitors, but hopefully these organizations rather see others as partners working towards common good. With cooperation the non-profit or other sports organizations are stronger.

Why is stakeholder communication important? Developing positive relationships and open two-way communication with stakeholders is a necessity for organizations: "The traditional management tendency is to respond to the squeaky wheel stakeholder." This means that if the organization has not mapped and prioritized its stakeholders and their relationships. The main partners, for example, would not get the attention they deserve and the "squeaky wheel stakeholder" may get more attention from the most important ones. (Rawlins 2006, 1-15.)

Stakeholder communication strategy and plan gives actual solution for the non-profit organizations communicating with the business stakeholders. The partnerships between non-profit organizations and business partners are often good way to think of the common values and communicate about them. One of the most important issues for the stakeholder communication is to communicate clearly about the organization's values. Villanen (2016, 67) argues that the values are an important part of the corporation and its

individual personality. Values give individuals or organizations the possibility of prioritizing different issues and values lead the behaviour. Values are often hard to communicate because of their abstract nature and they include emotions.

The values are important part of the discussion in this study. Values describe the rules of the game that are used in implementing the strategy. They give good guidance and background for making decisions in the different levels of the organization. This makes it also for smaller teams easier to guide their own actions. When corporations understand the highly important meaning of the value-based thinking, they get more power for their everyday actions. (Villanen 2016, 70.)

Juholin (2009, 40) sees that the more a community succeeds, the better it can consider the needs and hopes of its stakeholders, and in the public sector actions and conditions determine by how useful citizens think organizations to be. According to Juholin (2009, 40) in the public sector direct relationships between service users' satisfaction and social justification are not seen in the same way as they are within business organizations.

Highly important part of the stakeholder communication in a non-profit environment links to understand the basis of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which will be discussed in the next chapter.

3.4 Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) basics are important for understanding within organizations who aim for better business stakeholder experience, results or corporate understanding.

Harmaala & Jallinoja (2012, 14) CSR as a relationship between the company and society in building the well-being of citizens and their environment. The background to this view is that besides the economical responsibility, corporations are also responsible for the well-being of the people they are linked to and the environment around them. In the Nordic countries corporate social responsibility can be very different than in other European countries or, for example, United States.

According to Harmaala & Jallinoja (2012, 15) charity and doing good for others is highly important in a corporate citizenship viewpoint. The corporation speaks out with its actions, for example supporting those in need, like disabled athletes to do sports. Charity work and corporate citizenship have been important views especially in the United States, where

the government has a smaller role in producing the social and health services than in Finland.

CSR is often seen as a set of actions that a corporation engages in according to the expectations of its stakeholders. The European Commission sees corporate social responsibility as a concept whereby companies voluntarily integrate social and environmental concerns into their business operations and their interactions with their stakeholders. In Finland this turns into “responsible business”. (Harmaala & Jallinoja, 2012, 16.)

Chandler (2017, 2) describes the importance of CSR for organizations in leveraging their collective resources in the pursuit of common goals. Based on this purpose he classifies organizations as for-profits, governments and nonprofits. For-profits seek to make a profit, governments exist to define the rules and structures of society where all organizations must operate, and the goal of nonprofits is to work for the social good.

Sustainable development is at the core of the corporate social responsibility and nonprofit organizations would benefit in their everyday actions and stakeholder relations by implementing sustainable programs into practice. Chandler (2017, 285) describes sustainable development as a “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

According to Harmaala & Jallinoja, (2012, 17) sustainable development has three different dimensions which have direct and indirect influences. These dimensions are economic responsibility, social responsibility and environmental responsibility:

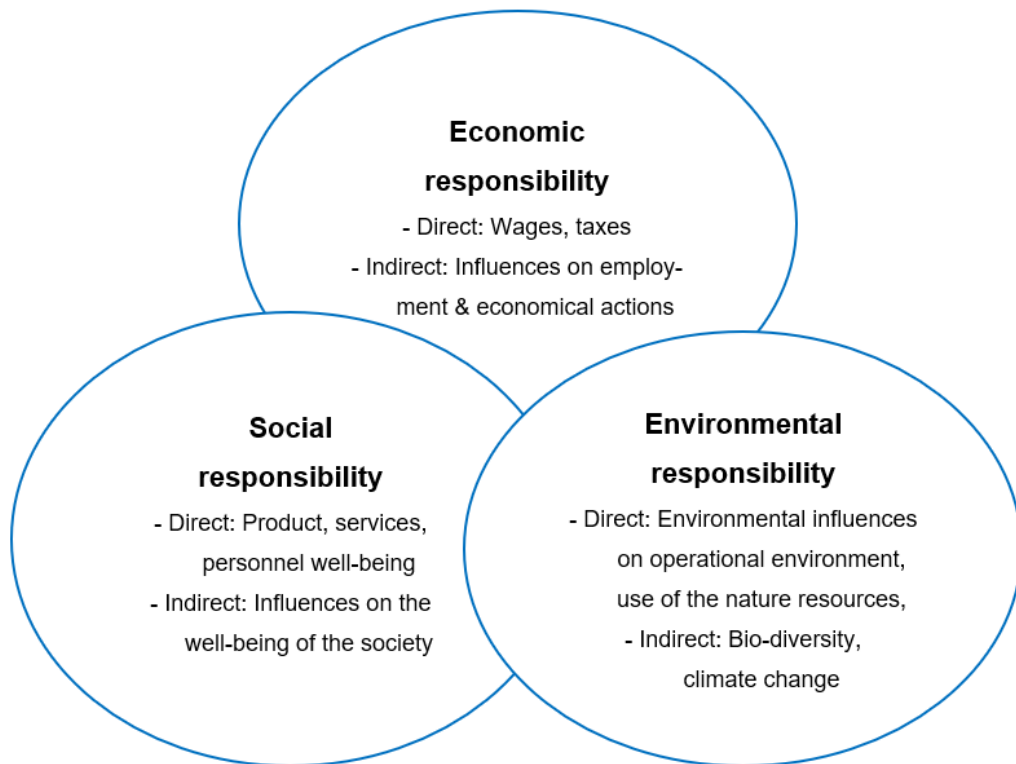


Figure 3: The three dimensions of the sustainable development, adapted from Harmaala & Jallinoja (2012, 17).

The increasing debts of the welfare state and the challenges of maintaining existing service levels for citizens, is generating pressure for corporations to input and it is increasing their role in taking care of social issues (Harmaala & Jallinoja, 2012, 27).

Since the operations of a corporation are based on economic objectives, responsibility-related decisions are also often made based on the economic goals. Most of the companies widely consider the expectations of different organizations and stakeholders in their own responsibility. This can be seen in Figure 4 in Harmaala and Jallinoja (2012, 58).

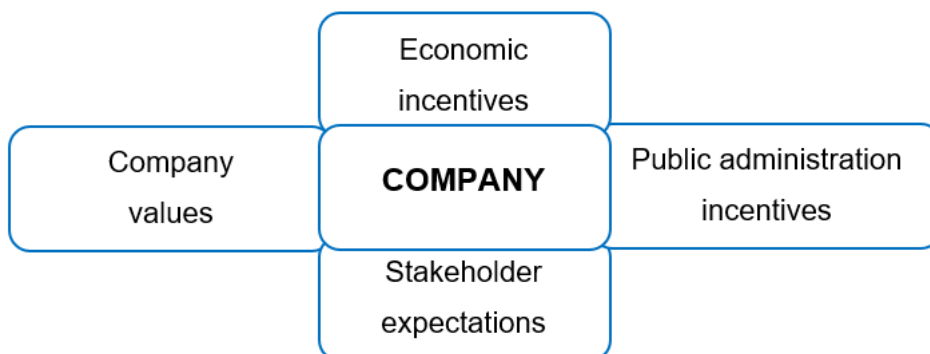


Figure 4. The incentives of the corporate social responsibility, adapted from Harmaala & Jallinoja, 2012, 58.

Company values play the key role in the responsibility actions. These responsibility actions can be divided into four important perspectives: 1. Company values, 2. Economic incentives, 3. Stakeholder expectations, and 4. Public administration incentives. These four issues should be the cornerstone of every company responsibility actions.

Writing about the nature of corporate social responsibility, Gottschalk (2011, 105) points out that this is a set of voluntary corporate actions designed to improve corporate actions. This voluntary nature of CSR means that these activities can be viewed as gifts or grants from the corporation to various stakeholder groups. If employees see that, when contributing to workplace integrity, they advance their own wellbeing as well as that of the community, they may be more willing to report suspicious conduct. (Gottschalk 2011, 105-107.)

Gottschalk (2011, 107) further discusses the nature of the implicit and explicit corporate social responsibility. Implicit corporate social responsibility consists of values and norms while explicit CSR consists voluntary corporate policies. Implicit responsibility describes the corporate role within the wider institutions of society, whereas explicit corporate social responsibility describes corporate activities that assume responsibility for the interests of society.

Gottschalk (2011, 147) raises the Stages of Growth Model in Knowledge Organizations as a great archetype for increasing corporate social responsibility, governance and reputation. The model consists of four stages that raise with the maturity level and over time:

- **Stage 1** is Activity Organization with task-oriented workflow, where tasks are performed in an efficient and effective way according to clear specifications, rules and regulations. Management is concerned with resource allocation and utilization according to the tasks to be completed.
- **Stage 2** is Problem Organization with solution-oriented interpretation where problems are interpreted and solved by application of relevant knowledge. Each new assignment is seen as a problem to be solved.
- **Stage 3** is Value Organization with a contribution-oriented approach whereby value creation logic determines priorities and resource allocation. The value that might be created by working on and solving a problem, determines how each problem is perceived and understood.

- **Stage 4** is Learning Organization with a change-oriented approach whereby continuous performance improvements are achieved. Communication channels are expanded internally and externally, and organizational culture is sharing, transparent and contribution based.

The aim in this study should be towards Stage 4, but the path towards this stage is long. Gottschalk (2011, 148) points out that “the knowledge sources are familiar to everyone and knowledge sharing occurs on demand for that knowledge”. Learning Organization is the model that disability sports organizations should aim for, especially when implementing CSR in concrete actions.

The objective of leading CSR is an urgent topic for the actual implementation of CSR strategies. Corporate governance has become common to fulfill legal requirements. Like in Finland, listed companies are considered to follow clear corporate governance. Many companies have also defined their own Code of Conduct regulations. These Code of Conduct may contain the principles, rules and rules that steer the company decisions, actions and behavior in a direction that increases stakeholder well-being and respects the rights of stakeholders. (Harmaala & Jallinoja 2012, 90.)

Duckworth & Moore (2010, 6) explain the ISO26000, Global Guidance on Social Responsibility. This is a guideline that is intended to be global and practical guideline for any organization that wants to enhance its social responsibility performance. The standard addresses which elements are important for an organization to operate in a socially responsible manner.

According to Duckworth & Moore (2010, 18) there are seven core principles in the ISO26000 social responsibility guidelines, and examples of these are accountability, transparency, ethical behavior, respect of stakeholder interests, respect for the rule of law, respect for international norms of behavior and respect of human rights. The ISO26000 guideline will not be further discussed in this study, as following this guideline completely step-by-step would necessitate completely its own study in the future.

How might we develop Corporate Social Responsibility into concrete actions with stakeholders? Chandler (2017, 72) writes about a Stakeholder Theory whereby CSR should find a natural home within corporate strategy and the strategic planning process. CSR is at the core of creating a successful business, so it is highly important for nonprofit organizations understand the basics, importance and many useful possibilities of it.

3.5 Branding

Branding and brand image have become a global arena where customers do not only buy products or services, Villanen (2016, 85) writes. They also seek meanings, values and new experiences in relation to the companies from whom they buy products and services.

Communication is an important part of branding. In the future we probably won't see communication as a separate function, but rather as crucial part of day-to-day business in all corporate and non-profit organizations' actions and leadership.

Brand and brand image are crucial parts of corporate communication since the organization's image determines how customer is influenced by company communication (Villanen 2016, 86).

Corporate learnings and tools are an important part of the brand for association too, though branding is not the first thing that, for example, non-profit associations consider as an important factor. A good reputation is crucial for associations. Good brands have the power to transform something from being "only" a popular product or service into an image. Iconic brands don't just take up their pole position by only having good products or services, they influence people even more deeply. (Villanen 2016, 89.)

Communication is a highly important part of a brand and branding. Cornelissen (2014) explains the importance of communications in the overall corporate communication where communication can be as its best used as a management function. The tools that can be used are advertising, direct marketing, sales promotions, media relations, investor relations, public relations (PR), issues management, digital communication, internal communication, community relations and sponsorship.

From a non-profit organization perspective and because of the limited resources for the marketing communications, the most important tools to be discussed in below are sponsorship and PR.

From a business stakeholder perspective, communications tools like advertising, sales promotion, product publicity and corporate image can be highly important but the resources for marketing communications in the disability sports non-profit organizations are often limited because of the smaller resources provided for disability sports. Business stakeholders and their channels play an exceedingly important role in making disability sport visible to large audience.

Why branding? Commercializing or productizing helps to describe the value of the product or service by describing and creating constancy for it. Productizing or creating a concept helps customers know what they buy, the sales organization knows what they sell, and everyone has a clear understanding of the action: *What? Whom? How?* (Villanen 2016, 20-21).

Creating the organization's offering to its customers through clear concepts or packages, helps the organization to clarify its offering. Productizing helps to create concepts that meet customer needs and expectations and clarify their meaning. (Villanen 2016, 221.)

