

FRAMING CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN PROFESSIONAL SPORT

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Introduction / Aim of Abstract

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become an area of growing importance for many corporations. Organizations in the sport industry are also increasingly engaging in socially responsible activities. Along with its increased diffusion, CSR has received growing attention in the academic sport literature. The framing of CSR in sport is still developing as scholars grapple with questions about motive, impact, business benefit, and/or consumer perceptions related to sport organizations' socially responsible efforts. Additionally, such framing will serve to clarify and more clearly categorize the academic literature on the specific dimensions and foci of socially responsible initiatives of professional sport teams.

The aim of our presentation is to provide a proposal for framing CSR in the context of professional sport teams. Our framing builds on seminal elements of extant CSR literature; it is based on four elements: CSR *components*, *justifications*, *features* unique to sport, and *pillars*.

Proposed csr framework

We propose a framing of CSR in sport that has economic, legal, ethical and discretionary *components* (Carroll, 1991). Godfrey (2009) suggests that Carroll's framing is useful for two reasons. First, Carroll characterizes and deconstructs a business's noneconomic responsibilities to differentiate between those that are enforced (legal responsibilities), contextual (ethical norms), and voluntary (discretionary). Second, Godfrey argued that the hierarchical nature of Carroll's framework provides a prescriptive model of the circumstances where tradeoffs (among competing demands) may not be appropriate (e.g., firms struggling to make profits should not focus on discretionary CSR activities).

CSR actions are also based on moral obligation, sustainability, license to operate, and / or reputation *justifications* (Porter and Kramer, 2006). Responding to pressures external to the organization is, of course, important for businesses success (Hess and Warren, 2008). Pressures related to CSR could emanate from various stakeholders: e.g., customers, activist groups, legislators, or local communities. Internal drivers such as the values, ethics, and moral priorities of top management, owners, employees, and athletes, and other internal variables (e.g., knowledge, skills, expertise) are also important determinants of CSR adoption and implementation.

There are four features that make professional sport organizations *unique* with respect to CSR, these being: passion (the attribute which differentiates sport from other domains is the passion that it generates among fans/consumers), economics (given the unique economic elements of the sport industry (e.g., monopoly power, antitrust laws, public support for constructing stadia), there are often expectations of sports teams to give back to society), transparency (contributions to good causes, poor behavior by players, coaches, owners, is open knowledge), and stakeholder management (success in the sport industry necessitates the ability to work with a complex set of stakeholders) (Babiak and Wolfe, 2009).

Finally, we identify the essential types of CSR in sport, which we refer to as CSR in sport *pillars*: labor relations, environmental management and sustainability, community relations, philanthropy, diversity, and corporate governance. These pillars reflect the complexity and scope of actions that sports organizations can incorporate in their CSR initiatives.

Implications and future directions

The above components, justifications, unique elements and pillars are not meant to be considered independently. For example, a pillar, e.g., labor relations can be related to each component, justification, and unique element of sport; moreover, pillars can overlap, as for example, a CSR initiative (i.e., the NFL's Rooney Rule) can include

elements of the labor relations, diversity and governance pillars. Such a consideration of these components introduces managerial challenges, tradeoffs and decision making around the allocation of organizational resources and focus of values.

While our focus is on professional sport teams these elements are generalizable geographically, and to other types of sports organizations (e.g., major events; sports federations; intercollegiate sport). We believe that it is a worthy endeavor for researchers (practitioners) to position their research questions (CSR initiatives) into a “pillar, component, justification, unique element” framework. Doing so will provide clarity to the focal research (practice) initiative. Ultimately for a sport business, consideration of these elements of CSR in sport can enhance performance, save money, access new markets, serve new customers, enhance loyalty with existing consumers, strengthen employee relations, and help these businesses attain their pro-social objectives. An understanding of these CSR elements supports the ability of sport businesses to be more aware of their impacts, be more accountable for their actions, and demonstrate transparency in decision-making and processes--all hallmarks of social responsibility. These aspects will also help academics consider the broader role and relevance of social responsibility to sport businesses.

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