

1 **Manuscript title**

2 Exploring how a disability sport charity utilises exchange relationships with
3 external organizations to sustain operations in times of lockdown.

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28 **Abstract**

29 National lockdowns exacerbated the inequalities that many disabled people faced in
30 accessing and engaging in sport and physical activity. Like many organizations,
31 disability sport and physical recreation-focused charities were constrained in their
32 ability to deliver and sustain their services during such periods. This study explored
33 the exchange relationships between a disability sport charity and its existing and
34 prospective business clients as the former rolled key elements of its provision online.
35 Resource mobilization theory was employed as a framework by which to identify key
36 resource types and mechanisms underpinning the exchanges between the businesses
37 and the charity. Semi-structured interviews with participants from eight businesses
38 were conducted to understand the dynamics of such resource exchange. Moral
39 resources featured prominently in participants' accounts, particularly in relation to the
40 legitimacy of the charity and authenticity of its delivery, with human resources also
41 receiving much attention due to facilitators' engaging delivery styles. Overall, the
42 charity was able to extend its organizational mission of increasing inclusion in
43 physical activity beyond its own programs via businesses through which it shares
44 exchange relationships, emphasising the importance of such relationships both during
45 and beyond lockdown periods.

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61 **Introduction**

62 In their research examining the effects of the Covid-19 global pandemic on Business-to-
63 Business (B2B) companies' operations, Cortez and Johnston (2020) compared such
64 implications with those of traditional financial crises, such as the 2008-2009 global economic
65 recession. Financial-based crises are typically triggered by endogenous mechanisms within
66 markets, whereas, and unprecipitated by financial factors, the exogenous shock and socio-
67 biological and transmissive nature of Covid-19 exposed a lack of organizational preparedness
68 and protocols of businesses and enterprises for navigating a global public health pandemic –
69 bringing about operational uncertainty in ways that financial crises alone do not (Cortez &
70 Johnson, 2020).

71 In the UK, government-imposed national, regional, and residential lockdowns were
72 legally enforced to prevent person-to-person transmission of the virus by restricting people's
73 movement, confining millions of people to their own homes at intervals during the pandemic
74 (Roberts, 2020). Non-essential services and business were not exempt from lockdown, and
75 instead forced to close their work premises. As Ken Roberts wrote, "the industries catering
76 for out-of-home leisure were the first to be hit and the hardest hit by the lockdown" (2020,
77 p.626). Consequently, the sustainability of smaller enterprises which are non-profit in nature
78 (and often without cash reserves) and that are essential to the provision of active leisure,
79 sport, and physical recreation were placed in an especially precarious financial position
80 (European Non-Governmental Sports Organization, 2020; Hayton, 2022;). Non-profit
81 organizations—such as disability sport charities (DSCs)—present vital sources of physical
82 recreation for marginalized groups, groups which such opportunities seemingly became

83 limited for disabled people¹ during periods of lockdown (Activity Alliance, 2021; Hayton,
84 2022; Kamyuka et al., 2020).

85 Many businesses had to alter their operating procedures in response to Covid-19
86 restrictions, which, during lockdowns, resulted in the full or partial shutting down of their
87 facilities as well as reductions to staffing (Cortez and Johnston, 2020). For those staff still
88 working in times of lockdown, society witnessed a largescale shift to socially distanced and
89 online working practices, yet, according to Cortez and Johnston (2020), virtual platforms
90 were deemed to diminish operational effectiveness and business impact. From their findings
91 with B2B employees, Cortez and Johnston (2020) indicated that the pre-existing relationships
92 with current partners and customers grew ever more salient to navigating the crisis and
93 organizational survival.

94 The purpose of this article therefore is to examine the exchange relationships between
95 a DSC and their business clients during lockdown(s) and the resources that are exchanged via
96 such relationships, in order to demonstrate how the DSC: a) generates revenue in times of
97 resource scarcity, and b) is able to deliver to and extend its organizational mission of
98 increasing accessibility and inclusion in sport and active leisure beyond its own sport
99 programs and via those business clients through which it shares such exchange
100 relationships. To do this, we apply the framework of resource mobilization theory to illustrate
101 key resource types and mechanisms underpinning their exchange. The research on which this
102 article is based concerns a DSC operating in the North East of England. Established in 2013,
103 this DSC provides disability sport and physical activity programs and delivers disability
104 awareness training to businesses and organizations operating in and across the field of sport,
105 physical recreation, and active leisure. Rather than centre our analysis on data yielded

¹ In this article we follow the UK social model and exercise “disability first” language, as opposed to “people first” language, to emphasize “disability as an affirmative identity and an underpinning facet of the lived experience of a person with an impairment” (Hayton, 2022, p.6). In practice, therefore, we refer to “disabled people” rather than “people with disabilities”.

106 directly from the DSC, we utilize interviews with key management personnel that represent
107 eight client organizations of the DSC that have either bought services from the DSC in the
108 past, have availed themselves of their digital services during lockdown, or would consider
109 obtaining such services in the future.

110 The overarching argument that we present in the article is twofold: first, that the
111 relationships shared between the charity and businesses are crucial to the sustenance of the
112 charity and its operations both within and beyond times of lockdown; and second, that the
113 nature of the DSC’s dual service nature in combination with such exchange relationships
114 enables it to extend its organizational mission via recipient organizations, thus continuing to
115 contribute to a much broader movement for social inclusion whilst society was held in the
116 grip of a global health pandemic. The article contributes to the leisure studies and sport
117 literature in several ways. We apply RMT to the study of disability-focused sport, recreation,
118 and leisure provision in a way that, to the best of our knowledge, has not been done
119 previously. We utilise RMT to dissect how a DSC ‘leans in’ to lockdown to draw in
120 resources, sustain its operations, and continue to pursue and extend its mission objectives. By
121 virtue of points one and two, we highlight the salience of those organizations that sit
122 somewhat outside of mainstream sport structures in the provision of accessible and inclusive
123 sport and physical recreation services.