Chandler (2017, 39) connects the importance of brand building to CSR. In his view brands drive CSR because they try to raise the stakes of the business. When all things are equal, brands that are trusted by stakeholders will be more successful in the market place than those who are not trusted. A brand is a way for a company to communicate directly with its stakeholders in general and with its consumers in particular.

Branding is also an important part of corporate social responsibility and in making actions visible. Corporate branding and common values are also an important part of cooperation. New branding and creating concepts are really important for organizations to be able to integrate actions and make certain standards for their offering that are easy to recognize as the offering of the same organization.

3.6 Sponsorship

One of the key aspects of branding is sponsorship. Sponsorship became common and grew in the United States in the 1950s. After that it spread to Japan and Europe in the 1970s. Sponsorship became more and more common in the 1980s and has become an important part of marketing communications. Sponsorship is always a strategic investment which starts from the company's business needs. Sponsorship needs to generate added value for the company, and its efficiency is measured like any other part of the business. (Valanko 2009, 27-28.)

Sponsorship is not advertising, an advertisement deal, or its substitute. Sponsorship always includes action and counteraction. It is not donation or charity. Sponsorship enriches both co-operation partners: the sponsor and its object. This opens the company or brand values in concrete objectives and gives an opportunity to create meanings with interesting content. Sponsorship, at its best, creates shared experience-full content for decided target groups and communities. (Valanko 2009, 49.)

The co-operation between the sponsor and its object is basically the ability and desire to combine and control different kinds of thinking with knowledge and creativity for the advantage of both sponsor and its object. This conclusion is not enough because all human action is communicative and its difficultness can give rise to completely different meanings between different kinds of people or stakeholders. (Valanko 2009, 101.)

Valanko (2009, 87) claims that societal sponsorship is seen as more and more important for a big audience. This brings even more sponsorship opportunities for disability sport in the future. The disability sport is often more than “only sports” and they have the responsibility aspect of not only supporting non-disabled athletes. Valanko argues that responsible sponsorship also brings more responsibility and demand for controlling reputation responsibilities.

Sponsorship is a great tool for marketing and reputation management. From a non-profit perspective, Juholin (2009, 224) offers an important view of how sponsorship is not charity or advertising. It differs from charity in that the sponsor is looking for publicity, whereas in charitable activity the organization does not want to be acknowledged or recognized for its positive actions.

Sponsor Insight researches the Finnish sponsorship market in their yearly research reporting. The results in their 2019 Sponsorship Barometer (Sponsor Insight, 14.2.2020) showed that the Sponsorship market in Finland was 260 million euros for 2019. 162 million euros (62,3%) of sponsorship money goes to sports, 45 million euros (17,3%) to culture and 53 million euros (20,4%) for the other sponsoring. Sponsoring increased 4,8% in comparison to the year before, but the future the amount is expected to decrease because economic issues associated with Covid-19 pandemic that have presented unique challenges to business in Finland and worldwide.

At present, there is no research available yet what kind of share of the 162 million euros sports sponsorship is dedicated to the disability sports especially, and it would be interesting to see how small amount of that is for disability sports. Disability sports is only now beginning to develop sponsorship strategies in 21st century. These companies are still rare forerunners in Finland sponsoring disabled athletes too.

To understand company investments, it is useful to compare the Sponsorship Barometer with the yearly Event Barometer. The 2019 Event Barometer by Sponsor Insight (14.2.2020) showed that in Finland, companies invested 147 million euros in company

events, which is only 56% from the amount that was invested to the sponsorship in Finland. The study for 2019 showed 7,3% increase since 2018 and 46% of this amount was used for company events for their stakeholders, 32% for the events of the company's own personnel, 8% for public events and 14% for other events.

Sponsor Insight (17.3.2020) every year researches the most interesting sports in Finland. In their research, which was published in March 2020, football was for the first time in the TOP5 sports. The order was: 1. Ice hockey, 2. Athletics, 3. Cross-country skiing, 4. Biathlon and 5. Football. Most of the biggest stars of the disability sports are from athletics but the study does not give indication if that has an effect on interest of the athletics. Support for biathlon is strongly driven by an athlete, Kaisa Mäkäräinen, who retired after the study.

In the athlete study (Sponsor Insight, 17.3.2020), Kaisa Mäkäräinen was individually the most interesting athlete in Finland before Kimi Räikkönen, Iivo Niskanen, Teemu Pukki and Krista Pärmäkoski. Paralympic Athletes were noted in the study where Leo-Pekka Tähti was in 9th place.

The sports and event industries were heavily disturbed in 2020 by the coronavirus. It is interesting to see how the sports industry will develop in the coming decade. The role of sponsorship should be seen as a great possibility to influence, as well as investments for the actions to increase public visibility and the importance of public relations.

Sponsorship is highly important especially for innovative companies because of cost-efficiency. There are often limited resources to invest money in the paid advertising, so sponsorship is perfect for these organizations and is often great win-win for the objects.

4. Conducting the study

This chapter focuses on the methodology, main data collection methods and principles for conducting the study. The main data collection methods were semi-structured interviews with the existing cooperation partners which started in December 2018 and a workshop that took place in December 2019.

4.1 Research respondents

The research respondents in the semi-structured interviews were the existing cooperation partners. When this study started, the Finnish Paralympic Committee had eleven main business partners and partners.

The data was collected through semi-structured thematic interviews in a six months period, prior to the first important May 2019 meeting about the merger between the Paralympic Committee and VAU ry.

Table 1. Data collection methods, objectives, participants and timing for the study.

Method	Objective	Participants	Date & Time
Semi-structured interviews, start	Information about the existing partnerships	10/11 partners	December 2018
Semi-structured interviews, deadline	Data gathering before May 2019 meeting	10/11 partners	May 2019
Gathering data and preparations for the workshop	Co-creation and networking		May 2019 - December 2019
Workshop	Co-creation and networking	39 employees from 17 partners	December 2019
Constructing the concept	New model		January - April 2020
Writing the report	Build & test the model		May - November 2020
Presenting the findings and suggestions			November 2020

Publishing the report & findings			December 2020
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4.2 Research Methodology

Every interviewed partnership organizations had a key person responsible for the cooperation. Ten of these eleven business partners were thematic interviewed before the first important meeting about the merger. The data collection method was individual semi-structured interviews, which took 25 to 30 minutes each.

The interview template and the interviews were divided into three themes including background information, information about the existing cooperation and future expectations.

Qualitative research methods are according to Professor Myers (2013, 5) designed to help researchers understand people and designed to help to understand the social and cultural contexts within which people live. The main benefit of qualitative research is that it allows to see and understand the context that decisions and actions take place. Human decisions and actions can only be understood in context, and context help to explain why some people or the organization they are representing acted like they did. Myers claims that if you want to understand people's motivations, reasons and actions, qualitative research is the best way to research that.

Examples of qualitative research are case study research, action research and grounded theory. Qualitative data sources include for example observation, participant observation, interviews, questionnaires, documents, texts, impressions and reactions. Interviews are the most common technique for collecting qualitative data. (Myers 2013, 8.)

Qualitative research is more focused on the and quantitative research is more focused on numbers. Quantitative research was originally developed in the natural sciences to study the natural phenomena. Survey methods, numerical methods and mathematical modelling are well accepted of quantitative methods in the social sciences. (Myers 2013, 7.)

The chosen method for this study was case study research. According to Arthur et. al. (2012, 102) the purpose of case study research is to explore a phenomenon which is not well known or to describe something in detail. The strength of a case study is in its ability to enable the researcher to intensively investigate the case in-depth, to probe, drill down and interrogate at its complexity, often through the long term.

Case studies are suitable for this disability sports research, since this is a concrete case and this study aims to create an actual solution for an existing organization. The researcher has also the possibility of investigating the phenomenon intensively and reacting to this very specific case.

The semi-structured interview data of this study is collected both in qualitative methods (written language, explanations, open answers). The interview themes are divided in three parts and added with quantitative questions.

Both Myers (2013) and Arthur et al. (2012) see interviews as the most important data gathering technique in the qualitative researcher's arsenal. Myers (2013, 121) emphasizes their importance especially in business and management, and that they are "a good interview helps us to focus on the subject's world".

There are three types of interview: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews. Structured interviews are used with pre-formulated questions, strictly regulated with regard to the order of the questions and sometimes regulated with the available time. Semi-structured interviews have some pre-formulated questions but no strict adherence to them and new questions might emerge during the conversation. Unstructured interviews have only few pre-formulated questions and interviewees are free to answer on what they want with no time limit. (Myers 2013, 121.)

In this study there are some pre-formulated questions with the possibility to answer on a scale one to five. These one to five questions are valid because of the numeric data that can be referred to in the possible later queries.

Another way to classify the types of the interviews is to make a distinction between individual interviews and group interviews. Most of the research in business and management relies on individual interviews, but focus group interviews are also good way of gathering data from larger number of participants than in individual interviews. The purpose of the focus group interviews is to get collective views on a certain defined topic. The group of people have had certain experiences which they share and the researcher documents in this exercise. The interviewer or moderator directs the enquiry and the respondent's interaction. Focus groups allow participants to engage in thoughtful discussion. (Myers 2013, 123.)

The chosen interview types for this study were semi-structured interviews with individuals and focus group interviews to engage more participants in the study at the same time and

have some more background information on the subject. The interviews were conducted with the partners of the Finnish Paralympic Committee between October 2018 and April 2019. The interviews took place at the beginning of this project to understand the background of the business stakeholders. The interviews were separately collected, not part of any other meetings or issues between the organization and stakeholders.

The semi-structured interviews were chosen to this study because researcher had the possibility of getting all the busy responsible persons at each partner to sit down and talk about the cooperation with the Paralympic Committee. This method gives the interviewees the opportunity to answer and long enough to get relevant data and ideas for better stakeholder communication. Email interviews would not give this much content and data for this use but would be seen as a good tool for the future.

Interviews always include potential problems which are important to recognize. These potential problems were considered before the interviews in May 2019 and the workshop in December 2019. The difficulties or pitfalls can occur for example if the interviewer is completely stranger, there is lack of trust, a lack of time, or the level of entry for the subject is incorrect (for example if the researcher enters at a lower level than the interviewee expects). On the other hand, elite bias can occur if the research is only interested in the viewpoints of those at the top of the organization – so called - elite interviewees. Hawthorne effects include a potential change in the situation if it is seen as a threat when the interviewer is part of the interactions. Also, a common problem emerges if the language used between the interviewer and the interviewee is difficult to understand, or interview situation faces fears, problems and other pitfalls. (Myers 2013, 126.)

4.3 Data collection and analysis

The main data collection conducted through the semi-structured interviews with the business partners and a workshop with business partners and internal participants. The analysis was done through quantification. The interviewed partners were divided and coded into two groups, depending on the length of the partnership with the association. The aim of this coding was to develop an in-depth explanation of the phenomenon are relating to these two groups.

In the data collection phase and the analysis of this data, reliability and validity must be carefully considered. According to Flink (2009, 385) the importance of reliability as a criterion applies to assessing qualitative research only against the background of the specific theory of the research and the methods used. For the interview data, reliability can be increased by interview training or reading interview guides and by increasing the quality of

the documentation of data. Flink (2009) also mentions that the standardization of notes increases their reliability, and finally, more detailed the research process is the better the reliability of the whole research will be.

Validity often receives more attention in the qualitative research discussions than reliability. The main question can be summarized “whether the researchers see what they think they see”. Flink (2009, 387) suggests that three errors can occur in the research process:

1. To see a relation or a principle that is not correct.
2. To reject them when they are indeed correct.
3. To ask the wrong questions.

A basic problem in assessing the validity of qualitative research is how we might specify the links between the relations that are studied and the version of them that researcher provides. What would these issues look like if they were not issues for this empirical research at the moment? (Flink 2009, 387.)

The data collection method used was semi- structured interviews for the existing business partners. The data collection was conducted by the researcher and interviewer in the business stakeholder interviews. The interviews were conducted with the then 10 existing cooperation partners at the end of the year 2018 to find out the existing situation of the business cooperation. These business stakeholders consisted of both main cooperation partners and cooperation partners.

The semi-structured interview data collection was documented by note taking. The first phase questions were about the company’s background. The second phase concentrated on the existing cooperation with the association. The third phase focused on the future expectations of disability sports organizations. These questions were defined so that they can be fast, and easily repeated later. The goal of these quantitative questions was to get measurable results in numbers that can be repeated later.

The main reason for these interviews as a data collection method instead of sending a query via email, was to make sure that all the partners will answer the questions. The aim was to gather the data from all the business stakeholders and hopefully generate great ideas for the future.

The primary data collection method was semi-structured interviews and the secondary data collection methods were statistics, research reports and the background information literature in the literature review. This is discussed in the next section.

4.4 Coding and quantification

The beginning of the data analysis involved coding the interview data. Here, the partnerships were divided into two groups depending on the length of the partnership with the association. These two groups are focused on in the findings chapter and give more depth to the explanation of the phenomenon. After coding, the data was analysed through many sampling methods.

In an interview study sampling is connected to the decision about which persons to interview (case sampling) and from which groups these should come (sampling groups of cases). Following this, the decision as to which interviews should be transcribed and analysed (material sampling) is made. The next decision is about which parts of the text to choose (sampling within the material). Finally, in presenting the findings this all comes together demonstrating the findings (presentational sampling). (Flick 2009, 115.)

