

Managing Relationships between Football Clubs and Community Stakeholders: Critical Factors Underpinning the Community Trust Model

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Abstract

Research Question/Aim of Paper

This paper looks at the community trust model of governance in English football, which is considered a way in which a football club can improve and manage its relationships with community stakeholders. However, what are the critical factors underpinning the creation and development of a community trust? Drawing on qualitative case study research undertaken at two football clubs with community trust organisations, the aim of the paper is to illustrate five factors that have played a key role in the development of the community trust model. These factors are important issues for football clubs and for Football in the Community scheme managers to consider when looking to implement a community trust model of governance.

Theoretical Background

Over the last twenty years, corporate social responsibility (CSR), loosely defined as the obligations that a business has beyond profit maximisation (Carroll, 1999), has become an increasingly important priority for organisations and has received growing attention within management literature. More recently, sport management literature is also beginning to address the issue of CSR (Babiak and Wolfe, 2006, Cappato and Pennazio, 2006, Smith and Westerbeek, 2007). In the football industry, CSR is significant for two prominent reasons. First, a key management challenge faced by a football club is how to reconcile its economic and commercial activities with its role as a social institution. Second, an inclusive approach to stakeholder relations is necessary to promote long-term sustainability (Morrow, 2003). Together, these two reasons mean that it is important for a football club to manage its relationships with community stakeholders. While community engagement has been a prominent feature within the football industry since the creation of the first Football in the Community schemes in 1986, recent research has stated that the relationship between a football club and its community has become more obscure (Brown et al, 2006). The report by Brown et al (2006: 23) recommended that to improve levels of engagement and the relationship between football clubs and community stakeholders, Football in the Community departments should look to convert to a community trust model of governance, an 'outward facing' independent community organisation with an explicit

commitment to developing community initiatives in key areas including health, education, community safety and regeneration.

Methodology/Research Design/Data Analysis

This paper is based on qualitative case study analysis conducted at two football clubs: Charlton Athletic, a Championship club based in South East London, and Brentford from West London, who currently play in League Two of the Football League. These two football clubs have community trust organisations. The Charlton Athletic Community Trust was created in 2003 to bring key areas of community work under one umbrella organisation. The Brentford Football Club Community Sports Trust was formed in October 2005 and officially launched in February 2006. The main method used in the data collection was the semi-structured interview, triangulated with analysis of secondary documents including publicly available written documents such as annual reports and financial statements, in addition to club websites.

Results/Discussion/Implications

This paper identifies five factors that have been critical to the creation and development of the community trust model of governance. These factors include maintaining a strong relationship with the football club, having charitable status, being independent from the football club, aligning with government policy to draw down funding, and partnership development. These five factors are important issues for football club managers to consider if they want to create a community trust to improve the relationship between the club and community stakeholders. It is also critical that Football in the Community scheme managers consider these issues if they want to convert their scheme into a community trust.

References

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