

Drivers, stages and capabilities of integrating corporate social responsibility in professional football

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Aim

Evidently, many forward-looking organisations across all industries have already embraced the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for their own competitive benefits. Also, Smith and Westerbeek (2007) as well as Breitbarth and Harris (2008) demonstrate the relevance of modern CSR for professional sports organisations in general and, respectively, professional football in particular. Recently, an increasing number of European professional football clubs and club organisations have started to actively engage with the CSR concept. This research describes key drivers, stages and capabilities for successful CSR integration in professional football and offers a road map for similar sports bodies. More specifically, the aim is to provide a stage model for managing the integration of CSR in professional football clubs.

Theoretical background

Forward-looking organisations that have integrated CSR add substance to their reputation, minimize operational risks, inspire innovation processes and improve their relationships with vital stakeholders, for example to secure their 'license to operate' (Weber, 2008). Influential contributions by Smith and Westerbeek (2007) and Breitbarth and Harris (2008) have framed the academic CSR debate in sport management. In a nutshell, they show that sport in general can act as an agent for corporate and governmental CSR initiatives, and that professional sport organisations in particular are required to integrate the CSR concept themselves. Only recently, football organisations have started to actively engage with the CSR debate and embrace it for their own means. For example, the German Football Association/League and top-league teams like Werder Bremen have undertaken first steps towards strategic implementation of CSR-related matters. In England, The Football Association in close cooperation with the leagues and individual clubs in particular have built a wide-ranging portfolio of activities (Rosca, 2011). Long-term studies of CSR integration and application processes in international business have led to established development models (e.g. Mirvis and Googins, 2006). Such models map organisational/managerial drivers, stages and capabilities vital to move from elementary, engaged, innovative,

integrative stages of CSR activity to, eventually, the transformational stage of CSR. However, so far no sports-specific map is available.

Methodology

Arguably, professional football is an idiosyncratic industry that on the one hand adopts and applies management knowledge from other commercial industries, but on the other hand partly operates based on non-profit premises. Therefore, the research is based on, firstly, the review of long-term studies of CSR evolution in international business in order to provide a conceptual point of reference; secondly, the review of CSR developments in professional football in order to draw sports-specific conclusions; and, thirdly, direct involvement in the integration of CSR in professional football clubs and leagues in order to ascertain process dynamics, context issues and content shifts. Hence, both the adoption of generic stage models and the analysis of CSR integration in, especially, German and English professional football organisations inform the conceptualisation of the respective stage model.

Results

Results show the intertwined influence of content, context and processes in managing the integration of CSR in professional football. The stage model describes strategic alignment, stakeholder support and sports-specific organisational capabilities to be the key enablers in order to advance meaningful CSR integration. Hence, the outcome of the research cumulates in the proposed '3S-Model'. Activating the 3S-Model enables organisations to reach higher levels of CSR engagement and to champion opportunities within competitive environments. The research outcome offers sport management researchers and practitioner alike a roadmap in order to frame the value that sport organisations can create through engaging with the modern CSR concept.

References

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