Case sampling was used when choosing the business stakeholders for the interviews and after that sampling of cases was used to analyse the findings in two partnership length groups. Material sampling and sampling within the material were used to analyse the relevant data. Finally, presentational sampling was used when presenting the findings of the study.

4.5 Semi-structured thematic Interviews

Interviews are one of the most important data gathering techniques for qualitative research in business and management. Interviews allow researchers to gather rich data from people in various roles and situations. A good interview helps to focus on the subject's world. The idea is to use their language rather than imposing one's own. (Myers 2013, 119.)

To be able to collect as much relevant data as possible the interviews of this study were implemented in Finnish. The final report was written in English, so the interviews were translated from Finnish to English by the author.

Semi-structured interviews sit somewhere between structured and unstructured interviews. They involve the use of some pre-formulated questions, but no strict adherence to them. The interviewer usually starts with a similar set of questions each time. (Myers 2013, 122.)

Semi-structured interviews were selected as a model and they were chosen in order to lead the conversation on the subject of disability sports business cooperation, while possibility of discussing the given subject in an open-ended fashion.

The thematic interviews were divided into three themes. The first part of the interviews focus on the company's background (questions 1-4). The second part focus on the existing cooperation with the association (questions 5-7). The third part focused on the future expectations of the cooperation partners regarding the future of disability sports organizations (questions 8-12 & communication 13-15).

The thematic interviews were mainly conducted using open-ended questions and they were analysed with qualitative methods. The second theme focusing on the partners' satisfaction with the cooperation included quantitative questions too. The aim of the quantitative questions was to generate measurable numeric results with questions that can be repeated after the research via a questionnaire, if required.

4.6 Workshop with respondents and internal participants

After the results of the semi-structured interviews were collected, the next step involved preparing for a workshop. The aim of the workshop was to develop the data from the interviews an aligned public and co-creative model.

The workshop was designed to be able to allow for final adjustments before the actual merger took place. The workshop took place in December 2019 and it was an important step before the actual merger took place on January 1st, in 2020.

The workshop was created for the cooperation partners. These increased from 11 partnerships in the beginning of the study to 17 partnerships at the time of the merger. In the workshop at least one person from each partner participated. This workshop was the first time for Paralympic Committee and VAU ry partners and employees were organized together in this level. Altogether 39 persons participated, where 7 of these attendees were employees of the new Paralympic Committee. Most of the rest of the 32 participants were partners of the Paralympic Committee, only few participants had cooperation with the VAU ry.

At the beginning of the workshop the attendees were asked to answer questions on the selected themes with their mobile phones. They typed their answers on a web page and the results were shown in real-time on the wall. The first background question in the workshop was about one word that comes into the attendees' minds about parasports. The

second background question was about the most important ways they cooperate with the Paralympic Committee.

5. Main results

This chapter focuses on analysing the findings and presenting the main results of the semi-structured interviews and the workshop. The results are analysed with quantification methods to combine the qualitative analysis and sampling.

5.1 Stakeholder management and existing cooperation

In this chapter the partnerships were divided into two groups, depending on the length of the partnership with the association. These two groups are following throughout findings chapter and they give more depth to the explanation of the phenomenon.

Thematic interviews with the first theme of background information about the business partner started with a question how many years the partner had been in cooperation relationship with the Finnish Paralympic Committee.

The average length of the partnerships was 4,00 years. With this result the partnerships were divided into two groups of partnership length. The first group of partnerships were divided into the newest partnership length – those up to 2 years (later: 0-2 years). The second group was for partnership lengths of 3 years or more (later: 3+ years). The attendees were not divided into more than two groups, because it is important to retain anonymity of the participants.

The most important reasons for having a partnership with the Paralympic Committee was asked in the second question: *What is the most important reason to have a partnership with the Paralympic Committee?*

The answers were analyzed with quantification methods. Most of the mentioned answers included shared values between the company and the Paralympic Committee. From all the interviewees 40 percent mentioned shared values. The group of more experienced partners (3+ years) mentioned shared values more often than the newer ones (0-2 years).

“Shared values and the possibility to increase **equality** together and influence on it.” (Partner, 3+ years)

“We want to support sports, and supporting the Finnish Paralympic Committee fits best with our **company values.**” (Partner, 3+ years)

The second important reason for cooperation was a positive image and a positive brand image. While the more experienced partners more frequently discussed shared values, most of the mentions of a positive image were from the partners in the first group of 0-2 years.

“The reason (for cooperation) is what the Paralympic Committee represents and its **positive image**. We want to support the Paralympics and its program in sports. **This is not charity.**” (Partner, 0-2 years)

Some interviewees mentioned both of the two most important reasons for the cooperation: shared values and a positive brand image.

“Shared values. The Paralympic Committee has great **positive brand image**, and it is easy to work together.” (Partner, 0-2 years)

After shared values and a positive brand image, the third most important reason for cooperation was an aim to increase their visibility through the partnership. Visibility was mentioned from both perspectives, on the partners' side and from the association's perspective to help to increase its visibility. Visibility was mentioned equally among both partnership length groups of 0-2 years and 3+ years.

“We look for partnerships in which both organizations would benefit. We look for **visibility** for our own brand through this partnership.” (Partner, 3+ years)

“We look for visibility and **concrete actions** for our campaigns.” (Partner, 0-2 years)

The three most important reasons for cooperation were shared values, positive brand image and visibility. Within shared values, equality was highlighted as the main discussion topic in two of the interviews.

“Other reasons for cooperation are **equality** and the joy of sports, to help increase our understanding of difference.” (Partner, 0-2 years)

In the rest of the answers the cooperation was seen important for the corporate social responsibility, internal communications and personnel awareness about the cooperation. There was no difference on the two partnership groups.

“Corporate social responsibility. We want to give Paralympic athletes visibility and be well-known together.” (Partner, 3+ years)

“To increase possibilities for disabled people in society. The same work that we do concretely within our company.” (Partner, 0-2 years)

To conclude, the three main reasons for the existing partnerships with the Paralympic Committee were shared values, the positive brand image of the Paralympic Committee and the aim of gaining visibility through partnering with the organization. Equality was the most mentioned shared value in these open questions. The three main issues link corporate social responsibility strategy with the aim to increase awareness of disabilities and cooperation amongst personnel.

What is noted as new issue for disability sport is its transformation from the one-way charity perspective to actual partnerships. In these issues all parties hope to benefit in a win-win-win cooperation supporting the athletes.

5.1.1 Recommendation

In the third question, the Paralympic Committee’s partners were asked if they would recommend cooperation with the organization to other companies: *Would you recommend the cooperation with the Paralympic Committee to other companies? Why?*

In this section partnership with the Paralympic Committee was seen highly useful. All partners answered that they would recommend partnering with the Paralympic Committee to the other companies.

In this open-ended question, the partners gave more reasons for recommending a partnership. Some partners told they had already recommended further cooperation.

“Yes. We have already recommended this cooperation to other companies. Cooperation is meaningful and works well.” (Partner, 3+ years)

In this section the Paralympic Committee received highly positive feedback regarding the cooperation, though it was not directly asked. Only “Why?” spurred responses regarding the reasons for recommending the Paralympic Committee as a cooperation partner. In this section both the groups of partners (0-2 years of partnership and 3+ years of partnership) felt that their support was appreciated.

“Absolutely! Cooperation has been active and there are lots of **concrete suggestions and ideas**. Many other partnerships are more passive. This is great way to support sports.” (Partner, 0-2 years)

“Cooperation is easy, and discussions are open. In this cooperation we **open-mindedly** try to find cooperation models that best support us both.” (Partner, 0-2 years)

“The cooperation works great, and the **consciousness** of the Paralympic Committee is brought in very well.” (Partner, 3+ years)

Above are only a few examples of the positive feedback received. All answers were positive, none of the participants viewed their partnership in a negative light. With the positive tone of this section the social meaning of the cooperation was raised in a third of the interviews. Timing seems to be good for supporting disabled sports. Especially the newer partners had thought of this aspect when joining to support the disabled sports.

“Parasports has really **positive tone** in the society.” (Partner, 0-2 years)

“This is **different to other more traditional cooperation** in sports. This has a wider **social meaning**.” (Partner, 0-2 years)

After positive feedback of the Paralympic Committee and raising the importance of the partnership’s social meaning, the wide “Why?” open-ended question did not show any other common nominators. The other recommendations given by both partnership groups (0-2 years and 3+ years in length) were influenced by various perspectives: from corporate social responsibility to a customer perspective.

“This partnership gives us good ways of influencing on things. **Networking and corporate social responsibility** are important.” (Partner, 3+ years)

The answers were again positive, which brings pressure to raise the bar. In this section cooperation was also discussed as having even more possibilities for future working together. When two disability sports associations merge, it generates pressure for the new organization to do together more.

“The cooperation has **lots of potential for the future**, when the Paralympic Committee strengthens its operations. There is potential for the brand and its visibility and for developing more **responsibility for social issues**.” (Partner, 3+ years)

As a conclusion the answers of this section show that the cooperation with the Paralympic Committee is a new way of thinking cooperation in sports. Yet, the reasoning for recommendations is not all related to sports. There is more influence on the societal issues too. In the future, it will be important to increase the visibility of parasports all together, which would have a positive influence on corporate image and taking care of corporate social responsibility.

It is noted that during this interview period, it was assumed, though not finally confirmed, that the associations could form one large association. This association would in the future support a whole range of disability sports, from children to adults and from hobbies to elite sporting activities. The aim of this first section was to indicate how well the partners knew about the operations of the other association.

5.1.2 Important areas in partnership

The interviewees also spoke about the important areas in their cooperation. In question 4, the partners were asked how important they see the following areas relating to elite sports and action targets: values and the supporting targets, the importance of support the Special Olympics and the Paralympic movement, and events in the upcoming years.

This section was meant to be fast questions with repeatable data for the future inquiries. The three highest answer averages on a scale between one and five were above 4.70. The three lowest scores on a scale between one and five were under 3.90.

How important do you find the following themes of the cooperation in the future, on a scale one to five?

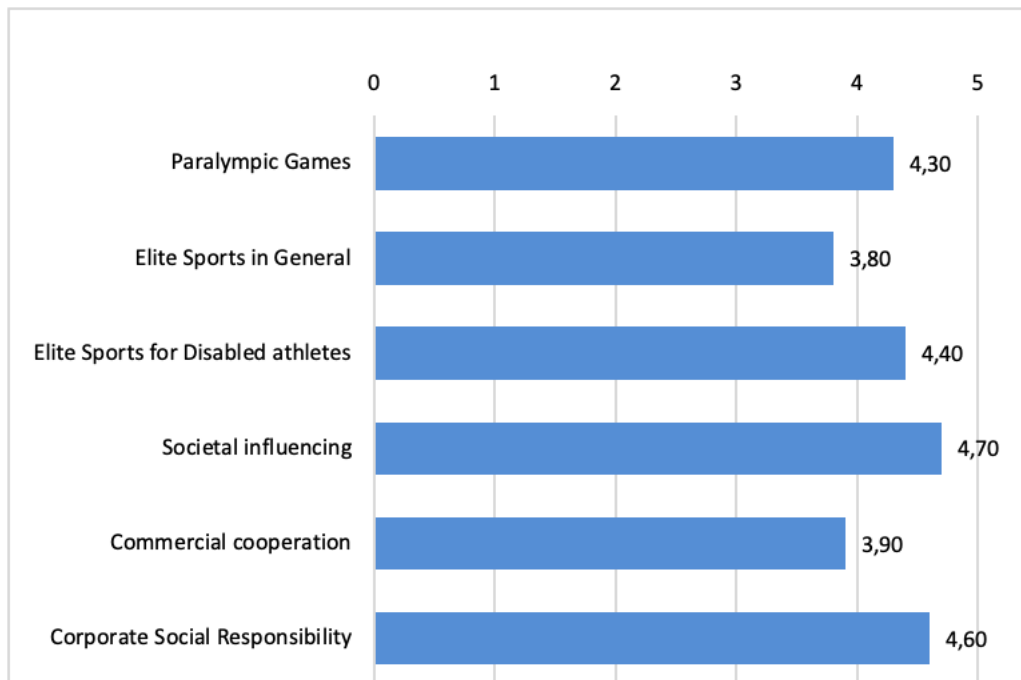


Figure 5. The importance of the different themes in the cooperation.

In the first theme of elite sports and action targets the answers showed the high value placed on elite sports in the actions of the former Paralympic Committee. Every other business partner saw elite sports as important for cooperation in the upcoming years. Earlier, VAU offered more opportunities for supporting disability sports beyond the activities of elite para-athletes. The importance of supporting elite sports for disabled athletes was of high priority with an average answer of 4.40 on a scale from one to five.

In the action targets of the co-operation, 80% of the partners saw that social influencing is highly important with overall average value of 4.70 average. Corporate social responsibility is important or highly important for all the business partners with average answer of 4.60. These result shows why non-profit organizations need to understand the basics of the corporate social responsibility. Surprisingly, commercial activities relating to cooperation were not seen that important with an average value of 3.90.