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125 **Inclusive sport, physical recreation, and active leisure and the role of the**
126 **third sector**
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128 Emphasising the rhetoric around the centrality of sport and physical activity to the health and
129 wellbeing of all members of society, Sport England’s (2021) recent strategy commits to
130 redoubling its efforts to tackle inequalities that detract from people’s access to and quality of
131 experience in sport and physical recreation. The strategy highlights the necessity of working
132 with and learning from ‘partners’ within the sport industry to harness best practice from

133 across the sector to understand, inform, and deliver inclusive and enjoyable experiences for
134 everyone, and especially those that have traditionally been marginalized from such
135 opportunities. Specific mention is given to disabled persons as is the emergence of care
136 homes as a priority area for ensuring that the salience of physical activity resonates, and that
137 quality provision becomes an integrated feature of residents' lives² (Sport England, 2021).
138 The third sector plays an important role in contributing to this agenda.

139 However, the operational hiatus imposed upon third sector organizations (TSOs) by
140 the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting state response has deepened the financial 'crisis' in the
141 sector, undermining the ability of charities to support vulnerable beneficiaries and calling into
142 question the long-term sustainability of such organizations (Butler, 2020). In combination
143 with the UK's exit from the European Union (EU) and the economic austerity policies
144 adopted by successive governments, the impact of Covid-19 completes a triple 'whammy' of
145 financial challenges faced by the third sector (Hill, 2020; Third Sector, 2020; Author, 2018).
146 Indeed, the rolling back of the public sector in the UK since 2010 has ever increasingly
147 beckoned TSOs to fill gaps in 'frontline' social service provision, thus transferring significant
148 risk onto TSOs and away from the state (Dagdeviren et al., 2018).

149 As local authority sport provision has retrenched further and further, TSOs are
150 becoming the key delivery agents for sport, recreation, and leisure, and this is particularly so
151 for vulnerable groups (Walker & Hayton, 2018). Faced with an increasing demand for
152 services, TSOs have been impacted by diminishing sources, sums, and durations of grant
153 funding from within both the public and private sectors, and this has substantially increased

² The authors' conceptualisation of disability aligns with that of the *Admit* organization that sits at the centre of the article. *Admit* aims to work with participants of any level or type of impairment, including those with high and very high support needs, as well as residents of care homes and daycare centres. Eschewing pervasive norms of able-bodiedness, *Admit* would follow Maika and Danylechuk's (2016) position 'that human ability exists on a spectrum, regardless of impairment' (2016, p. 413), thereby embracing individual difference and empowering persons that Silva and Howe (2018) consider to be 'differently abled' in and through sport and physical recreation.

154 the level of competition within the sector for the ever scarcer financial resources available
155 (Hastings et al., 2015). In response, and in line with the sector more broadly, third sector
156 sport organizations (TSSOs) have become more business-orientated, typically pursuing a
157 pluralisation of revenue streams beyond traditional grant dependencies (Walker & Hayton,
158 2017, 2018).

159 One outlet for some TSSOs had been to scope funding beyond domestic bodies by
160 targeting EU social funding (Walker and Hayton, 2017). As a consequence of the UK's exit
161 from the European Union, however, Hill (2020) states that charities and social enterprises
162 will have less access to EU funding or opportunities to lead on EU funded projects. To put
163 this into further perspective, Cooney and Ferrell-Schweppenstedde (2017) reported that, in
164 2015, UK charities benefitted from £210.9 million awarded directly by the European
165 Commission, and a further £47.5 million via European Structural and Investment Funds.
166 Thus, the funding landscape available to organizations such as TSSOs grows narrower. In the
167 context of Covid-19, according to Third Sector (2020), charity funding streams during the
168 pandemic have been heavily constrained with many having to fall back on their reserves. Yet,
169 at the onset of the pandemic in the UK, only a quarter of UK charities were estimated to have
170 reserves large enough to sustain them for three months (National Council of Voluntary
171 Organisations, 2020) whilst others have no financial reserves at all (Walker & Hayton, 2017),
172 with many forced to rely on committed donors (Third Sector, 2020).

173 What is more, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought into sharp relief (and exacerbated)
174 the inequalities that disabled people face in accessing and engaging in sport and physical
175 activity (Hayton, 2022; Kamyuka et al., 2020). In illustration of this, figures released by the
176 Activity Alliance (2021) reported that 59% of disabled people felt that their ability to
177 undertake sport and physical activity has reduced during the pandemic, with the proportion of

178 disabled people who felt that they had the opportunity to be as active as they wanted to be
179 decreasing from 58% to 39% following the onset of Covid-19 in the UK.

180 **Theoretical framework**

181 The focus of this article centres around the work of a TSO to which we have given the
182 pseudonym, *Admit*. The *Admit* organization is a disability sport charity based in the North
183 East of England. The charity exists to increase awareness and opportunity in disability sport
184 and physical recreation. Its mission is threefold: to promote the health of disabled people; to
185 create opportunities for disabled people to participate in sport and physical activity, and to
186 support all providers of sport and physical activity to include disabled people. To deliver
187 against its mission aims, *Admit* provides disability sport and physical activity events and
188 programs, as well as disability awareness training courses for individuals and organizations
189 either situated within the sport industry, or who are seeking to incorporate more sport and
190 physical activity into their day-to-day operations.

