Assessing social impact of sport-industry philanthropy and CSR

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Aim of paper and research questions

The purpose of the current study was to explore the idea of social impact, by qualitatively assessing the outcomes of a golf management company CSR initiative within the elementary school system of the southern United States.

Literature review

With increasing attention being given to corporate social responsibility (CSR) by scholars, it has become apparent that the focus has been somewhat one sided in nature, with the bulk of attention going to the corporate motives, processes, and outcomes of such efforts. Less prevalent has been a focus on the beneficiaries of CSR, and thus lost in the conversation has been the critical aspect of "social impact" of such activities (Porter & Kramer, 2006). Porter and Kramer (2006) argue that, similar to how effective foundation giving efforts cannot be a "be all to all people" and still expect to be effective, foundations must focus on a cause which offers a unique strategic position. They further suggest that the same idea should be the universal premise for all CSR initiatives, as it will allow for the greatest social impact. Broadly defined, social impact can be environmental, cultural, political, economic, spiritual, psychological, and physical influences which affect individual and group attitudes, values, and behaviours (IAIA, 2008).
From the sporting world, with virtually all high and mid-profile teams and leagues engaging in community outreach, examples abound. For instance, the National Football League's "Recharge! Energizing After-School" program for youth which is designed to help children learn and practice good nutrition and also adopt healthy physical activity habits (Join the Team, 2008). Liverpool Football Club have several community programs, including "Truth 4 Youth" assemblies, where club players and management travel to local schools and provides assemblies on important topics such including the negative effects of drugs use, bullying, racism, and violence. Liverpool FC also has a "Charity 4 Others" community program, where the club sends Liverpool Football Club training kits to third world countries.
Other sectors of the sport industry are similarly engaged in CSR activities. Adidas sponsors a variety of socially responsible initiatives, one of which includes the funding of the Sudhaar Education and school infrastructure program where parents are motivated to keep their children in school and better education is provided for all children. Nike invested over $100 million in product and cash donations in 2003 and 2004. Further, they have pledged an additional $315 million in community programs through 2011. The sentiments of Nike's CEO, Mark Parker, echo those of other sport and non-sport corporate leaders. "We [Nike] see corporate responsibility as a catalyst for growth and innovation, an integral part of how we can use the power of our brand, the energy and passion of our people, and the scale of our business to create meaningful change" (Nike, 2006, p. 4).

Research design and data analysis

Through a series of interviews with program stakeholders, secondary document analysis, and personal observations, the researchers were able to assess the impact on participants

(N=23), make suggestions for improvement for the future, and ascertain the degree of strategic congruence between the program and the overall corporate mission.

Results/Discussion/Conclusion

The current research indicates corporations do have the ability to impart positive social impact through CSR efforts. Participants in the introductory golf program learned the basic fundamentals of the game of golf but the same could not be found for the life skills section of the program. Also, the mission of both the Golf Corporation and the introductory golf program were found to be similar and in alignment. This alignment of both entities allowed for a greater social impact through the introductory golf program and a potential competitive advantage opportunity for the Golf Management Corporation. However, the Golf Management Corporation did not obtain a competitive advantage because the corporate owner did not publicize his CSR efforts.

References

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