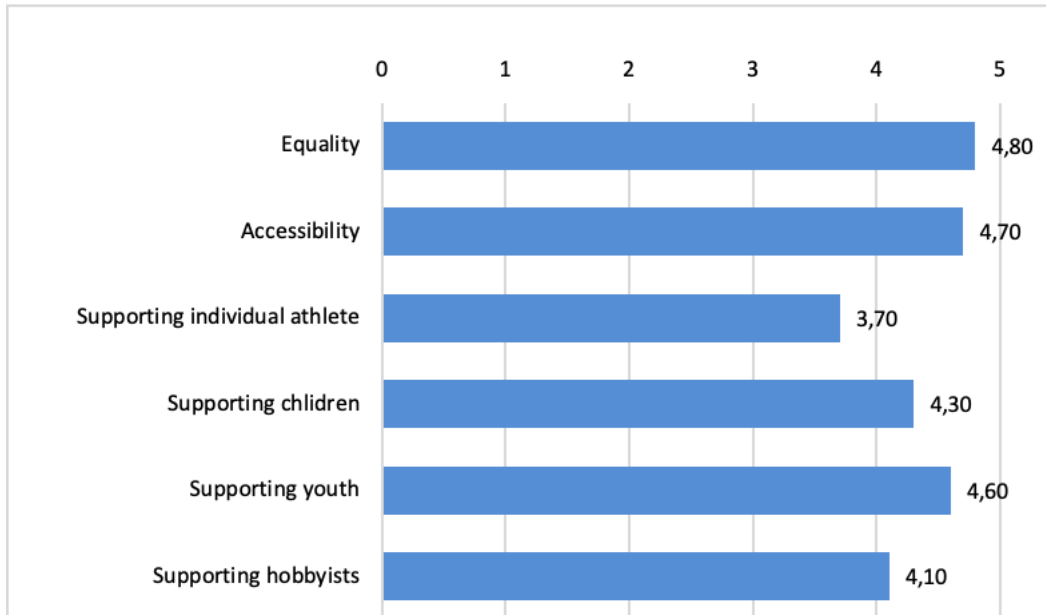


Figure 6. The importance of the different themes in the cooperation: Values and the target for the support.

The values of the “old” or at the time existing Paralympic Committee included equality and accessibility, so the particular importance of these themes was interrogated. Almost all the partners saw equality (average value 4.80) and accessibility (4.70) as a highly important part of their co-operation at present and in the future also. Behind these numbers almost all the interviewed saw equality as an important or highly important (answers 4 or 5) part of their future partnership with the Paralympic Committee. All partners saw that accessibility is an important or highly important (answers 4 or 5) part of their partnership future too.

Values play an important part of non-profit and corporate cooperation. The highest averages of the interviews on a scale one to five were equality (average 4.80) and accessibility (average 4.70) and social influencing (average 4.70). This result also shows that social issues can be a highly important part of cooperation.

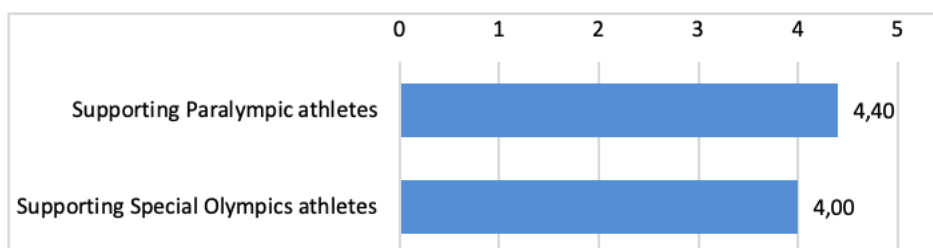


Figure 7. The importance of the different themes in the cooperation: Paralympic athletes vs Special Olympics athletes.

The Finnish Paralympic Committee has a long history of supporting Paralympic athletes and most of the cooperation has supported the Paralympic Team for a long time which was seen in the theme addressing the Paralympics and Special Olympics.

Supporting Paralympic Athletes was seen important part of the cooperation in the future too (average 4.40). Supporting Special Olympics Athletes was quite highly valued too (average 4.00), though the partners didn't have particularly long history of supporting the Special Olympic Finland athletes.

This result shows that the Paralympic athletes are more familiar to the companies with many years of supporting mainly elite sports and those with existing Paralympic cooperation. This result also shows that there is some work for the new organization to do to increase consciousness of the Special Olympic movement.

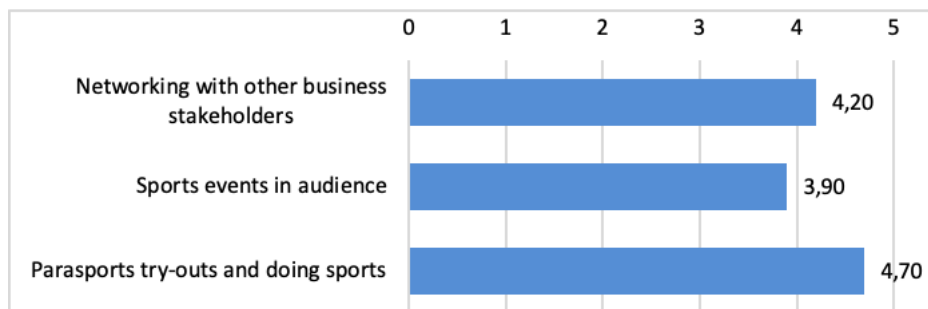


Figure 8. The importance of the different themes in the cooperation: Events.

Under the events them, all the partners saw that doing parasports try-outs and sports together was highly important (average 4.70). Networking with other business partners (average 4.20) was also seen important. Surprisingly, the sports events as an audience (average 3.90) were not seen as such an important part of the cooperation. The business partners spend time together at least once every quarter, approximately four times a year.

As an overall view of the background section (questions 1-4) the highest averages were given to equality, accessibility, and social influencing. Supporting young athletes with average 4.60 (supporting kids average 4.30) and corporate social responsibility (average 4.60) were also seen important.

The least important issues were supporting individual athletes (average 3.70), elite sports in general (average 3.80) and third, sports events as spectators and joint commercial cooperation and actions (both average 3.90).

5.2 Stakeholder awareness and satisfaction for the existing co-operation

The second theme of the semi-structured interviews was existing cooperation in questions 5-7. Next the partners were asked about the importance of the existing cooperation themes that both the Finnish Paralympic Committee and the Finnish Sports Association for Persons with Disabilities (VAU ry) supported in question 5.

How important for your company is your personnel awareness about your cooperation with the Paralympic Committee on a scale one to five?

All the business partners saw their own personnel consciousness of the co-operation as important (answers 4 or 5) and 80 percent saw it highly important (an answer of 5) part of their co-operation. On a scale one to five the partners average was high (4.80).

In the next phase the partners got to answer about the influence of the cooperation in question 6. *What kind of influence has the cooperation had on a scale one to five? Why?*

In the first part of this question 90 percent of the partners saw that their co-operation with the Paralympic Committee had had a positive or highly positive effect on their brand image (answer 4 or 5). On a scale one to five, the partners average was rather high, 4.50.

The open-ended question "Why?" gave more details on the topic. This section brought in a customer perspective on the cooperation. 50 percent of the answers raised the importance of differentiation from other companies in the same industry through this cooperation or their brand image amongst the customers.

"One of the main reasons has been to **differentiate ourselves from our competitors**. That is where we have succeeded." (Partner, 0-2 years)

"Every time this cooperation is brought up with our customers it is always positive. **Nobody has ever questioned this cooperation.**" (Partner, 3+ years)

The most important aspect of the cooperation was seen in the customer perspective. The second most important was the partners' personnel view. Surprisingly, most of the interviewees who raised this aspect were newer partners (0-2 years) in cooperation with the Paralympic Committee.

“This cooperation gives a **clear positive message** about the company’s values for both our personnel and customers.” (Partner, 0-2 years)

“This cooperation has **strengthened our corporate image** and has had positive influence on our personnel.” (Partner, 0-2 years)

Two attendees noted in this section that the influence of their cooperation was hard to measure in detailed data and there were yet not enough data to analyze this.

“We have not yet measured.” and “**Not yet measured.**” (Partners, 0-2 years)

As a conclusion differentiation from their competitors was raised in most of the interviews and cooperation had clearly strengthened their corporate image. Some stakeholders found the exact influence of the cooperation hard to measure, or too early to measure.

In question 7 the partners were asked about the satisfaction for the existing cooperation. *How satisfied are you for the cooperation with the Paralympic Committee on a scale one to five?* The participants articulated that they were rather satisfied with their co-operation with the Paralympic Committee, since the average was 4.30 out of a possible 5.

In the open-ended question the partners were asked first which subjects they were happy with and which one could be improved.

The positive aspects of the cooperation were easy to discover, while some interviewees found it hard discuss the issues that can be improved. After some reconsidering, the participants’ suggestions of issues to improve upon were finally collected.

“**Both have benefitted** from the cooperation. Yearly events have been concrete positive things. We could together **deepen our understanding** of sports in general, since we have not been that active in sports.” (Partner, 3+ years)

“We are pleased with the new suggestions and ideas. Wider visibility from our cooperation has **more possibilities**. How can we share our common message with an even wider audience, and how can we benefit from different channels and media?” (Partner, 0-2 years)

The contacts that came from the Paralympic Committee were appreciated and two of its partners wanted even more proactive communication and active contacts.

“Good and enthusiastic cooperation. There could be more **active contact** from the Paralympic Committee.” (Partner, 0-2 years)

“The flexibility and **active contacts** have been good. We have not ourselves raised this cooperation enough. There could be more proactivity from the Paralympic Committee.” (Partner, 3+ years)

Most mentions by the interviewees noted how their partnerships had not made full use of this cooperation. This part shows that is important not only to have resources but to utilize them in cooperation also. Most of these mentions came from the partners that had been working with the Paralympic Committee for under three years.

“We are pleased with the work of Paralympic Committee in general. **We could do more** with regard to common communication in order to increase the visibility of our cooperation.” (Partner, 0-2 years)

“It has been easy to build a common path, to plan for our cooperation and to stick with our plans. **Our own actions could be more efficient** and there could be more focus on the communication channels.” (Partner, 0-2 years)

This part shows that active discussion and frequent contact are important, but the partners should not be pushed too much information. It is a thin line. This hopefully transforms to strong partnerships, where euros are not only moving to one direction, but towards actual cooperation with open discussion and co-creation.

“We are happy with the open discussion. The **commercial side** of the cooperation could be better.” (Partner, 3+ years)

Communications received positive feedback in this part. On the other hand, the materials could reach the partners earlier. Press releases and materials were seen as perfect for the business stakeholders' channels. There could be more press releases made available, not only games or competition messages or athlete interviews for company use.

This section raised important issues regarding existing co-operations and the Paralympic Committee's partners' satisfaction with it. The next section pays attention on the future expectations.

5.3 Stakeholder management and future expectations

In the third section of the thematic interviews the partners were asked about the future expectations in questions 8 to 12. Firstly, about the future expectations the partners were asked which kind of things their company would like to benefit from the cooperation?

The answers showed that the partners support the actions of the Finnish Paralympic Committee and especially the two-way discussion is highly important in the future. The answers showed that most of the partners hoped in this part that the Paralympic Committee would have even more resources for the business cooperation. These investments to the resources would bring more actions and visibility among the business stakeholders and their channels. This question how to benefit was difficult since the companies would like to help, not that much benefit from the cooperation.

“Issues where our company can be as an enabler. **Tools** to utilize the common work for equality.” (Partner 3+ years)

“More visibility and consciousness on the **corporate social responsibility**. Together more consciousness on day-to-day life for persons with disabilities.” (Partner 3+ years)

The most common answer was to promote the para-athletes' stories together.

“Paralympic athletes to share their **stories at our company events**.” (Partner 3+ years)

“**Raise individual athletes together**. Investments in education and developing it together.” (Partner 0-2 years)

Through joint corporate social responsibility and para-athletes sharing their stories, the interviewees saw the importance of joint campaigns as beneficial to both parties.

“**Concepts** that are built around events. **Campaigns** and good joint planning.” (Partner 0-2 years)

Here it is notable that the interviews were carried out before COVID-19 pandemic. Events have become uncertain after the world was hit by Coronavirus pandemic. Supporting parasports was also seen important part of employee branding.

“Thinking through **employer branding**. How might we increase this aspect of our cooperation even more?” (Partner 3+ years)

The partners were asked in question 9, whether it is important to support a specific sport in the future. 90 percent of the partners did not see it important to support a specific sport in the future. These numbers show that they support the Finnish sports widely, not one sport specifically. The cooperation is built onto a wide support network.

In question 10 the interviewees were asked whether it was important to support some specific individual athlete in the future. The answers showed that individual athletes can play a part in the cooperation. It was more important is to show support for Finnish disability sports in general. 80 percent of the partners did not see as important to support specific athletes in the future. Perhaps the ones that were interested in supporting a sport specific aim were interested in supporting specific sports associations, and these partners can be directed to support these sports in their cooperation.

Cooperation with the Finnish Paralympic Committee tends to make cooperation with the para-athletes possible, the athletes become closer with business stakeholders, and through this they are exposed to wider audience. This is seen as a good way of using the cooperation. Only 20 percent of the interviewees told that they have taken the opportunity to draw on both cooperation models: cooperation with the association and cooperation with an athlete as a brand ambassador. In future, to develop more efficient cooperation, one good way of developing an efficient cooperation would be to have an athlete or group of athletes as brand ambassadors.

The interviews were conducted before the important meeting in May 2019, and the first decisions regarding the upcoming 2020 merger. That is why the interviews were implemented before this. The partners were asked in the open-ended question 10: *What kind of extra possibilities or challenges you see with the merger of the Finnish Paralympic Committee and VAU?* It is notable that the interviewees' cooperation experience mainly came from working with the “old” Paralympic Committee and the approximately 5 to 7 people working in the organization.

