
APPLYING CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY THEORY IN SPORT: THE ROLE OF ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

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Abstract

AIM OF ABSTRACT/PAPER - RESEARCH QUESTION

Recent sport management literature has adopted several measures of corporate social responsibility in an attempt to explain the nature of the concept within the sporting environment. The theoretical foundations of corporate social responsibility are situated in business management and were developed to deal with perceived social obligations of corporate firms (Carroll, 2012). Simultaneously, several academics argue that the sporting environment is distinctive from corporate environments due to fan behaviour, government support, competitive balance, stakeholder relationships, non-financial success measures and media exposure (Babiak and Wolfe, 2013). Due to this it is reasonable to hypothesize that the initial theoretical underpinnings of Carroll's (1979) corporate social responsibility may not be synonymous with the social responsibility of modern sports organizations. To test this hypothesis, two research questions are proposed:

- 1) Does Carroll's (1979) model of corporate social responsibility align with expert respondents' perception of social responsibility for:
 - a. An elite sport organization (ESO)?
 - b. A national sport governing body (SGB)?
 - c. A local sport organization (LSO)?

- 2) Does the perceived importance of social responsibility by expert respondents vary between organizational archetypes?

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OR LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical background for this study is based on Carroll's social responsibility theoretical development over the past four decades (c.f. Carroll, 2012). Whilst other frameworks have been developed (e.g. stakeholder theory, corporate social performance), Carroll's frameworks

are considered seminal in the CSR field and have been used extensively in recent sport management literature investigating social responsibility (Paramio-Salcines, Babiak and Walters, 2013). This literature has largely occurred within the context of highly commercially orientated sport organisations. As a result major facets of the sport industry – in particular sport governance bodies and local sport clubs – have largely been overlooked in the theoretical application of social responsibility within the sporting context. This research aims to take an initial tentative step toward the proposition that all sports organisations have an implicit level of social responsibility that may, or may not align with established theoretical concepts.

METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

Methodologically, this study adopted the Delphi method that has recently been used in sports management literature (Costa, 2005). A total of 56 experts (representing 10 countries, 14 sports) in the field of sport management (33 senior academics and 23 senior managers from sports governing bodies) were invited to complete a survey in three consecutive rounds. Each survey presented three archetypal sport organisation case studies (ESO, LSO and SGB) based on Max Webers ideal types. The utility of this approach therefore lies in theoretical development rather than empirical generalizability. Twenty-five survey items were developed from two prevalent social responsibility standards (ISO 26000 and GRI 3.1) and coded to Carroll's (1979) framework. Eight further items were identified by participants and added to the item list in the second round. Following the third and final survey round, social responsibility elements were analysed based on a) Carroll's four social responsibility components and b) the level of perceived importance of social responsibility elements to each archetype.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS/CONCLUSIONS

The findings indicated a high degree of congruence between Carroll's model of CSR in all three archetypes. Economic responsibility was deemed the most important social responsibility component, whilst the discretionary component was deemed the least important. The importance of legal and ethical responsibility components were relatively similar in all archetypes indicating a social environment in which social norms are increasingly being codified into laws and regulations.

Despite congruence with Carroll's model of CSR, the nature of perceived organizational social responsibility differed between organizations. The SGB archetype had the highest perceived level of required social responsibility with 23 social responsibility elements identified as of at least 'high importance'; followed by LSO (17 elements) and ESO (13 elements). These social responsibility elements were classified into tertiary (common to all three archetypes); secondary (common to two

archetypes) and primary (unique) social responsibility constructs.

Tertiary social responsibility constructs were financial management, occupational health and safety and equal opportunity employment. Secondary social responsibility constructs were found between SGB and LSO; and, SGB and ESO. The former relationship produced commonalities based on social equality and inclusion; and, maximizing participation. The latter identified appropriate governance and regulation - particularly with regard anti-corruption measures. No common areas of social responsibility were identified between ESO and LSO. Each organizational archetype had one unique social responsibility construct; social advocacy and thought leadership (SGB); on field performance (ESO); and, social capital and community cohesion (LSO).

This research advances the sport and CSR literature by identifying for the first time that theoretical differences in social responsibility between sports organizations may exist. Pragmatically, the findings suggest that experts perceive SGB's may have a higher level of expectation to respond to social issues than LSO's and ESO's respectively.

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