
Exploring the Link Between Social Responsibility and Strategy in Community Sport

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Synopsis:

The purpose of this research is to examine the factors influencing CSOs' decisions to integrate concerns and action on wider social issues into their organizational strategy. The research addresses two questions: (1) What is the link between SR and organizational strategy among CSOs? and (2) what resources and structures are available and deployed in the execution of socially responsible efforts in CSOs?

Abstract:

AIM OF PAPER

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to ethical practices and a generalized concern for the community beyond an organization's narrow mandate and which is not required by law (Carroll, 1999). Social responsibility (SR) is intricately linked with an organization's strategy, where expectations and demands beyond those directly associated with a product or service, can impact reputation, performance, citizenship behaviour, and loyalty among other outcomes. Engaging in SR is no longer exclusively a 'corporate' phenomenon. Rather, nonprofit organizations are increasingly involved in socially-minded efforts beyond their own narrow mandate (Morris, 2013). At the local level, Community Sport Organizations (CSOs) are a prevalent type of nonprofit organization that have a primary mandate to provide sport participation opportunities. CSOs also play a significant role in their communities in building social capital, developing community (collective) identities, and improving health and wellbeing. These sport clubs are thus uniquely positioned to engage in SR beyond sport delivery and may include such activities as part of a broader strategic focus than has been identified in the research to date.

While there is growing interest in how nonprofits are enacting socially responsible values (Morris, 2013), little is known about the mechanisms by which it is integrated as part of the strategic focus of the organization, nor how

it may be deployed in smaller nonprofit organizations which have been shown to vary in their human resources, financial resources, and planning/development capacities (Doherty, Misener, & Cuskelly, 2014). The availability of these resources may further impact their ability to engage in any activities beyond sport delivery. The purpose of this research is to examine the factors influencing CSOs' decisions to integrate concerns and action on wider social issues into their organizational strategy. The research addresses two questions: (1) What is the link between SR and organizational strategy among CSOs? and (2) what resources and structures are available and deployed in the execution of socially responsible efforts in CSOs?

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Recent literature on CSR emphasizes a fit between a company's core strategy and its CSR efforts (Porter & Kramer, 2011). These efforts not only contribute to societal beneficiaries, and enhance business performance, but are more sustainable when linked to strategy and purpose. Similar pressures and considerations are also entertained by nonprofit leaders with attention to the unique context in which these organizations operate (Morris, 2013). Given the growing competition and commercialization within the community sport context (Wicker & Breuer, 2011), CSOs must differentiate themselves and enhance their organizational reputations. Engaging in SR practices may provide important benefits to the club such as enhanced stakeholder perceptions of the club, increased participation numbers, and greater overall impact on a given community.

In the professional sport setting, Babiak and Wolfe (2009) suggested that the nature of an organization's CSR efforts depends upon the organization's strategic approach to external pressures and/or internal resources. They identified four types of CSR initiatives including: stakeholder-centric CSR, corporate-centric CSR, ad hoc CSR, and strategic CSR. We adapt this framing from Babiak and Wolfe (2009) in our study to uncover the relationship between different forms of SR engaged in by nonprofit CSOs and the extent to which their efforts are viewed as 'strategic' on the part of these entities. The clustering of different types of SR activities engaged in by CSOs, will shed light into the purpose and value of these activities for nonprofit sport clubs. The study also recognizes that CSOs have complex resource demands related to finances, human resources, planning, and infrastructure (Doherty, Misener, & Cuskelly, 2014) and seeks to uncover how their resource environment impacts their orientation towards SR.

METHODOLOGY

The study involves two focus groups (one with board members and staff and one with general volunteers) within a purposeful sample of six CSOs in Ontario, Canada (N=12) which range in organizational age, membership size, and available resources. Focus groups, lasting approximately 90 minutes, will be transcribed verbatim and analyzed inductively. Organizational documents will also be collected to provide further insight into the relative importance CSOs place on integrating social issues into their strategic planning and management.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

Focus groups are currently being conducted and will be completed in April 2015. Preliminary data suggests that a range of SR initiatives are currently being delivered through the CSOs and it is expected that a multi-layered approach will be uncovered where CSOs vary in the degree of integration between their organizational strategy and their approach to SR. Assessment of SR based on club resources will also be provided in the presentation. Determining the range of possible ways that sport clubs can address social concerns beyond the provision of sport, and how this may impact their mandate and role in the community represents an important line of inquiry in sport management.

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