

BUILDING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY BENCHMARK FOR PROFESSIONAL SPORTS ORGANISATIONS: A CONSENSUS GENERATING APPROACH

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Abstract keywords

social responsibility; benchmark; sport; professional sports club;; Delphi

Aim of abstract/paper - research question

The aim of this study was to generate an organisationally specific social responsibility benchmark for a professional sports organisation using a consensus generating approach (Delphi technique). An archetypical professional sports organisation (club) was investigated as part of the project. Two research questions were asked in order to build a social responsibility benchmark for the sports club:

- 1) What social responsibility issues are most important for a professional sports club to intentionally address?
- 2) What organisational activities should the professional sports club undertake to effectively address these social responsibility issues?

Theoretical background or literature review

This study was initiated in response to the growing complexity and unbounded nature of ‘social’ expectations placed on sports organisations. Increasingly governments and communities are turning to these organisations to help deliver solutions that address complex and often resource intensive social problems outside the traditional scope of operation, including but not limited to: social capital degradation; development and peace efforts, health and mental health outcomes, environmental impacts, worker rights, human rights and at risk youth (e.g. Coalter 2007; Nicholson and Hoye 2008)#. Whilst the legitimate benefit of meeting these expectations is unquestionable – the lack of a tangible benchmark that accounts for significantly different organisational contexts and resource capacities may hinder the understanding, implementation and scalability of social outcomes from professional sports organisations.

This study uses institutional theory as its theoretical foundation (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Institutional theory helps explain how the social environment influences change in sports organisations, in this case the adoption of organisational activities that address prevalent social responsibility issues. Furthermore, institutional theory was influential in the early organisational archetype literature developed for the common organisational context in this study.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

Methodologically, this study adopted the Delphi method that has been recently used in sports management literature (Costa 2005). A total of 100 academic and 100 administrative experts were invited to complete a questionnaire in three consecutive rounds. Questionnaire items were developed from an extensive literature review and participants were given an archetypical professional sport clubs’ context with key information prior to the first round. No indication of social responsibility was included in the organisational context. Using a common organisational context as a collective starting point the expert group was asked to rate the importance of twenty-five social responsibility issues on a five point Likert scale and include any other issues they deemed important. For those issues that participants rated as ‘Extremely Important’ (5) or ‘Important’ (4), further information was sought regarding the identification of applicable actions to achieve these issues. Following questionnaire rounds one and two the aggregated rating and information for each social issue was sent back to the participants. Where participants differed to the aggregated ratings they were asked to review and possibly revise their answers in light of group results. Following the third and final survey round, social responsibility issues that received a median score of 4 or above with 75% of the sample group within an interquartile range of 1 were included as an issue within the social responsibility benchmark. Qualitative data relating to organisational activities to address these issues was analysed for common themes using NVIVO and established qualitative data analysis techniques. Where appropriate these actions were included as a guide for applying important social responsibility activities within a professional sports organisation.

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

The major finding from this research is expected to be a finite benchmark of social responsibility issues and related organisational actions for a professional sports club. The Delphi methodological approach may also yield interesting results regarding future research application in complex sport management problems. The primary theoretical implication of this research is expected to be a clarification of the issues and activities that are deemed important (and not important) to professional sports clubs’ social responsibility based on expert group consensus. By identifying a finite social responsibility

benchmark future research and practical implications may focus on the extent to which these issues and activities are implemented within professional sporting organisations.

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