

'Getting the tactics right': implementing csr in English football

Author: Christos Anagnostopoulos
Institution: Coventry Business School
E-mail: aa9711@coventry.ac.uk

Introduction

The practice of CSR seems to have a growing appeal for the sport scholarly community, and the sport of football has not been immune to this development (Walters and Chadwick, 2009). Although there exist no regulatory provisions that require English football clubs to assess their overall social or environmental impact in any detail, or with any degree of formality (James and Miettinen, 2010), football clubs in England are now heavily engaged in implementing a range of social and environmental-based programmes. This paper draws on findings from a larger empirical study and provides a descriptive account of some of the key issues associated with the way CSR is being strategically implemented in English football. It does so, by using a football tactical 'line up' analogy in an endeavour to accentuate eleven points that pertain to strategic CSR in this particular context.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design. Primary data was gathered from a series of semi-structured interviews with key individuals in setting the CSR strategy in their football clubs. The study was populated by the top two divisions of English football. Thirty two CSR managers were interviewed through snowball and purposive sampling. The sample provided a good mixture of football-playing status as it consisted of twelve clubs from the Premiership and thirteen clubs from the Championship.

Strategic line-up: 1-4-3-3

Tactical formations are a recognisable pattern of play resulting from the use of certain players in fairly clearly defined functions on the pitch (Orejan, 2010). The position of the goalkeeper in football can rarely be understated. An important element for the strategic CSR implementation in English football is, therefore, the facility or venue where the foundation resides and manages its operations from. The back line of defenders with regards to CSR implementation in English football consists of 'players' such as health, education, staff and geographical remit. The first two are seen as the fullbacks and they are the two of the major themes that both Premier League and Football League support and promote. Emphasis is also given to the geographical remit where the football club, and by association its charitable foundation, exists and operates, whereas the people behind the implementation of all this form the last defender in this tactical formation.

The position of the holding midfielder, occupied in this case by the 'parent' football club. The role of the holding midfielder has been incredibly important in contemporary

football because such player can provide better fluidity of the game by bridging the gap between the defence and the attackers. This is precisely how CSR managers regard the relationship between the charitable foundation and the football club; as being *the* key link that can actually maximise the mutual benefits that one can offer each other. Supporting and raising sports participation has always been an issue-to-deal with for football organisations in England. Sports participation has now a central role in the strategic CSR agenda of the football foundations in this country. Creating the next generation of fans/customers is perhaps more likely (and certainly more sensible) to be achieved by introducing the sport via an active rather a passive way. Social inclusion-based CSR programmes target those who can be seen as being socially marginalised and it is another area that is considered as being the core in the CSR implementation strategy of these foundations.

The front line consists of the two wingers and one centre forward. The 'wingers' are, in essence, the two areas in which English football foundations/clubs have started paying more and more attention to by gradually integrating them in their strategic agenda, albeit with plenty of room for improvement; these two players are the 'environment' and 'communication'. The place of the centre forward in this tactical formation is given to the, perhaps abstract, concept of 'Big Society'. The centre forward in our analogy needs to be 'fed' with quality passes from the rest of the team. That is, should the other ten 'players' underperform, then the goal for a significant contribution to the idea of 'Big Society' will not be realised to the extent football organisations and the government alike wish for.

Conclusion

By using an analogy of a tactical formation this paper discusses eleven issues that play a key role when CSR strategy is being put in place. In essence, it responded to Godfrey, Hatch and Hansen's (2010) call for management scholars studying socially responsible business practices to consider specific manifestations of CSR and take into account *relevant industry contexts and forces*.

References

- Godfrey, P., Hatch, N. and Hansen, J. (2010) 'Toward a General Theory of CSRs: the Roles of Beneficence, Profitability, Insurance, and Industry Heterogeneity', *Business & Society*, 49(2): 316-344.
- James, M. and Miettinen, S. (2010) Are There Any Regulatory Requirements for Football Clubs to Report Against Social and Environmental Impacts? Working paper as part of the project '*The Social Value of Football*' undertaken by Substance and funded by Supporters Direct.
- Orejan, J. (2010) 'A Descriptive History of Major Tactical Formations Used in Football Association from 1863 to the Present', in C. Anagnostopoulos (Eds.) *International Sports: A Research Synthesis* (pp.43-56). Athens: ATINER.
- Walters, G., and Chadwick, S. (2009) 'Corporate Citizenship in Football: Delivering Strategic Benefits through Stakeholder Engagement', *Management Decision*, 47(1): 51-66.