191 This article has resonance within two contemporary and related bodies of literature:
192 first, the burgeoning work focused on the increasing significance and operations of TSOs in
193 the delivery of sport and recreation (as contextualised above) and second, literature on the
194 *mainstreaming* of disability sport policy and organisational practice (e.g., Kitchin & Howe,
195 2014; Kitchin & Crossin, 2018; Kitchin et al., 2019). Implemented across many European
196 countries, mainstreaming presents a structural solution to increasing accessibility to and
197 inclusion in sport for disabled people (Kitchin & Crossin, 2018). Mainstreaming represents
198 the policy of integrating responsibility for formalized disability sport provision into non-
199 disabled sporting organizations, and in England, for example, the responsibility for such
200 disability sport provision is placed within sport-specific NGBs (Kitchin & Howe, 2014).
201 However, research indicates that a gap tends to exist between inclusive ‘policy and the
202 operations at the implementation level’ within mainstream sport settings which render

203 processes of integration largely structural and superficial (Kitchen & Howe, 2014; Kitchen et
204 al., 2019, p.433). One underlying reason for this is suggested to be because community sport
205 programming is dominated by a competitive pathway logic geared towards high-performance
206 and elite sport, thus reinforcing outcomes and practices which marginalize those with
207 complex disabilities and/or multiple impairments (Kitchin & Howe, 2014; Kitchin & Crossin,
208 2018). In conjunction, insufficient planning, organizational capacity, and capacity building
209 characterized by a paucity of actionable strategies, a lack of specialist personnel, limited
210 range activities, and paternalistic provision overseen by largely nondisabled practitioners and
211 decision-makers further serves to marginalize inclusivity (Kitchen et al., 2019; Kitchen &
212 Crossin, 2018).

213 The work of *Admit* converges with both national and international movements to
214 reduce discrimination and promote inclusive opportunities for disabled adults and children to
215 engage in sport and physical recreation, and to do so with regularity. As aforementioned, in
216 England the most recent national sport (and physical activity) strategy places emphasis on the
217 inequalities of access to and experience of sport and physical activity that marginalized
218 groups such as disabled people have long faced. Entitled *Uniting the Movement*, the strategy
219 document speaks of the radical change required to tackle the underpinning and intersectional
220 dimensions of such inequalities and the importance of organizations (or ‘partners’) like *Admit*
221 in contributing to this agenda.

222 Beyond the national level, the work that *Admit* undertakes connects with a much
223 broader human rights movement occurring on an international scale which, in alignment with
224 the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations, seeks to coalesce organizations spanning multiple
225 fields and industries – including sport – “to end discrimination and transform the lives of the
226 world’s 1.2 billion persons with disabilities so they can be visible and active members of an
227 inclusive society” (#WeThe15, 2022). This movement aims to, for example: increase the

228 awareness, visibility, and representation of disabled people; work on governments,
229 businesses, and the public to be more inclusive of disabled people, and to empower disabled
230 people to be active members of society (#WeThe15, 2022). In the context of the current
231 study, such objectives very much chime with Article 30 of the *United Nations Convention on*
232 *the Rights of People with Disabilities* which was introduced to recognize that disabled people
233 have a right to access services from all areas of citizenship including recreational, leisure, and
234 sporting opportunities, and should experience such services with full and effective
235 participation (United Nations Enable, 2006). Indeed, as *Admit* endeavour to work with and
236 develop a network of external businesses to deliver services and, ultimately, extend their
237 organizational mission, by virtue of this they also contribute to the overarching movements
238 outlined here.

239 The mobilization of necessary resources is vital to the strength and successes of a
240 social movement (Edwards et al., 2019; McCarthy & Zald, 2002; Millward, forthcoming).
241 Indeed, Millward highlights that resource mobilization theory (RMT) has proven an
242 influential framework in the study of social movements. Prior to RMT, and according to the
243 classical model, social movements were conceived as irrational, emotionally driven and
244 disorganized behaviour expressed by unconnected and alienated individuals (Hayton et al.,
245 2019; Millward, forthcoming). RMT scholars, on the other hand, contend that social
246 movements are extensions of institutionalized actions and whereby the proliferation of
247 organized collective action, and the impetus it is able to galvanize, is dependent upon the
248 availability of and access to specific resources and the knowledge to use them effectively
249 (Edwards et al., 2019; Jenkins, 1983; Millward, forthcoming).

250 According to resource mobilization theory therefore, social movements are driven by
251 rational and organized groups or entities (McCarthy & Zald, 2002). To this effect, McCarthy
252 and Zald (1973, 1977) conceptualized the RMT to explain movement formation and

253 implementation as led by emergent professional organizations, and thus referred to these
254 entrepreneurial organizations as social movement organizations (SMOs). SMOs, then, can be
255 understood as those “organizations that seek to bring about social change by altering
256 elements of social provision or the distribution of opportunities within a society” (Hayton et
257 al., 2019, p.24; McCarthy & Zald, 1973, 1977). As formal organizations, SMOs employ
258 professional staff, have permanent leadership, and can take such forms as charities or non-
259 profit organizations (Jenkins, 1983; Hayton et al., 2019; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). What is
260 more, exchange relationships and the ability of SMOs to broker access with external actors
261 and entities are therefore critical to their mission goals and organizational sustainability
262 (Edwards et al., 2019). As Edwards et al. suggest, SMOs “typically cultivate, maintain, and
263 preserve numerous exchange relationships through which they gain access to the specific mix
264 of resources supporting their endeavours” (2019, p.88).