“It has been quite a small organization. We see more possibilities than threats. The merger should bring **more resources**.” (Partner 3+ years)

Accessibility was raised as the most important theme of the cooperation in this open question section.

“**Possibilities** absolutely. The common denominator for **accessibility** gets wider and our target group increases. Not only elite sports.” (Partner 3+ years)

“We don’t see challenges. It is good that the **offering gets wider**. We have lots of things to learn. **Supporting accessibility** is important, and as a theme sports and motion are important. We see it positively.” (Partner 0-2 years)

All the interviewees (100%) had positive expectations for the merger. This was maybe because of the backgrounds of the interviewees from the corporate stakeholders where mergers are common. Some interviewees even found it hard to think of future challenges.

“Positive, I don’t see any threats. It is **a huge possibility** that the resources are getting bigger and the organization is strengthening.” (Partner 0-2 years)

The only negative thing articulated by the interviewees was the bureaucracy. The old Paralympic Committee had only seven employees and the organization was fast and flexible from a corporate perspective. Some hoped that the bureaucracy would not increase in the new organization. Especially this concern came from the interviewees who had been partners longer period (3+ years).

“More possibilities than threats. When we are familiar as a partner, we already know what kind of things to make happen. Is there an overlap between two organizations and actions to be decreased? I see more possibilities on children and youth support and actions. There hasn’t been much **bureaucracy**, which has been great. Does this or possible new practices change the flexibility?” (Partner 3+ years)

“The world of associations is sometimes complex. From elite sports only, you come closer to average citizen. **I hope there isn’t more bureaucracy** when the organization gets bigger.” (Partner 3+ years)

As a conclusion, the interviewees saw lots of positive issues and possibilities in the wider organization. “The bigger has more power” theme featured in most of the interviews. In the future, a greater benefit to being a bigger organization is its wider offering for corporate cooperation and greater support for athletes that the new organization isn’t already supporting. The new organization possibly comes closer to the people, since it will not only support elite sports – it wasn’t so even earlier, but now there are more cooperation models and possibilities to support children, youth and hobbyists from the grass roots activities to elite sports.

As the interviews were conducted before the merger, the name of the new organization was not yet confirmed. The partners were asked in question 11: *How important you see the existing name of the Finnish Paralympic Committee?* 80 percent of the Paralympic Committee’s existing business partners saw the name Finnish Paralympic Committee as an important or highly important part of the brand.

“The Finnish Paralympic Committee is a stable name, and it has value especially being well-known.” (Partner 0-2 years)

“The Finnish Paralympic Committee is a strong binding denominator. **Through this name people understand disability elite sports.**” (Partner 0-2 years)

The interviewees saw that during the past years the word Paralympic has finally started to receive the attention of a wider audience. The brand image of the Paralympic Committee, athletes and their recognizability was seen important. The interviewees whose organizations had been partners more than three years were especially strict with their opinions on retaining the name.

“In the world the Paralympic-brand is truly alive. In Finland its benefit is not yet maximized, people are just starting to recognize it. It would be sad to lose it. Of the two organizations **Paralympic Committee is better known**, and it will hopefully continue with that same name.” (Partner 3+ years)

The existing name had positive image among the interviewees. Some of the interviewees associated positively with the word Paralympic. Among the newer partners this was noted from a brand and visibility perspective.

“The existing name has a **positive meaning**, and it brings positive visibility.”
(Partner 0-2 years)

“The name is really good. It mirrors what you are and is positive.” (Partner
3+ years)

After this research was conducted and the data analyzed, it was confirmed that the new association would also be called the Finnish Paralympic Committee from January 1st 2020 onwards. The name VAU ry was retired at the end of 2019.

The word Paralympic will be discussed later in the workshop section where the wider audience of the partner employees were asked about the first word to come in mind about parasport. The next section will concentrate on the stakeholder communications.

5.4 Stakeholder communication and future expectations

Two-way communication with business partners and the communication channels of both sides were important factors in this research. The final section - questions 13 to 15 - first discuss the communication channels of the Paralympic Committee, and after that the channels of the business partners where the business partners were asked to place the following communication channels in order from the most important to least important:

- A) Website
- B) Facebook
- C) Twitter
- D) YouTube
- E) Instagram

For future development the participants viewed its website as a most important channel for the Paralympic Committee. Every other partner saw this as the most important channel (1.) asked to rank its importance between 1 (the most important) and 5 (the least important). The average value given to the website was given: 2.00.

Facebook was the second most important channel with an average of 2.20. Most of the partners saw the website or the Facebook channel as a most important channels for the Paralympic Committee’s business co-operation. After this, Instagram (an average value of 3.00) was judged as important followed by Twitter (an average value of 3.60).

From all the Paralympic Committee's channels YouTube was seen as the least important during the research, with an average value of 4.20. After the merger, the YouTube channel was the last one to be renewed.

Two Facebook channels, a Twitter account and an Instagram account were the first ones to be renewed at the beginning of the year in 2020. It was also suggested that the Paralympic Committee should create a LinkedIn account, which it did not have at the time. By the end of 2020, the new LinkedIn account has already generated almost 500 followers.

From the business partners' channels, the most important from above five by the participants was their company's own website (average 1.9). Here, more than every second partner viewed this as their most important channel. The second most important channel was the company's Facebook page (average 2.3). Almost all the interviewees marked either the company's website or their Facebook page as the most important.

Opinions about Instagram (with an average value of 3.1) and Twitter (with an average value of 3.4) varied a lot. The companies' YouTube channels were seen the least important, with almost all the companies viewing YouTube as the least or the second least important channel of five channels discussed (average 4.3).

In this channel study, only five channels were discussed. Beyond these, some of the Paralympic Committee's partners only brought up their own intranet possibilities and LinkedIn. The various channels improve and change as existing technologies boost them at different times. It would be highly beneficial and interesting to conduct further longitudinal research (i.e., annually) and see differences over time. The COVID-19 pandemic started after this study, so YouTube and webinar channels would probably be more important now than during this study.

After the respective importance of each individual channel was ascertained, it was time to find out the content. In the open-ended questions, one important form of content was raised in most of the interviews: videos. The need and desire for short videos was raised in across all of the discussed communication channels. Videos were needed for short and quick information sharing by both of partnership length groups (i.e. partners of 0-2 years and 3+ years).

“The importance of the videos is crucial for all of the communication channels. It is important to bring moments to life” (Partner 0-2 years)

The second most important content after videos was articulated by the respondents was collaborative content that emphasizes the cooperation between the Paralympic Committee and the business stakeholder. This question, on the other hand, raises the important matter of the resources needed to produce such content, yet on the other hand, such collaborative content would develop synergy and create possibilities for disability sports to be seen through business stakeholders' larger communication channels.

“Cooperative communication materials would bring synergy benefits, and we need more discussion over how to have you take more advantage on our companies' channels.” (Partner, 3+ years)

The answers showed that the nature of the disability sports and issues related to people with disabilities include a greater need for information. In one third of the interviews the respondents hoped that the Paralympic Committee could serve as a professional body highlighting issues associated with disabilities and help the business stakeholders with these issues. The most important place for finding informative material was the Paralympic Committee's website.

In conclusion, videos collaborative content about the cooperation and informative content were the three most important content needs articulated by the Paralympic Committee's partners. The importance of written content offered by the Paralympic Committee and its photo bank were raised in the discussion. In regard to these channels, it is important to carefully consider the audiences the Paralympic Committee and its partners aim to reach. This is why the LinkedIn started to quickly receive attention although organizational accounts are not followed as often nor as popular as the personal accounts.

5.5 Branding and workshop

After the results from the semi-structured interviews were collected, the next step was to make preparations for collecting data from a workshop. The workshop was the next important step before the merger took place on January 1st in 2020.

The workshop was an important part of the study from a branding perspective and in regard to making actions visible. The aim of the workshop was to network and to test the proposed slogan, branding and look of the organization with its business partners. The aim was to have both Paralympic Committee's and VAU ry's business partners participating, as this was to be an important step on behalf of the charity in regard to its partnerships. Networking and co-creation are discussed in the next section with concrete examples from the workshop event.

The workshop was created for the existing partners, which had increased from 11 to 17 partnerships during the process. In the workshop there was at least one person from each partner organization participating. Most of the participants were partners of the Paralympic Committee, only few participants had earlier cooperation with the VAU ry. This workshop was the first time for Paralympic Committee and VAU ry partners and employees were organized together in this level, so 7 of the attendees were employees of the new Paralympic Committee. Altogether 39 persons participated to the workshop.

At the beginning of the workshop the attendees were asked to answer questions relating to specific themes with their mobile phones by typing an answer on a web page with the results being projected real-time onto a wall. The first background question in the workshop was asked the attendees for one word that comes to the attendees' mind about parasports. The second background question was about the most important way to cooperate with the Paralympic Committee.



Figure 9. Wordcloud from partnership workshop. Which word first comes to mind when you think about parasports? 3.12.2019.

In confirmation of the findings of the semi-structured thematic interviews, the five most quoted words also in the networking event were courage (= translated here from sisu), equality (= yhtenvertaisuus), elite sports (= huippu-urheilu), possibility (= mahdollisuus)

and bravery (= rohkeus). There were three important themes that were raised from this background exercise.

1. Sisu, also known as “Finnish sisu” is a word for courage or bravery, and it was mentioned in many ways and this sentiment was behind many of the words used (= sisu, sisukkuus, periksiantamattomuus, tahto).
2. Equality (= yhdenvertaisuus, tasa-arvo, tasa-arvoisuus, tasavertaisuus) was the second common theme within the answers.
3. Success (menestys) and winner or winners (= voittaja, voittajat) was the third important theme. This strongly relates to the importance placed on support elite sports (= huippu-urheilu).

The most common cooperation themes from the partners in the interviews section were the increase of the corporate social responsibility and its awareness, cooperation in different communication methods, and athletes performing at company events and in collaborative campaigns. These themes were also shown to partners in the first networking event and they were placed on the wall, where everyone got to see them and vote for the most important one. Next the attendees had the possibility to answer the following question: Which method is the most important theme in your cooperation with the Paralympic Committee?

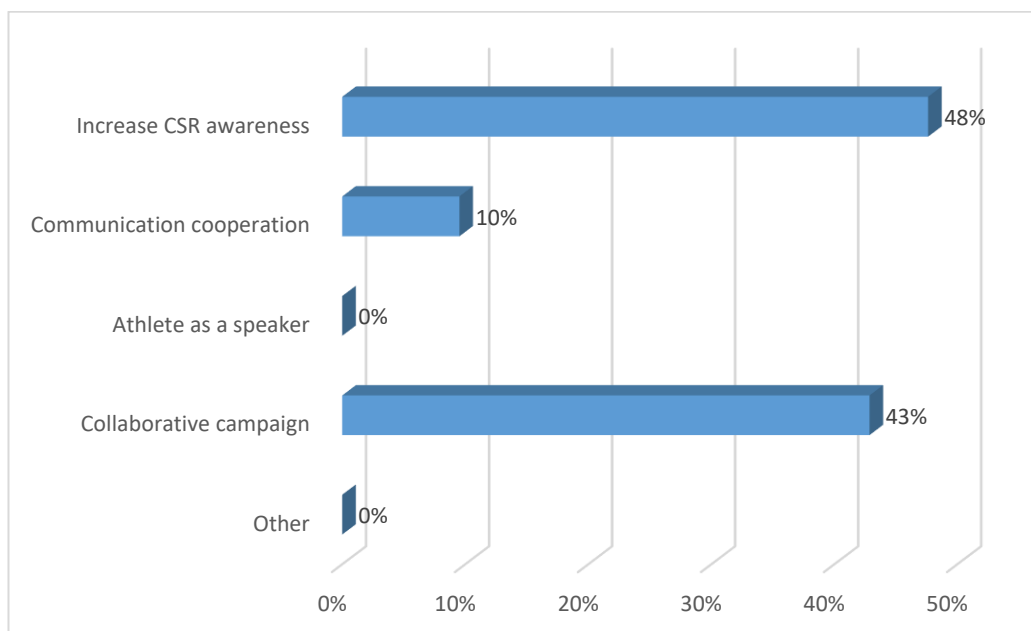


Figure 10. Workshop for partners. The most important cooperation method. 3.12.2019.

At the networking event, the two most important themes these four pre-established themes was increasing of the CSR and need to create collaborative campaigns between the Paralympic Committee and its partner companies. It is notable that the attendees only

were able to choose one option. The importance of the communication cooperation and athletes as impressive speakers were raised in the research in respect to wider existing cooperation and future expectations.

In the research the common themes expressed by the words that partners chose were equality, success, and change. Equality was one of the most important values expressed by the cooperation partners in their interview answers. The importance of supporting elite sports is shown in relation to the use of the word *success* too. *Change* describes the change anticipated as the two organizations prepared to merge into a new organization, but was also related to changes in society towards wider audience and to giving recognition to people with disabilities.

Between summer 2019 and the networking event in December 2019 a marketing company was asked to create slogan suggestions for the new Paralympic Committee. Four slogan suggestions were chosen and these were shown in the networking event to the partners. They had the opportunity to vote for the best one.

Slogan for the Finnish Paralympic Committee?

1. "Success looks like you" (56,67%)
2. "Change starts with sports" (20,00%)
3. "We are the changemaker of the societal change" (16,67%)
4. "We encourage kids move and create success" (6,67 %)

The slogan "success looks like you" (Menestys näyttää sinulta) was chosen at the networking event and deemed to be the best slogan choice. This slogan was also used in the first marketing campaign in January 2020, when the new Finnish Paralympic Committee was first introduced to a wider audience at the Finnish Sports Gala in Helsinki.

