Corporate community involvement: influence tactics, reciprocity, and organisational traded currencies

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Rationale & purpose

Most professional team sport organisations (PTSOs) have now established charitable foundations for the delivery of their socially responsible agendas (Anagnostopoulos & Kolyperas, 2016). This development, however, has augmented the complexity of the formulation of corporate community involvement (CCI) and the dynamics amongst organisational actors at various levels. According to Kihl, Babiak, and Tainsky (2014), CCI falls under the CSR umbrella (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Breitbarth et al., 2015), and is a critical means by which PTSOs engage in their local communities and foster loyalty and connections with youth, fans, businesses, non-profits, local governments and other key stakeholders through avenues other than their core business. Although scholars have begun to examine the role of charitable foundations in relation to CCI (e.g., Anagnostopoulos et al., 2014; Extejt, 2004; Inoue, Kent, & Lee, 2011; Sparvero & Kent, 2014; Walters & Panton, 2014), empirical insights on the micro-processes of how CCI unfolds are missing. Given that one of the most important determinants of managerial effectiveness is success in influencing subordinates, peers and superiors (Yukl & Falbe, 1990), the purpose of this study is to examine how charitable foundations managers influence their counterparts in the 'parent' companies for the enhancement of CCI, thereby capturing elements at both the cross-organisational and individual level of analysis.

Theoretical background

The present study draws on an organisational context in which the boundaries between foundation and 'parent' company are frequently ill-defined (Anagnostopoulos & Shilbury, 2013; Walters & Chadwick, 2009). This is particularly so because foundation managers are trying to influence their counterparts in the 'parent' company without having the formal authority to do so. According to Cohen and Bradford (1989), in the absence of formal authority influence is acquired through principles of reciprocity. Reciprocity is "probably the best known exchange rule in Social Exchange Theory" (SET; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 875), and the latter is amongst the most influential theories for understanding workplace behaviour (ibid.). SET propounds that individuals interact with others because they expect to benefit from this interaction. In interpersonal exchanges within organisational contexts "exchange rates" (Cohen & Bradford, 1989) are not restricted to common monetary currencies, even when the agent is a manager and the target a subordinate (although in this case monetary transactions may be the sole currency in the form, e.g., of money or promotion). When, however, organisational actors (e.g., a foundation manager) try to influence colleagues (e.g., the 'parent' company's marketing manager) or supervisors (e.g., the owner of the 'parent' company), then these agents need to broaden the range of what can be exchanged between themselves and their targets. Cohen and Bradford (1989) use the metaphor of 'currencies' to formulate five categories which illustrate what might be important to agents and targets during the process of organisational influence, namely: (1) Inspirational-related currencies; (2) Task-related currencies; (3) Position-related currencies; (4) Relationship-based currencies; and (5) Personal-related currencies. Underpinned by SET, and with the abovementioned currencies as a guiding framework, the present study is set to examine how reciprocity is sought from the foundations managers' perspective.

Methodology

Explorative in nature and populated by charitable foundations in the English football, this study used semi-structured interviews for data collection and analysis. Twenty one foundation managers were interviewed in person by the lead author from 2009 to 2012 (each lasting an average of 45 minutes), through snowball and purposive sampling. All data was analysed using NVivo 8.0, a qualitative data-analysis software program. The analysis followed a deductive reasoning in order to quantify, group and synthesise the data around the five organisational traded currencies (Cohen & Bradford, 1989). As such, we sought for frequency of times each 'currency' appeared in all coded quotations in data set, as well as for the percentage of informants represented in each 'currency'. Intercode reliability testing using Cohen's kappa was performed between the authors resulting in a 0.723 score, which can be interpreted as an acceptable level of agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Results, discussion, conclusion

Although several currencies can be traded across several categories depending on what the agent is seeking to achieve by the target's 'involvement', the study reports that reciprocity is sought, by and large, through task-related currencies. Foundations can (a) offer the 'resources' (see expertise in delivering community programs); (b) assist the 'parent' companies towards 'counteracting' negative publicity (c) 'cooperating' in sponsorship deals, especially now when the business world is increasingly embracing the CSR notion; and (d) offer 'information' through their presence at the local strategic steering groups where the majority of decision-making is made. More detailed results to be discussed.

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