265 Edwards et al. (2019) and Millward (forthcoming) outline five distinct resource types:
266 material, human, social-organizational, cultural, and moral. Material resources can refer to
267 financial (money) and physical capital (e.g. property, office space, and equipment; Edwards
268 et al., 2019). Human resources relate to labour, expertise, and leadership (Hayton et al.,
269 2019). Social-organizational resources include networks and social ties and non-proprietary
270 infrastructure such as public parks, cycle ways, and the worldwide web (Hayton et al., 2019).
271 Edwards and Gilham (2013) describe cultural resources as tacit knowledge about how to
272 accomplish specific tasks like designing and delivering inclusive activity sessions or
273 disability awareness workshops or utilizing new social media, thus requiring tactical
274 repertoires and technical or strategic know-how required to produce events and services, and
275 to mobilize necessary resources. Whilst specific cultural resources are widely occurring in a
276 society, access to them can be socially or spatially restricted and contingent. Edwards et al.,
277 (2019) add that unlike human resources whereby individuals have control of who benefits

278 from their skills and knowledge, cultural resources can diffuse into the public domain, and at
279 which point become more difficult to control by their creators. Cultural products such as
280 workshops, web content or digital tools and packages can facilitate the recruitment and
281 socialization of new ‘adherents’ who actively support the goals of the SMO and support it
282 by contributing resources to it (Edwards & Gilham, 2013). Lastly, moral resources are
283 typically bestowed upon SMOs by external sources who – publicly respected themselves –
284 keenly recognize the work of the organization and draw positive attention to it (Edwards et
285 al., 2019). Moral resources therefore include legitimacy, integrity, solidarity support,
286 sympathetic support, and celebrity (Edwards et al., 2019). Critical to the leveraging of
287 essential resources, is the ability of SMOs to accord with and satisfy institutionally
288 legitimated expectations of potential sponsors of what is appropriate, proper, and desirable, at
289 least in comparison to other entities also vying for resources (Cohen & Arato, 1997; Edwards
290 & Gilham, 2013; Suchman, 1995). Where such endorsement(s) can be garnered, exists the
291 potential to not only mobilize resources over the long-term, but also via networked
292 reputational propagation.

293 These resource types provide one part of our organizing frame in this study. The
294 second part of this organizing frame refers to the mechanisms of access and mobilization of
295 resources through which an exchange relationship occurs, of which there are four: self-
296 production; aggregation; co-optation, and patronage (Edwards & Gilham, 2013; Edwards et
297 al., 2019). An SMO can produce certain resources itself, and examples of resources that can
298 be self-produced include the training of human resources, running events, cultivating
299 networks, and developing web content (Edwards & Gilham, 2013). The aggregation of
300 resources describes the ways in which an SMO collates and harnesses resources offered by
301 dispersed individuals or organizations to allocate to their own ends (such as the aggregation
302 of monetary donations or human resources in the form of volunteer recruitment; Edwards &

303 Gilham, 2013; Edwards et al., 2019). Co-optation refers to the ability of, for example, an
304 SMO to utilize its relationships with other organizations to access or borrow resources that
305 they already control or produce (Hayton et al., 2019). Any borrowing of resources is
306 transparent and permitted, and often implies a reciprocal arrangement (Edwards et al., 2019).
307 Edwards and Gilham (2013) suggest that buildings, members, and staff, social networks, or
308 moral authority, for example, can all be co-opted by and between organizations. Finally,
309 resources mobilized through patronage typically, but not always, refer to monetary transfers
310 awarded to, for example, SMOs, by traditional donors or funders such as government
311 departments or national governing bodies who are external to the organization (Edwards &
312 Gillham, 2013; Hayton et al., 2019). Edwards et al. (2019) highlight that patronage can
313 therefore take the form of service contracts which cedes a degree of proprietary control over
314 what that money is used for and how. Human resources can also be provided as part of a
315 patronage relationship, and whereby, for example, a sympathetic or endorsing organization
316 can temporarily loan some of their staff to an SMO.

317 We therefore apply resource mobilization theory within this study as a framework to
318 explore what is shared in the relationships between the *Admit* charity, as a social movement
319 organization, and its business clients during a move to online provision. The specific focus on
320 a disability-oriented organization was twofold. First, disabled people have experienced new
321 barriers to being active during the pandemic compared to non-disabled people, and ‘are less
322 likely to take part in activities that have become more common during lockdown restrictions’
323 (like outdoor exercise; Activity Alliance, 2021, p. 100), and so the availability of
324 appropriate—and likely online—provision/providers offers a social and physical activity lifeline
325 for those who experiencing such impediments. A second and not entirely unconnected reason
326 relates to the issues associated with mainstreaming. To elaborate on this latter point, *Admit*
327 aspire to support all providers of sport and physical activity to include disabled people, whilst

328 Kitchin et al. (2019) emphasize the necessity for mainstream organizations to access partners
329 with competencies in disability rights and awareness to facilitate their inclusion practices –
330 and RMT helps us to illustrate how such networks and relationships have the potential to be
331 cultivated.

332 **Methodology**

333 This article emerges from a broader project whereby the research team worked with the
334 *Admit* organization to gather information from its business clients to inform, and then
335 subsequently evaluate a range of digital packages developed, piloted, and launched as it
336 sought to roll out its face-to-face provision in online form during the lockdown periods. A
337 major part of this study was to also understand prospective clients' needs and requirements of
338 such packages. Data collection spanned April and June 2021. For context, at the point of
339 writing, England has experienced three full national lockdowns with varying degrees of
340 social restrictions enforced in between until “all legal limits on social contact were removed”
341 on June 21st, 2021 (Institute for Government, 2021). The three lockdown periods were:
342 March 26th to May 10th, 2020; November 5th to December 2nd, 2020, and from January 6th to
343 March 8th, 2021 (Institute for Government, 2021).

344 To recruit participants to the study, the Managing Director of *Admit* provided the
345 research team with the email addresses of 13 business clients, with 8 organizations
346 responding to an invitation to participate in the research. As two participants took part in an
347 interview together, a total of nine participants (eight females, one male) representing those
348 eight organizations took part in the study. Table 1 presents the pseudonyms by which
349 participants are referred in this article, along with a brief description of the organizations for
350 which the participants worked and the activities via which they engaged with *Admit*.

