

Creating shared value through sport: incorporating CSR into sport management curriculum

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Background

The importance of education in the understanding of the business world cannot be underplayed. It was most identified in DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) seminal work on organisational change, identifying normative pressures as a large factor of isomorphism. This can be attributed to the number of professionals who have received similar levels of training, thus leaving them with the same core ideas of best practise in the work place. More recently, it has been said that to create a shared value between a business and its surrounding society, future managers should be educated through a variety of subject areas beyond a narrow, capitalist view of business (Porter & Kramer, 2011). It is apparent that universities, and business schools in particular, have a role in the development of those professionals that goes beyond their initial tertiary education, and instead instil values and beliefs to be used for the rest of their (professional) lives. There is evidence of a current change in direction for business schools, emphasising the value that businesses play in the surrounding society (Starkey, Hatchuel, & Tempest, 2004). Although sport can be used to benefit society, whether directly or through positive spillovers (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007), the extent to which (future) sport managers are prepared to use sport's power and magnitude to its full potential, - in other words they understand the principles that underpin CSR thinking -, is an empirical question remaining unaddressed (Mallen, Bradish, & MacLean, 2008). This paper purposes to ascertain the levels of understanding around Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) that current sport students are gaining, and their interpretation of the importance of CSR in the developing world of sport.

Method

The authors draw on the results of an (ongoing) quantitative case study, seeking to provide a descriptive account of the students' perceptions on matters associated with CSR. A survey method was used to collect data from Sport Management and Sport Marketing students. This research takes place in two separated phases, differing in time and scope. The first phase took place before the delivery of a module entirely devoted to the principles of CSR (December 2011). For this phase, a self-administered questionnaire was distributed to undergraduate students across both courses representing cohorts year one through three. The scope here was to seek an understanding of the students' familiarity of the concept itself as well as attitudes towards specific issues that broadly fall under the CSR concept (e.g. corruption, match-fixing, child-labour etc). From a total population of 365 UG students a sample of 143 was collated and

subsequently descriptively analysed, a 39% response rate. The second phase of the research will take place after the CSR-devoted module has been delivered (May 2012). The scope here will be to draw comparisons between the two phases and explore the change in students' perceptions and (future) behaviour towards the identified key issues. For this phase, the same self-administered questionnaire will be distributed to students studying the CSR module.

Findings & discussion

The preliminary results of the pre-CSR delivery questionnaires indicate that CSR is viewed as an increasingly important subject for sports organisations, with 96% of respondents acknowledging the importance for sport organisations to act in an ethical and socially responsible way. Yet, this does not necessarily correlate with the general understanding of CSR, with 56% of respondents having covered elements of CSR as part of their study, but 75% feeling there should be more opportunity to study CSR. This suggests that CSR is very much a subject that is both under taught and undervalued in the sport management curriculum. Despite this openness to CSR, 67% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that a company's first priority should be to remain competitive and profitable, perhaps succumbing to Porter and Kramer's traditional view of business (2011). While this contradicts the earlier view that organisations should take CSR into consideration, it perhaps underlines the confusion and lack of clarity of those students who have yet to study CSR in depth.

Conclusion

It is important to remember that our results so far only display the views of students who have not yet studied a specific CSR module. This research will shed light on whether a specific CSR module can influence the thinking of the sports managers of the future. Thus, it should not be restricted to one business school, with the potential to investigate further across European universities, and ultimately a comparative study of sport management students from Europe and North America. This will enable us to investigate how differences in sporting structures and culture are significant in the way that future sports managers broadly regard CSR.

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