In stakeholder management the three most important actions are regular meetings and actions with a company, to organizing approximately one well-organized joint event per quarter for the partners at which to network, and keeping the chosen value-based themes as an important aspect of the whole cooperation.

So, what are the main reasons for the existing business partners to support disability sports? As a summary the cooperation is mainly based on shared values and supports visibility for both parties. Cooperation with the Paralympic Committee has positive tone and sends positive message to the partners' customers, employees, and other stakeholders.

Cooperation with the Paralympic Committee is based on corporate social responsibility, and both parties gain the visibility through the cooperation. On the other hand, after the merger of Paralympic Committee and VAU ry, cooperation with the business stakeholders has increasing potential for cooperation and to support the para-athletes together.

6. Suggestions for the future

In the research, the main reasons to support disabled sports were the possibilities for a win-win-win; for the athletes, Paralympic Committee, and business stakeholders themselves. This would be managed through corporate social responsibility, equality, and value-based cooperation.

Communications cooperation and the Paralympic Committee acting as a professional support for the business partners for example on accessibility within the sports industry should be carefully considered when applying cooperation in practice.

Sponsorships for disability sports are rather new and developed in the 21st century. The background for this new sponsorship framework is the desire to shift operations with business stakeholders from charity to even more active cooperation and a win-win-win for all parties.

Based on the aim towards Partnership-KAM in the Key Account Management Relational Development Model, the suggestions for business cooperation themes are divided into seven steps:

1. Stakeholder management towards Partnership-KAM
2. Value-based cooperation
3. Stakeholder communication
4. Corporate Social Responsibility
5. Sponsorship
6. Events co-operation
7. Charity and donations

These seven steps are discussed in the following seven suggestions.

6.1 Stakeholder management towards Partnership-KAM

In the study the Paralympic Committee received good feedback about its flexibility with the partnerships, and regular meeting with the partners are an important part of the cooperation. The study was run with the business stakeholders of the old Paralympic Committee and before the merger with another disability sports association VAU, and some of the partners were worried that the new bigger organization would bring more bureaucracy.

Engaging the existing partners at the Partnership-KAM level has many benefits since the recommendations will be highly important in the future. In the study every partner would recommend cooperation with the Paralympic Committee to another business stakeholder, which gives a good background to take the five themes into practice.

In the research the main themes were the importance of corporate social responsibility, equality, and the importance to act as an accessibility professional to some of the business partners.

Jobber and Lancaster (2015, 278) describe key account management (KAM) in a “Key Account Management Relational Development Model”. This model is divided into five phases: 1. Pre-KAM, 2. Early-KAM, 3. Mid-KAM, 4. Partnership-KAM and 5. Synergistic-KAM.

In the Key Account Management Relational Development Model by Jobber and Lancaster (2015, 278), the first phase is Pre-KAM. This phase is for prospects, so none of the existing partners of the Paralympic Committee are at this level, but it is important to recognize and be able to attract new partners. The second phase of the framework is Early-KAM, which is for opportunities in closer collaboration in identifying the motives, culture, and concerns of the customer. The third phase of the framework is Mid-KAM, where trust has already been established.

The fourth phase is Partnership-KAM, which is the most important part of this thesis and the fifth and ultimate stage is Synergistic-KAM, but the organizations are not here yet with the business partners. The fifth level in sports should be considered as the top level, for example co-operation with Olympic and Paralympic Committees in different countries where joint research and development take place and decision-making includes joint business planning.

The most important stage of the relational development model is the fourth stage of Partnership-KAM which Jobber and Lancaster (2015, 279) describe as being where the buying organization sees the other party as an important strategic resource. Here the level of trust is sufficient for both parties also to be willing to share sensitive information. Actions move to joint problem-solving, collaborative product or service development and, for example, training for both organizations’ staff members. This is the particular level this study aims to reach with the partnerships to be able to engage and attract more partnerships and support for disability sports.

But how does one build value-based partnerships from donations? This is a good question raised during this study. Before the merger of the two organizations the old VAU had many years of good experiences of charity work and donations from corporations. The old Paralympic Committee had their cooperation background more in partnerships. This is where two worlds were combined.

This study strongly suggests aiming towards Partnership-KAM, although partnerships need more time, resources, and stakeholder management than simply receiving donations. A successful process would bring in more satisfied and long-lasting cooperation. Aiming from charity towards value-based partnerships I suggest the following figure.



Figure 11. From charity towards partnerships in disability sports (Mäkynen, 2020).

The question of how to build partnerships from a donations background brings in the importance of stakeholder management and stakeholder communication. Partnerships are important and necessary, especially for non-profit organizations. But if an organization does not have enough resources for reasonable stakeholder management or stakeholder communication, it is not rational to aim towards partnerships. Partnerships need more time than receiving donations. At an organizational level, this is also a strategic question and decision.

Before aiming towards partnerships, the organization must define the cooperation model. If the aim is towards value-based cooperation, the cooperation model must be carefully decided and planned. Succeeding in value-based cooperation can bring huge benefits for both parties. Suggestions for value-based cooperation are described in the next section.

6.2 Value-based cooperation

Common values are an important part of successful partnerships. Common values or some common values give a backbone for building long-lasting win-win partnerships. In the study the most important common values were equality and accessibility. The new organization will reconsider its values but from the partners' feedback these themes need to

be considered when planning the future of the new organization. These values and themes are applied in defining the cooperation partners' combined values.

Kummu (2007, 92) describe how the most important aspects for corporate cooperation with the Paralympic Committee have been hard work, the increase of disability sport visibility from the beginning of the 21st century and common values with the business stakeholders.

Villanen (2016, 67) argues that values are an important part of the corporation and individual personality. Villanen adds that values give individuals or organizations the possibility to prioritise different issues and values lead behaviour, but they are often hard to communicate because of their abstract nature and inclusion of emotions.

Value-based co-operation with the Paralympic Committee has been an important part of the cooperation for many years, as Kummu noted. This study showed the increasing importance of value-based cooperation among existing business partners. Value-based cooperation is important for the existing cooperation, but it is also important when recognizing and finding new cooperation partners. In the study the most important raised common values were: 1. Equality and 2. Accessibility.

The new organization will consider and determine its values, but from the partners' feedback these two themes of equality and accessibility in particular need to be strongly considered in planning the future actions of the new organization with its corporate partners. These values and themes are applied in defining the cooperation partners' combined values.

It is notable that some existing partners had not yet written their values in public, but the process of determining and raising values from the already existing disability sports supporting actions is recommended for all organizations, non-profits and corporations. It is sometimes hard to make values visible, and that is when organizations need good and considered stakeholder communication which is described in the next section.

6.3 Stakeholder communication

This study was the first time stakeholder communication development from the partnership perspective had been investigated this widely, which gave relevant material to consider future stakeholder communication from the partnerships needs perspective.

The most important channel from the corporate cooperation perspective of the Paralympic Committee was its website. The website is important for searching for relevant data on disability sports. Increasing knowledge of disability sports is important for bringing the partners' employees closer to the subject and affects deeper cooperation.

Of the social media channels, Facebook was seen as most important, which should be considered when sharing data. It is notable that Instagram and other fast-sharing applications are raising rapidly. It is important to understand the needs for website and Facebook during the study, and they are relevant for reaching out especially to an older audience. It is also important to look for new applications and channels especially to reach the younger audience.

The study showed differences on awareness for example on elite sports communication with the Paralympic Team Finland and intellectual disability activities of Special Olympics Finland. For these two in particular, it is recommended to have different Facebook channels to be able to share relevant messages for both audiences.

One concrete suggestion that was raised in this study was to create a LinkedIn account. This was seen as so important that it was decided it should take place during the data analysis by the end of 2020 the new LinkedIn account had almost 500 followers. This study has already created one more channel to make disability sports visible and a concrete way to reach possible partnerships.

Content suggestions to fulfil stakeholders' communication needs were more videos for the partners'. In the study short videos were raised as being important to partners for short and quick information-sharing and engaging both employees and customers. The second most important content after videos was seen as being overall collaborative content about the cooperation between the Paralympic Committee and the business stakeholder. These both need resources, so there is also a strategic decision to take on where to concentrate.

The partners wished to have more concentrated content especially from a business perspective which brought a suggestion to have a section for business partners on the Paralympic Committee website. The business cooperation website was completely renewed and content in that section will be tagged as having the relevant data for the partnerships in that area of the website.

On the future choices, the study also raised the importance of corporate social responsibility from the corporate perspective. This subject needs more studying amongst non-profit

organizations and needs to be considered an important part of stakeholder communication. Because of the importance of corporate social responsibility suggestions in this area are described separately in the next section.

6.4 Corporate Social Responsibility

After considering the suggestions for moving from charity towards value-based partnerships in the first upper level, it is time to move on with the suggestions in the second and lower level. The study showed that business stakeholders saw corporate social responsibility issues as highly important.

The three dimensions of sustainable development was earlier described as 1. Economic responsibility, 2. social responsibility and 3. environmental responsibility (Harmaala & Jallinoja 2012, 17). It is strongly suggested that the three dimensions should be the basis of the future responsibility programme.

There is an increasing need for non-profits to understand the nature of corporate social responsibility issues from the corporate perspective. Education, understanding and possibly new knowledge is needed in the organizations. Value-based partnerships that are implementing the corporate social responsibility also need more time resources.

These suggestions are placed in the following “From charity towards partnerships” figure, created during this research process based on the findings and for future suggestions.

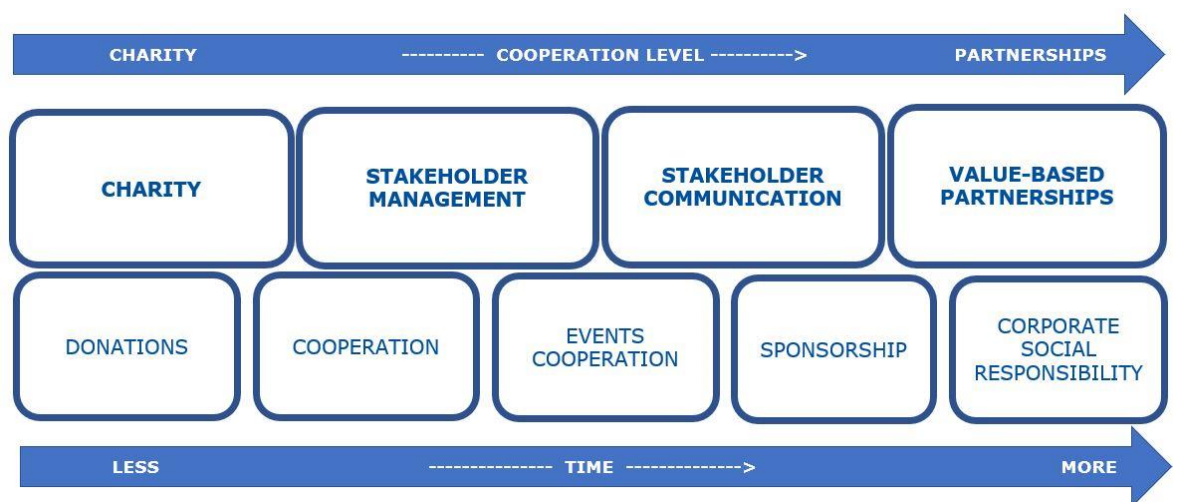


Figure 11. From charity towards partnerships and from donations towards corporate social responsibility strategy in disability sports (Mäkynen, 2020).

The earlier figure in Section 7.1 explained the suggestions for the first upper level of charity towards value-based partnerships. The figure above goes deeper into the cooperation with suggestions from donations, cooperation, event cooperation, and sponsorship towards corporate social responsibility strategy implementation.

In the same way as in the upper level, value-based partnerships need more time from the organizations to succeed, in the second and concrete level the corporate social responsibility strategy implementation needs more time from both sides of the partnerships than only receiving donations.

In best practices, corporate social responsibility is a crucial part of the whole value-based cooperation and a strong stakeholder perspective is deepest in strategic corporate social responsibility (strategic CSR). Harmaala and Jallinoja (2012, 77) note that here the organization notices the expectations of the stakeholders, and what makes the stakeholder perspective strategic is that the corporate social responsibility goals and actions are also part of the business strategy. Implementing that strategy needs careful consideration – and resources and time.

Before transferring organizational cooperation from charity into the partnerships-KAM, it is highly useful to consider this exercise and figure. This template is for disability sports cooperation but can be used for other organizations and areas too. The organization can consider if there is more knowledge later in some areas. The aim is that all of the issues are treated equally, but for example in organizations where charity work is strong or gets stronger, the stakeholder management and stakeholder communications should also provide more support in that direction.

This template is not only restricted to disability sports, non-profits or even sports organizations. This figure can benefit many organizations and is not restricted to one specific area. What is more specific in the sports and culture area is sponsorship, suggestions for which will be discussed in the next section.

6.5 Sponsorship

Sponsorship is not donation or charity (Valanko 2009, 49). That is why sponsorship suggestions needs careful planning and time from the sponsors and their objects. The sponsor is often looking for publicity, when in charity the organization does not often want to be acknowledged or recognized for its positive actions. Societal sponsorship is seen as more and more important for the big audience in the future (Valanko 2009, 87), which hopefully gives more sponsorship opportunities for disability sport.