351

Table 1. Participant pseudonyms and nature of the work of their organizations with *Admit*

| Participant pseudonym and organization/role | Nature of work | Services the participant/their organization has accessed with <i>Admit</i> disability sport charity |
|---|---|--|
| 1. Mandy, local council | Management role in a local council sport and leisure department, including responsibilities for local facilities, sports development and a public health funded program | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face workshops • Online workshops • Point of contact for advice when working on projects |
| 2. Lisa, learning disabilities self-advocacy group | Group worker for a group of adults with learning disabilities to support them with self-advocacy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face physical activity sessions • Online physical activity sessions |
| 3. Vicky, charity for young people with additional needs | Management role in a charity providing leisure activities for 6- to 30-year-olds with additional needs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face physical activity sessions • Online physical activity sessions • Equipment hire |
| 4. Alice, care home activity coordinator | Activity coordinator in a care home for adults with neurological conditions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face physical activity sessions • Online physical activity sessions • Face-to-face boccia training |
| 5. Zach, coordinator for student-athlete practitioner development | National role supporting the development of practitioners at an organization designed to assist athletes studying at universities in England | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face workshops • Online workshops • Creation of bespoke education leaflets |
| 6. Jenna and Donna, National Governing Body | Management roles in a National Governing Body for disability sport, responsible for development (e.g. club, competition) and workforce (primarily volunteers such as officials and coaches, also some paid tutors who deliver training development) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face workshops • Online workshops • Face-to-face physical activity sessions • Working with <i>Admit</i> to build disability awareness content into their own products |
| 7. Yvonne, adult weight management programs | Facilitator on a weight management program for overweight/ obese adults which has recently been adapted for people with learning disabilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online workshops |
| 8. Lorraine, support officer for a series of daycare centres | Support officer responsible for a series of daycare centres across the county, providing learning experiences (e.g. cookery, crafting) for adults with multiple and complex needs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face physical activity sessions • Online physical activity sessions |

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354 The interview schedule was developed together by the research team. Two members of the
355 research team (FP and RS) conducted the interviews (6 and 2, respectively) to ensure that
356 they could be arranged to fit participants' work schedules. The interviewees discussed and
357 rehearsed the content of the interviews prior to commencing the data collection. Interviews
358 were conducted online via Microsoft Teams, and subsequently transcribed before the
359 transcripts were reviewed by the research team. The interviews followed a semi-structured
360 format, with the interviewer asking a set of core questions such as, 'What are the most
361 important things you look for in an organization that offers disability awareness training /
362 sport and physical activity sessions?', 'How do you locate the training?', 'what have your
363 experiences been of any online provision of such packages, so far?', and 'what are your
364 access needs and requirements?'. Where appropriate, participants were prompted for further
365 details and examples to encourage greater depth of responses. The average duration of the
366 interviews was 32 minutes. The project received ethical approval from the Faculty of Health
367 and Life Sciences Research Ethics Committee at Northumbria University (ref. 28331), and
368 participants provided written consent for their participation.

369 A phronetic iterative approach to the data analysis was adopted whereby emic
370 (primary) and etic (secondary) cycles of analyses were undertaken recursively by JH and NM
371 (Tracy, 2019). In undertaking the primary cycle of coding, JH and NM first immersed
372 themselves in the data before inductively analysing the transcripts, making notes and
373 discussing their readings of the data. From this emic analysis, both a manifest and latent
374 sense of relationships emerged prominently from the data – to which key questions unfolded
375 concerning what was exchanged via such relationships and what did this mean in relation to
376 Admit's goals and sustainability. Following this the emic cycle of analysis we then turned to
377 an etic cycle of analysis to which we turned external theories to deductively draw theoretical
378 explanations to frame meaning derived from the data. Etic analysis led us to resource

379 mobilization theory. RMT was deemed of most theoretical significance as it allowed us to
380 explain what was shared between Admit and its client organizations and to position and
381 contextualize the charity as an SMO. Once this was fed back and agreed amongst the research
382 team, JH and NM subsequently developed a codebook based on the key types of resource
383 (human, cultural, material, moral, and social organizational) and means of resource
384 mobilization – to which they later imposed on the data. During this second-cycle coding, JH
385 and NM first independently coded the data according to this codebook, before co-coding the
386 transcripts together until consensus was reached across the entirety of the transcripts.

387 **Findings and Discussion**

388 The findings from the interviews are discussed below in relation to resource mobilization
389 theory, with the resource types and mechanisms of resource mobilization grouped by topics
390 reflecting how these concepts were linked in the participants' accounts. Participants'
391 perspectives on the benefits and drawbacks of online delivery are also presented as these
392 highlight important considerations for future work in this area of practice.

393 **Mutual benefits**

394 Lockdown opened up a new dimension of leisure for client organizations and their residents
395 in the form of 'virtual entertainment' that may have not materialized (or as quickly)
396 otherwise:

397 We've been using YouTube a lot... we've been on virtual trips to Orlando,
398 we did giant rollercoasters yesterday. We've been to the opera, the ballet,
399 we've been to concerts... We were able to bring *Admit* in digitally, and the
400 technology is a great way of delivering extra things to people, because we
401 can't do things face-to-face, if we couldn't do it virtually, we couldn't do it.
402 (Alice)

403 As McCarthy and Zald (1977) stated, a supply and demand relationship underpins the
404 sustainability of an SMO, and in this example, Alice indicates both a demand for and a

405 receptivity to innovative entertainment solutions – which *Admit* was able to provide.
406 Following on, Lorraine illustrates the creativity and expertise of the human resources
407 supplied by *Admit* as they delivered a virtual exercise program in story form. This program
408 generated ancillary activities that served to further involve the service users (adults with
409 multiple and complex needs) as well as the staff at Lorraine’s daycare centers:

410 We had to launch everything digitally through the Teams or Zoom
411 platform... Then along came *Admit* and changed our lives and the staff
412 embraced the opportunity on behalf of the service users, and we had
413 themed events. [Service users] had a choice: would you like to have an
414 interactive session around pirates, astronauts, food, Disney characters? The
415 entire program, the creative arts, the crafts, the needlecraft, would be
416 building towards the interactive *Admit* sessions. They would sew costumes;
417 they would make masks. In the music class, they would upload songs to go
418 with the themes... It was lovely... It was so interactive, and the clients
419 responded so beautifully... But because our staff were shadowing, were in
420 the sessions to support the learners to get the most out of the opportunity...
421 the beauty for us was when they exited, when the funding streams ran out,
422 our staff had picked up the skills to be able to roll out that program in their
423 absence. It had a dual purpose for us, and it was very valuable.

424 Lorraine’s comments demonstrate two points. The first being that *Admit* possesses the
425 expertise to offer tailored virtual physical activities in a way that other online/social media
426 platforms cannot offer. Second, whilst some clients (such as Alice) hired *Admit* to purely
427 deliver services, others had a cost-saving ‘dual purpose’ in mind: although the funding to hire
428 *Admit* ran out, the service that had been provided had been structured in such a way as to
429 upskill the client’s staff, allowing self-production of such programs of activity in-house
430 (Edwards & Gillham, 2013). Drawing on Edwards et al. (2019), this presents an example
431 wherein the skills and knowledge of *Admit* staff subsequently translate into cultural resources
432 that have diffused into the client organization’s workforce. The upshot of this for *Admit* is
433 threefold. First, this transfer of practice aligns with *Admit*’s organizational mission of
434 widening access to inclusive physical activity and recreation. Second, cultural products – for
435 example, virtual exercise programs – can generate advocates and supporters for the SMO,

436 from which it has the potential to derive future resources. Third, by having the daycare staff
437 involved as part of this resource exchange, *Admit* was able to co-opt further human resources
438 who were physically in situ to ensure that the exercise programs ‘have really, really engaged
439 and motivated our service users and staff’ (Lorraine).

440 **Quality pays dividends**

441 This topic encompasses a number of resource types and mechanisms in relation to both the
442 physical activity sessions and disability awareness workshops, moving from a simple account
443 regarding patronage and material resources to a discussion of how moral resources can be
444 distributed through social-organizational networks.

445 Lorraine, satisfied by and grateful for the physical activity sessions delivered by
446 *Admit*, explained that she wanted to secure additional funding to procure further services
447 from them, thus representing a form of patronage to the organization:

448 Now that I know I have access to a budget, I want to be able to sustain the
449 *Admit* initiative as well... When the free access to the provision ended
450 through the charitable funding, I liaised with our senior management in the
451 County Council. They’ve actually paid for some additional sessions.

452 Lorraine is not alone in this as Mandy also expressed how much she valued *Admit* for
453 their disability awareness workshops, wishing to confer material resources in the form of
454 money in reciprocation for their services:

455 Further down the line, we are hoping to get some kind of commissioned
456 work to them, where they come in and deliver some of our disability
457 services on behalf of the Council, because they have that area of specialism
458 which we do not.

459 Longer-term patronage and partner endorsement is of great importance to the success
460 and sustainability of an organization (Brinkerhoff, 2005), and as well as wanting to repay
461 *Admit*’s good work with more work, client organizations are willing to promote and

462 recommend the work they do via their networks, therefore adding further reach to their
463 reputation:

464 The package has been quite magical so... I did say... “Is there any platform
465 I can go on to highlight or speak my passion to help you get funding?” ...
466 We’ve decided, as a countywide care home, we’re going to put some
467 favorable marketing information on Facebook and things to support *Admit*.
468 In the hope that other practitioners will pick up and utilize them as well...
469 I’ve sent my testimony to [my network]. When we have great practice, I
470 showcase it and send it to all external partners. (Lorraine)

471 The above represents *Admit*’s ability to access wider social-organizational resources:
472 when good practice is recognized, the service provider is endorsed throughout the client’s
473 networks. Propagated via these networks, therefore, are moral resources – such as legitimacy
474 and integrity – which client organizations confer upon the SMO and the quality of their
475 services (Edwards et al., 2019). Thus, two relevant mechanisms of resource mobilization are
476 implicated here: one facet being that client organizations demonstrate their patronage by
477 drawing positive attention to the services provided by an SMO, and the second pertaining to
478 co-optation – whereby the gaining of access to key networks presents greater opportunities
479 for the SMO to subsequently convert into necessary resources (Edwards et al., 2019).

480 **Legitimate selection**

481 Leading on from the previous topic in relation to legitimacy (moral resources), it was clear
482 that (prospective) client organizations desired providers with good standing and a track
483 record of delivering services satisfying their institutionally legitimated expectations (Cohen
484 & Arato, 1997; Edwards & Gilham, 2013; Suchman, 1995). As Yvonne explained in relation
485 to the workshops:

486 We always look for really bespoke training, and to be honest with you, we
487 probably look for a company that’s got legitimate experience in delivery
488 themselves. I think that’s where it was very nice to understand that they
489 actually have done it themselves... I look for a company that’s got good
490 quality trademark as well, that they’re recognized for that sort of service.

491 It appeared from the interviews that organizations working with disabled people
492 desired providers that not only had experience of working with specific target audiences, but
493 also that employed practitioners able to identify, relate and speak to the intersection between
494 that audience and the subject matter: ‘The most important thing would be if they were
495 delivering training about people’s learning disabilities, to have somebody with a learning
496 disability involved in delivering the training... like lived experience’ (Lisa).