During this study, in the 21st century sponsorship is rather new for disability sports. The importance of sponsorship has been raised especially because of some of the athletes who are seen as role models even widely in the Finnish society. The partners of the Paralympic Committee are still forerunners among Finnish corporations in sponsoring para-athletes.

After the Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro, wheelchair racer Leo-Pekka Tähti was voted Athlete of the Year of 2016 in Finland. But it is surprising that there are still companies in Finland that have chosen to sponsor only non-disabled athletes in 2020, when the aim is towards equality in many other issues in society.

During the time of this study, the Sponsor Insight research on sports industry in 2019 had not yet covered what kind of share of the 162 million euros for the sports sponsorship market in Finland goes to disability sports. It would be interesting to see how small an amount of that goes to disability sports. From a disability sports perspective it is not reasonable to complain if the figures are low, but is more reasonable to take more actions to improve this.

Why is it even important to increase sponsorship among disability sports? For people with disabilities, it is highly important to see the forerunners succeeding and also with relevant stakeholder communication share the ideas that also people with disabilities can also do many kinds of things in sports and be a forerunner in Finland. Sports is for all, and this will encourage younger people with disabilities towards sports and show them the possibility to reach for their own best. In this way disabilities should not be seen only as a challenge, but also as a possibility to do different kind of sports and reach for a healthy lifestyle.

The best suggestion for a sponsorship strategy for the corporate partners would be to have a partnership with the local Paralympic Committee, and to sponsor one to three Paralympic athletes as brand ambassadors, depending on the company budget. A good example of this is Toyota Auto Finland, which is supporting the International Paralympic Committee, local Paralympic Committee in Finland and has had for example Leo-Pekka Tähti and Matti Suur-Hamari as brand ambassadors.

Disability sports is often more than only sports and has a responsible aspect of not only supporting non-disabled athletes. The athletes should be forerunners and visible in various areas and at events, and event cooperation is suggested in the next section.

6.6 Event cooperation

In the study all the partners saw doing disability sports together as highly important, while surprisingly attending sports events as an audience were not seen as such an important part of the cooperation. It is suggested to continue disability sports try-outs, since they are very well appreciated, and brings engagement amongst company employees.

It is notable that this study was implemented before the Covid-19 pandemic, so the nature of events and event cooperation has changed after conducting the study. After the study there was a period when physical events were not allowed. Safety issues have been increased and networking via digital tools and remote meetings have become more common. This causes considerations for events cooperation. Physical events are good for engaging partners and a fundraising method too. Digital events need even more stakeholder communication to attract the relevant audience.

In the study, networking was raised as a highly important part of cooperation and the business partners have had a joint meeting, workshop or get together at least once every quarter, approximately four times a year. It is recommended to try to keep these physical meetings after the Covid-19 pandemic, since networking was considered so highly important.

In smaller and faster networking, digital tools bring possibilities to engage the audiences even every month, but the other events and webinars should be more voluntary events for partners who want to deepen their knowledge or do even more networking with the digital tools.

The study showed networking to be an important part of the cooperation, but networking events were not wanted more frequently and also should not be too rare. It is important to give networks and partners the feeling that they can utilize the cooperation. That is why it is not recommended to have too many events for business stakeholders and why this study suggests organizing one joint event per quarter for the partners.

What need to be considered in sports events are the choices between organizing one's own disability sports events or to trying to be part of other bigger events. Organizing events as part of bigger events will have more possibilities to attract more audience and give more visibility to business partners too.

Events need more time and resources from a communication perspective, but they give many possibilities for charity and donations. These possibilities are discussed in the seventh suggestions section.

6.7 Charity and donations

At the beginning of the research the main point was to aim business cooperation for disability sports from charity towards partnerships. This world of disability sports is not that black and white, divided into either/or. This study showed the importance of charity in business stakeholder cooperation. Despite the headline of this study, as a result also suggests more actions for increasing charity and donations. Fundraising campaigns can be a strong part of disability sports with emotional content.

This study showed that sometimes companies do not use the official partnership as much as they can, and charity and donations are also an important part of corporate social responsibility. It is the nature of disability sports that the business partners are implementing their corporate social responsibility strategies more widely than in sponsorship only.

During reporting this study in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic was causing uncertainties and charity issues were even more strongly raised in cooperation considerations. When companies and individuals want to help, charity and donations can be a less time-consuming and highly important part of fundraising and stakeholder communications. Fundraising campaigns can be a good way to communicate stories and share emotional content to the targeted audience.

One of the most impressive fundraising campaigns in Finland for 2020 in sports was the Olympic Fund, Olympiarahasto. The Finnish Olympic Committee's Support Fund started a massive fundraising campaign where individuals and companies can donate to support sports widely. The state is committed to donating the same amount of the collected money, up to a maximum of 20 million euros (Olympiarahasto, 2020).

In this study the partners showed strong commitment to supporting disability sports. For future considerations it is suggested to investigate if companies want to show support especially for disabled sports. That is why it is suggested to have donations as an important part of building the corporate social responsibility actions and starting a company's own strong fundraising for disability sports specifically.

6.8 Summary

Stakeholder communication plays an important role in improving stakeholder management towards partnerships. Based on the findings this study suggests seven important themes to focus on, which are valid for non-profit organizations, sports associations, clubs, or even active individual athletes.

1. Stakeholder management and the aim towards Partnership-KAM
2. Value-based cooperation
3. Stakeholder communication
4. Corporate Social Responsibility
5. Sponsorship
6. Donations
7. Event cooperation

Cooperation with the business partners should not involve only charity and the first steps towards increasing engaged partnerships have already been taken. The feedback in general was positive, but there are also many other possibilities for business cooperation in disability sports. The research process went well, although the Covid-19 pandemic caused some delays and changes to the report and implementing the suggestions in the first year of the new organization.

The results met the theory about the stakeholder management and stakeholder communications very well. There was even more need to understand corporate social responsibility issues and this study raised the importance of non-profit organizations having knowledge of CSR.

The reflection of own learning in these subjects were mainly benefitted in learning about corporate social responsibility. CSR is the key to develop partnerships on a non-profit perspective with business partners. Learning occurred in building the following steps and model itself, and lead to good conversations during the merger process in various departments of the organization.

The importance of stakeholder communications was high and recognized. Based on the study and the earlier discussed Key Account Relational Development Model theory by Jobber and Lancaster (2015, 278), this study suggests a special Key Account Management Relational Development Model for disability sports.

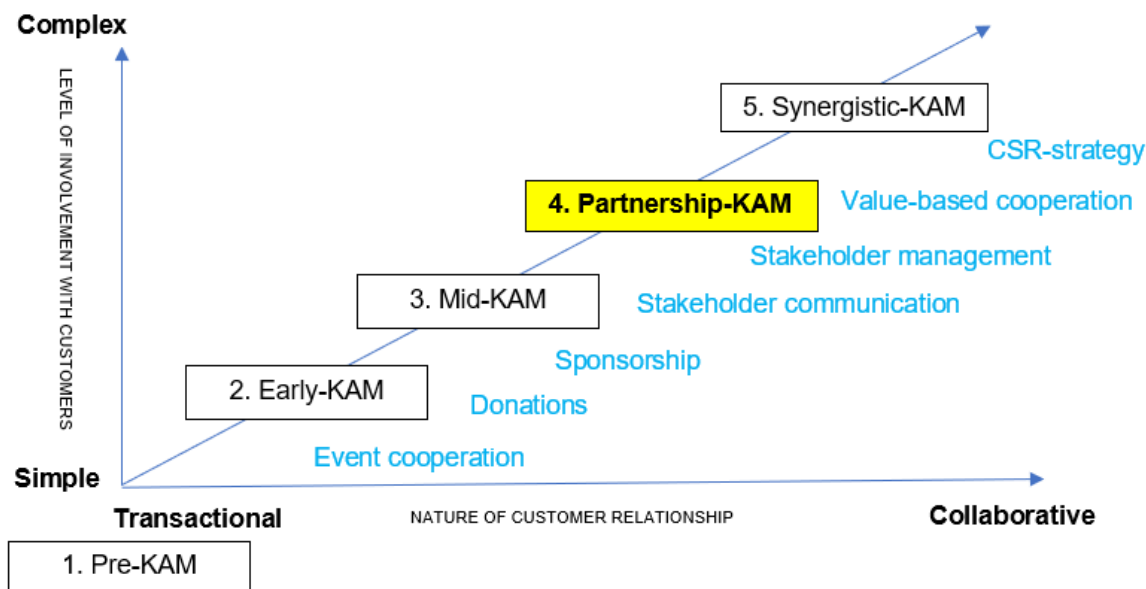


Figure 12. Key Account Management Relational Development Model for disability sports (Jobber and Lancaster 2015, 278 – modified by Mäkynen, 2020).

This modified Key Account Management Relational Development Model for disability sports was also taken into practice during the study. During the study and the building of the model, the organization’s partnerships increased from the interviewed 11 partnerships to 21 in two years from the end of 2018 to the end of 2020. During this time the world was hit by the Covid-19 pandemic, which brought uncertainty to the sports industry and for example the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics were postponed.

The timing of this study and the suggestions for the new disability sports model was perfect during the integration process of the two disability sports non-profit organizations. Are there uncertainties that affect the future of the disability sports? In the future the world-wide pandemic and the uncertain nature of companies’ economies linked to the future funding uncertainty from the governmental support for sports will bring challenges. On the other hand, it brings more possibilities to investigate and build new models and solutions. These subjects give good reasons for future studies to investigate the influences of the uncertainty.

For the future, this study gives a good background for new research and challenges to improving stakeholder communications and business stakeholder cooperation. This was not an Internet or desk enquiry and this kind of study into disability sports business cooperation is rare and probably gave even more insight and wider answers.

In the future the interview can be modified to a satisfaction survey, which would be available for future use. This study also gives a good background to scale the model for sports associations, sports clubs or even individual athletes' use. Hopefully, this study gives ideas even to a wider audience to support disability sports and start activities moving from charity issues towards building long-lasting partnerships. In the future sports and parasports should not be that strongly divided as they are still in 2020.

This study hopefully gives courage and ideas for companies, associations, and individuals not to limit their support to non-disabled athletes. Disabled athletes need to be raised and supported now by these pioneers, so that in the future there is no sports and parasports. There is only sports.

6.9 Validity and reliability of the research

Validity can be summarised as whether the researchers see what they think they see. There can be three main errors in research. First, the relations or principles are not correct, second to reject when the relations or principles are correct. The third error is to ask the wrong questions. (Flink 2009, 387.)

In this study the literature was increased and the relation with the partners and the disability sports consistent. The semi-structured interviews showed that the link with corporate social responsibility was strong, and its relations to the literature with the stakeholder communications and stakeholder management were relevant and considered in the interview questions too.

The questions in the interviews worked well since it was necessary to have long interviews and many insights from the same interviewees. The decision to have the interviews in Finnish instead of English was the correct decision according to the large amount of relevant feedback. Future cooperation with the business partners has all the possibility to engage more people from the organizations, since now more and more people are part of the co-operation.

The study included ten interviews before the decision about the merger with Paralympic Committee and VAU ry. There could have been even more interviews, but these combined 91% of the then-existing partners. On the other hand, there were no more partners at the beginning of the case study, so the number of the interviews was justified. It is not certain if more interviews would give different results, but after this study there are more

interview data possibilities. For this type of study with three themes and long interviews, this was enough for building the model.

The workshop in December was important to see that this case study was on the right track. The answers followed the analysis and results of the interviews. The same workshop also included focus group interviews in six groups, but due to the good amount of data already available in this research, they were not analyzed for this study.

As a conclusion the reliability and validity were on a good level. For the future, this case study works as a good background for the next disability sport business cooperation research, especially after Covid-19 pandemic. This study gives good suggestions to begin and develop disability sport cooperation and encourages to more research on the subject.

7. Discussion

The reason for conducting this study in the beginning was to gather relevant data and find solutions to a research problem: What motivates existing business stakeholders to support Paralympic sports?

The most important reasons that motivate supporting Paralympic sports are the equality issues through the cooperation, corporate social responsibility, value-based cooperation for common values, positive brand image and to make the activities around these visible to the wider audience.

As a possibility both business stakeholders and non-profit organizations could concentrate more on supporting the visibility of the corporate social responsibility and the importance to act as an accessibility professional to some of the business partners.

The research shows that Paralympic sports has more societal cooperation possibilities and is often more than only sports. There is still hard work to be done so that para-athletes get their recognition in sports. The amount of the business stakeholders monetary support for both of the old non-profit organizations was in 2019 still on a low level at less than 10% of their combined budgets. Through equality and more than sports cooperations with the business stakeholders, the new organization would have a good view in the future for business cooperation.

The average length of the partnerships was 4.00 years. The median was 2.5 years. The partnerships can be divided into two: the first half of the partnerships had lasted longer than three years and the other half less than three years.

All of the existing stakeholders would recommend cooperation with the Finnish Paralympic Committee to another corporation. The satisfaction of the existing stakeholders is highly important since it is often less time-consuming to strengthen existing partnerships, while attracting new partners often requires more time and efforts. Recommendations are a highly important part of attracting new business stakeholders.

The learnings of the study were eagerly being put into practice already during the process. At the beginning of the research, the Paralympic Committee had 11 business partners in December 2018. At the end of the year 2020 the number of business partners had more than doubled (23 partners).