497 Emphasizing further the importance of legitimacy, Yvonne highlighted that the
498 marketing of some services/products by certain organizations may be somewhat misleading
499 and subsequently not meet expectations: ‘The other [non-*Admit*] one that I did, I didn’t get
500 from it what I needed. It was sold to me differently than what it actually was.’ In such cases,
501 if the experience of a service is incongruent with the user’s prior expectations and they deem
502 it to not meet their needs, the provider stands to lose organizational legitimacy, weakening its
503 ability to vie for resources in a competitive marketplace (Cohen & Arato, 1997; Edwards &
504 Gilham, 2013; Suchman, 1995). To guard against this, several of the participants intimated
505 that they would undertake audits across their networks to ensure that they fill gaps in their
506 provision or procure training by hiring organizations that they can have confidence in, and
507 which can signal – or have signaled for them – a particular cachet:

508 What we have to ensure is that there is an audit trail, that these people are
509 suitable for working with adults with complex needs... we’ve got to be sure
510 that the company is of good status... we would make sure that their sports
511 coaches were qualified... [Their training and development] would have to
512 be absolutely top-notch. So as not to cause harm or the potential for harm
513 physically to our students (Lorraine)

514 Zach similarly brings together social-organizational and moral resources (legitimacy);
515 by profiling their network, his organization aims to find ‘leaders’ to deliver workshops in
516 their areas of specialism, and this process helps to reveal and verify legitimate providers such
517 as *Admit*, thereby facilitating the mobilization of material resources (money) to engage them:

518 We conduct audits across the network. We either go directly to the
519 education providers... or someone who has an area of expertise... We
520 conduct a needs analysis of our practitioners and their educational needs
521 and try to work out who would be best suited to fill that gap. That's why we
522 work with *Admit* in the disability sport area as one of our providers.

523 For organizations like *Admit*, such positive endorsements of the service they deliver
524 help them to penetrate key organizational networks related to their field of work and help to
525 ensure that (prospective) clients procure their services in times of lockdown. Moreover, client
526 organizations favored 'word of mouth' recommendations when sourcing external service
527 provision: 'You hear about different things and once you hear a good review then you go and
528 try it out yourself' (Vicky). Yvonne also highlighted that the volume of providers means that
529 recommendations are often the most efficient way to select one:

530 Because I've been in this job for such a long time, I really rate word of
531 mouth really highly, definitely because you do get to trust in your own
532 colleagues' experience... [and] other health professionals that you've
533 worked with over the years... Because I think time is really precious, isn't
534 it? ...There are so many different companies and organizations offering
535 you training, you really want it to come first-hand from somebody who has
536 been there and done it and rates the training and rates the experience so
537 you're not wasting your time

538 The social-organizational resources of social ties, and opportunities for *Admit* to patch
539 itself into relevant networks, are crucially important to gaining work, including repeat
540 custom, enabling revenue generation and delivery on their organizational mandate during
541 lockdown. Whilst Vicky's organization had 'a little catalogue which has different
542 organizations that you can go to,' Donna explained that her organization was likely to contact
543 providers already known to them:

544 We haven't really recruited anybody new. We've perhaps reached out to
545 people that we knew of before in partner organizations as well who have
546 delivered for us. No new formal recruitment but certainly looking at what's
547 out there and finding the best people to fit our need.

548 **The upshots of online provision**

549 The lockdown-driven move to online provision has instigated many organizations to connect
550 with a greater number and wider range of providers when seeking to access online awareness
551 training activities or to procure physical activity sessions/programs. Many of the interviewees
552 stated that they are likely to continue to both operate and participate in online activities due
553 to, inter alia, their accessibility:

554 I don't think there will be a push to travel for a day event especially if we
555 can do it online. So, we'll probably look to do the sessions online,
556 especially if it's information heavy and there isn't a technical aspect to it,
557 which I think *Admit* probably delivers, for the [disability awareness]
558 packages they deliver for us. (Zach)

559 This trend is likely to benefit *Admit* in several ways. As an organization based in the
560 North East of England, it is not always logistically practical or affordable for prospective
561 clients to travel long distances from the South/Midlands of the country to attend, for example,
562 a 2-hour workshop. Furthermore, delivering services digitally expands the organization's
563 reach, as colleagues Donna and Jenna highlighted:

564 Donna: Everybody has moved online. I think we're all a bit guilty of that
565 when the stuff was face-to-face... we didn't go along to it whereas now it's
566 so easy to dial in. I think I've seen more courses now than ever before.

567 Jenna: We're planning to keep some elements of the virtual things going
568 because actually, from an accessibility point of view, much more people
569 can attend things down the line. We're not just banking on people travelling
570 two hours or whatever to come to an event if we can also host things online
571 or live stream things that we're attending

572 That online delivery will continue in some sort of permanence will further open up the
573 market for organizations like *Admit* to increase their client-base and the revenue they can
574 generate from it. By possessing and utilizing material resources in the form of digital
575 technologies, it can in turn make better use of social-organizational resources (networks and
576 social ties), thus being able to aggregate more income (Edwards & Gilham, 2013; Edwards et

577 al., 2019). Moving further forward, the wider body of clients that *Admit* has been able to
578 amass via digital means during lockdowns may translate into more demand for its face-to-
579 face services upon the denouement of lockdown(s). Several participants spoke to this
580 potentiality; for example, Vicky's organization was 'actually booking them to come and do
581 some face-to-face which will be so much nicer.' Somewhat connectedly, amongst certain
582 clients prior to the pandemic *Admit* had been better known for, for example, delivering sport
583 and physical activity programs, yet the shift to digital working practices and information
584 gathering undertaken by businesses during periods of lockdown had facilitated a wider
585 understanding of their services, potentially boosting demand:

586 I was just recently browsing their website and noticed that *Admit* provide
587 awareness training as well as the physical activity sessions... I didn't know
588 they did it beforehand. But it's something I would like to know a bit more
589 about. (Vicky)

590 In sum, resource mobilization theory draws close attention the exchange relationships
591 between an SMO and the organizations and enterprises that it engages with or hopes to
592 engage with. Our application of RMT here has revealed how the lockdown scenario and a
593 shift to online provision has shaped the form of resources exchanged between the SMO and
594 its clients. It becomes clear that moral resources in the form of legitimacy and authenticity
595 hold prominence for the DSC because, when seeking to identify and select a provider,
596 businesses in this field pay keen attention to recommendations made through their networks
597 as to organizations that will truly understand their clients and how to work with them – and it
598 is in the DSC's human resources where such expertise exists. This, in turn, translates into the
599 material resource of income for the DSC. By illustratively drawing these facets of RMT
600 together we gain a picture of how such exchange relationships drive the sustainability of the
601 charity.