In 2020 the Finnish Sports industry was strongly hit by two massive crises: Covid-19 pandemic and the overall discussion of the possible decrease of monetary support in Finland in governmental support for sports.

What these results mean for the research problem? Disability sports can in the future have the same possibilities to find cooperation partners for sports associations, clubs and athletes that make themselves visible and concentrate more on parasports. The study shows the importance of individual athletes as role models, who have a good chance to brand themselves and show strong equality meaning for corporations. The possible brake for athletes could be the small amount of the social media followers, and it is not easy to raise the number of followers.

The findings of this study and these results show that the Paralympic Committee has a good chance to handle the difficult situations that are hitting to the monetary support of the sports industry. Disability sports in general should have the possibility to find more business cooperation partners from the private sector, especially from organizations supporting equality issues.

7.1 Stakeholder management

In the study the main findings on the existing co-operation were that value-based co-operation and brand image are highly important aspects of the partnerships. Further recommendations are important, so that is why it is necessary to take care of the existing stakeholders and engage them in many ways.

After the research was conducted, the yearly co-creation workshop of the Paralympic Committee took place one month before the actual merger of the Paralympic Committee and VAU ry. All the partners and some possible future partners took part in the yearly workshop in December 2019. It was one year from the start of the process, and there was confirmation of the name (Finnish Paralympic Committee) and some of the questions in the research for example about the organization could already be answered. This workshop included 39 attendees and at least one participant from each partners.

This workshop was a good place to test these suggestions in practice and start with three open questions on the main themes to discover some more information about the partnerships for the new organization. Learning during the study had already been taken into practice and the partners had increased from 11 to 17 business partners in one year. The first networking event had altogether 39 attendees, at least one attendee from each partner. Eight of the participants were employees of the Paralympic Committee.

Besides the meetings between non-profit association and companies, networking with other companies with the same values supporting parasports was seen as important. A good way to encourage companies to network with each other is to have a joint workshop every year. Situations in the companies can change during the year and these networking events give good views for the companies.

In the study the answers show that the cooperation with the Paralympic Committee is a new way of thinking about cooperation with sports. The reason for recommendation is not necessarily related to sports, with more influence from societal issues.

In the action targets of the co-operation, 90% of the partners saw social influencing as important or highly important. Corporate social responsibility is important or highly important for all the partners, which shows that non-profit organizations need to understand the basics of CSR. Commercial activities of the cooperation were not seen important. The interviews were conducted before the Covid-19 pandemic, so the results on commercial activities could be more important in the future.

The values of the Paralympic Committee included equality and accessibility, so the importance of these two in particular was asked about. Almost all the partners saw equality and accessibility as highly important aspects of the co-operation in the future and almost all saw equality as an important or highly important part of the partnership in the future. All the partners saw accessibility as important or highly important.

Values play an important part in partnerships. The highest averages of the interviews on a scale of one to five were equality (average 4.80), accessibility (average 4.70) and societal influencing (average 4.70). These themes need to be considered, in order to be a main part of communication in the future.

Because of the background of the Paralympic Committee supporting elite athletes, the Paralympic movement is much more familiar for the companies than the Special Olympics movement, which needs efforts by the new organization to increase the consciousness of this movement. All the business partners saw their own personnel consciousness about the co-operation as an important or highly important part of the co-operation.

7.2 Value-based cooperation

The influences and possibilities with the merger of Paralympic Committee and VAU were mainly seen as positive and not many negative opinions were raised. Future benefits were

the bigger organization and wider offering and support for the athletes. The new organization possibly comes closer to the people, since it is not only supporting elite sports. It was not so even earlier, but now for companies there are more cooperation models and possibilities to support children and youth as well as grass-roots sports, too.

Almost all the business partners saw the name Finnish Paralympic Committee as an important or highly important part of the brand. After this research was conducted and analyzed, it was confirmed that the new association would also be called the Finnish Paralympic Committee from 1st of January 2020. The name VAU was discontinued at the end of 2019.

“The name is really good. It mirrors what you are and is positive.” (Partner 3+ years)

Most of the answers stated shared values between the company and the Paralympic Committee to be important. Almost half mentioned shared values. The group of more experienced partnerships (3+ years) mentioned shared values more often than the newer partnerships (0-2 years), so the meaning of the shared values is probably even better understood the more common operations are held between the two organizations.

The three most important reasons for cooperation were shared values, positive brand image and visibility. Equality was the main discussion topic in two of the interviews. This raises the importance of the employer branding towards cooperation with disability sports organizations. Events and networking with the other partners were important in the perspective of networking with other companies and people who share the same values through disability sports.

Almost all the partners saw it as not important to support a specific sport in the future. These numbers show that they support Finnish sports widely, not one sport specifically. The athletes were hoped to be from various sports and they wanted to support as many athletes as possible through the cooperation.

Sustainable development has three different dimensions: economic responsibility, social responsibility, and environmental responsibility (Harmaala & Jallinoja 2012, 17). From the findings of this study, it is strongly recommended to consider these three dimensions in the plans and implementations of future responsibility programmes and especially in stakeholder communications with existing business partners and to attract new ones.

7.3 Stakeholder communication

In the study, the interviewees hoped to receive more videos, collaborative content about the cooperation and informative content for their needs. The importance of more written content and even more material for the existing photo bank was also raised.

The non-profit organization must understand and consider that it has many other needs and target audiences, too. But if these needs can be filled, the business stakeholders offer possibilities for visibility to reach even more audiences. These needs and suggestions should be considered in the future stakeholder communication plans.

The channels of the business partners in their order of importance to the partners were: website, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram.

For the future development as the most important channel of the Paralympic Committee the partners raised the website. Facebook was the second most-important channel. Most of the partners saw the website or the Facebook channel as the most important channels of the Paralympic Committee business co-operation before Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. There was also a suggestion to create a LinkedIn account, which the Paralympic Committee did not have at the time.

The research has had many positive influences on disabled sports and business communication. The suggestion for a LinkedIn account for the Paralympic Committee led to concrete action and building a LinkedIn account, which was opened in spring 2019. This action point brought disability sport closer to not only existing but also possible new business stakeholders.

The study was conducted before Covid-19 pandemic and after that for example YouTube and other webinar solutions could be higher in importance in the channels. It would highly beneficial and interesting to run the research every year and see the differences.

The object of this study was to find out what motivates the business stakeholders to support disability sports. Three main findings and reasons behind the cooperation were value-based cooperation, positive brand image for both parties and cooperation part of the corporate social responsibility strategy.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Semi-structured interview template

Hei,

Yhteistyökumppanuuksien vahvistamiseksi entisestään Suomen Paralympiakomitea ry tekee yrityskumppaneilleen verkostokyselyn. Haastattelu suoritetaan puhelimitse ja vastaaminen kestää noin 20 minuuttia. Arvostamme suuresti haastatteluun käyttämäsi aikaa. Kiitos!

TAUSTATIEDOT (1)

1. Kuinka monta vuotta yrityksenne on ollut Suomen Paralympiakomitean kumppani?

YHTEISTYÖSSÄ TÄRKEÄÄ ja SUOSITTELU (2)

2. Minkä tai mitkä asiat koette tärkeimmäksi ollessanne Suomen Paralympiakomitean kumppani?
3. Suositteletko yhteistyötä Paralympiakomitean kanssa toiselle yrityskumppanille? (KYLLÄ / EI) MIKSI?
4. Seuraavassa esitetään kysymyksiä samaan aihepiiriin liittyen. Asteikolla 1-5 miten tärkeää teille Paralympiakomitean yhteistyökumppanina on tulevana vuosina yhteistyössä seuraavat asiat?
 - A) Paralympialaiset
 - B) Huippu-urheilu
 - C) Vammaishuippu-urheilu
 - D) Yhteiskunnallinen vaikuttaminen
 - E) Yhteistyön kaupallinen hyödyntäminen
 - F) Yritysvastuu
 - G) Yhdenvertaisuus
 - H) Esteettömyys
 - I) Urheilijakeskeisyys
 - J) Lapset
 - K) Nuoret
 - L) Harrastajat
 - M) Urheilijat yleisesti
 - N) Paralympialaisiin tähtäävät urheilijat
 - O) Special Olympics -urheilijat
 - P) Yritysverkoston tapaamiset
 - Q) Urheilutapahtumat yleisönä
 - R) Lajikokeilut ja yhdessä liikkuminen

TIETOISUUS JA BRÄNDI (4)

5. Miten tärkeää yrityksellenne on oman henkilöstönne tietoisuus yhteistyöstä Suomen Paralympiakomitean kanssa, asteikolla 1-5?
6. Onko yhteistyöllä Suomen Paralympiakomitean kanssa on ollut positiivista vaikutusta yrityksenne brändiin, asteikolla 1-5? Millaista vaikutusta?

TYTYTYVÄISYYS (5)

7. Kuinka tyytyväinen olet yhteistyöhön Paralympiakomitean kanssa, asteikolla 1-5?
- A) Mihin asioihin olet erityisen tyytyväinen?
- B) Missä asioissa näet parannettavaa?
8. Mistä asioista yhteistyössä yrityksesi haluaisi jatkossa erityisesti hyötyä?

TULEVAISUUS - YHTEISTYÖN KEHITTÄMINEN (6)

9. Onko yrityksellenne tulevana vuosina tärkeää jonkin tietyn lajin tukeminen? (KYLLÄ / EI)
- A) Minkä lajin?
- B) Miksi?
10. Onko yrityksellenne tulevana vuosina tärkeää jonkin tietyn urheilijan tukeminen? (KYLLÄ / EI)
- A) Minkä urheilijan?
- B) Miksi?

YHDISTYMISEN VAIKUTUKSET JA MAHDOLLISUUDET (7)

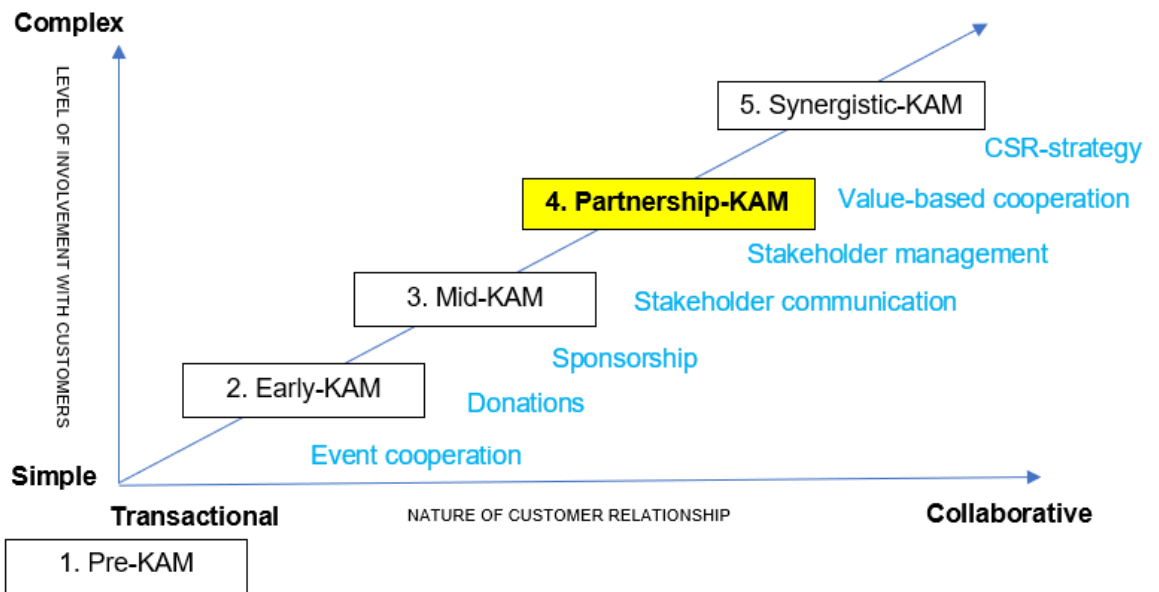
11. Suomen Paralympiakomitean ja Suomen Vammaisurheilu ja -liikunta VAU:n hallitukset ovat hyväksyneet aiesopimuksen järjestöjen toimintojen yhdistämisestä siten, että 1.1.2020 alkaen järjestöjen toiminta olisi yhden järjestön alla. Mitä lisämahdollisuuksia tai uhkia näet Suomen Paralympiakomitean yhdistymiseen VAU:n kanssa?
12. Kuinka tärkeänä koet Suomen Paralympiakomitean nimen brändin osalta, asteikolla 1-5? MIKSI?

VIESTINTÄKANAVAT (8)

13. Laita tärkeysjärjestykseen Paralympiakomitean kanavista yhteistyön kannalta tärkeimmät kanavat?
- A) Nettisivut, B) Facebook, C) Twitter D) YouTube E) Instagram
14. Laita järjestykseen yrityksenne omista kanavista yhteistyön kannalta tärkeimmät?
- A) Nettisivut, B) Facebook, C) Twitter D) YouTube E) Instagram
15. Millä keinoin toivoisitte jatkossa hyödynnettävään näitä Paralympiakomitean kanavia yhteistyössä juuri teidän yrityksenne kannalta?
- A) Nettisivut, B) Facebook, C) Twitter D) YouTube E) Instagram

Kiitos ajastasi!

Appendix 2. Key Account Management Relational Development Model for Disability Sports (Mäkynen, 2020).



Appendix 3. From charity towards partnerships and from donations towards corporate social responsibility in disability sports - Suggestions of four main concepts for Paralympic Committee business cooperation (Mäkynen, 2020).