602 **Conclusion**

603 In this article, we have framed the *Admit* organization as an SMO – given that its
604 organizational mission, practice, and service activities are congruent with national and
605 international movements to promote inclusive opportunities for disabled adults and children
606 to engage in sport and physical recreation. In line with the SMO concept, we have applied the
607 framework of RMT to illustrate types and mechanisms of resource mobilization underpinning
608 *Admit*'s exchange relationships with business clients in times of lockdown. A key argument
609 that we make here is that DSCs such as *Admit* should be seen as more than simply 'on the
610 ground' deliverers of sport and physical activity, but as playing a much wider role in the
611 disability sport movement more broadly. The application of RMT to the disability sport field
612 has allowed us to illustrate how *Admit*—as an SMO—contributes to this broader movement and
613 continues to do so in times of lockdown. Key to its success is the dual services that *Admit*
614 provides: the delivery of sport and physical activity programs, and disability training and
615 awareness packages. The use of RMT has allowed us to unpack the way that these two
616 services work in tandem to develop the DSC's ability to broker access with external
617 organizations to elicit exchange relationships which are critical to both their mission goals
618 and organizational sustainability, as the former service enables *Admit*'s staff to hone and
619 shape good practice which they can share with others via the disability awareness training
620 that they provide (Edwards et al., 2019).

621 A central finding here, evinced through an RMT lens, is that the quality of service
622 provided—often related to the skill and expertise of the delivering practitioners, coupled with
623 the experience and judgement of these services by the client—is of critical importance to the
624 success, growth, and sustainability of the SMO. The human resources that the SMO are able
625 to deploy are therefore crucial because clients can and will subsequently vouch for the quality
626 and propriety of the services that they provide, conferring upon the SMO moral resources

627 such as legitimacy as they promulgate endorsements of that SMO through their
628 organizational networks – which will potentially lead to more work and further promotion.
629 This is opportune for both the SMO and potential clients because lockdowns have instigated
630 organizations such as care homes and day centers to explore virtual entertainment and they
631 will often seek to procure engaging service providers that understand or can adapt to the
632 needs of their service users. The receptivity of client organizations to virtual and online
633 platforms has opened up new possibilities for sport, leisure, and entertainment provision
634 which *Admit* has been able to adapt to and capitalize on due to the specialist nature and
635 versatility of its human resources – a key facet of the demand-supply relationship that we
636 contend has underpinned the DSC’s organizational resilience during a precarious period for
637 businesses and sport and leisure providers alike.

638 In contrast then to Cortez and Johnston’s (2020) claims that the shift to virtual
639 platforms undertaken by many organizations during lockdown had served to diminish
640 operational effectiveness and business impact, a further key finding was that *Admit* was
641 actually able to extend its organizational mission of increasing inclusion in physical activity
642 beyond the direct provision of sport programs and services due to the knowledge, skills, and
643 training imparted upon business clients via exchange relationships. The data demonstrated
644 that delivering such services as exercise programs and disability awareness training can be
645 engaging via online formats, and moreover that online delivery now has a permanence. The
646 capacity of organizations to run online services to either supplement or substitute face-to-face
647 provision has the potential to widen accessibility to disability sport and physical recreation as
648 well for greater promotion of disability awareness than might have been the case prior to the
649 pandemic – not to mention their service reach in terms of revenue generation.

650 Moreover, because organizations like *Admit* sit outside of mainstream sport structures
651 they are consequently reliant on developing diverse networks outwith sport-specific NGBs to

652 draw in business-critical resources. A further consideration here is that, by its nature, *Admit*
653 exists to support all providers of sport and physical activity to include disabled people,
654 possessing the competence in disability rights and awareness training that Kitchin et al.
655 (2019) highlight that mainstream sport clubs likely require in order to more effectively enact
656 inclusive policies. It would appear then that the work of DSCs like *Admit* confer them
657 legitimacy as niche operators who can complement the integrative goals of mainstream sport
658 organizations (McCarthy & Zald, 2002).

659 In the call for papers to this special issue, Millward et al. (2022) raised the question:
660 ‘How have new leisure providers developed and what does this mean for older providers?’. In
661 the case of the current study however, we might switch the places of the new and old
662 providers and ask instead: ‘Has lockdown proven challenging for new entrants to the
663 market?’ in the context of inclusive online provision. The business clients in this research
664 stressed not only their desire to source authentic and well-reputed providers, but that they go
665 to great lengths to screen potential candidates that they have knowledge of within their
666 networks. Perhaps the advantage here is with the more established organizations and SMOs
667 with recognized specialisms, as opposed to new companies, or TSOs which ever more often
668 decide to ‘chase the funding’ to survive (and thus deviate from what they were set up to and
669 are skilled to deliver) – a trend which Hastings et al. (2015) suggest will likely stifle the long-
670 term impact of that organization. Future research, therefore, could look to plot success,
671 sustainability, and ‘mission drift’ of diverse types and history of provider operating in sport
672 and leisure spaces. Whilst recognizing that SMOs exist within an environment wherein they
673 often compete for resources (Hayton et al., 2019), our novel application and illustration of
674 RMT in the context of the disability sport charity may offer likeminded TSOs a framework
675 by which to assess the strengths of their organization’s footing in a turbulent sector and offer
676 a practical basis by which to identify and pursue purposeful exchange relationships.

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