

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY MANAGEMENT IN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL CLUBS IN THE NETHERLANDS: JUGGLING WITH VALUE(S) IN A LOCAL CONTEXT

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Abstract keywords

Social responsibility, management, professional football, public value, values

Aim of abstract/paper - research question

The central research questions are: (1) How do professional football clubs in the Netherlands manage their social activities and (2) how can similarities and differences in the CSR manifestations be understood from a value and values perspective?

Theoretical background

Professional football clubs have long been considered in terms of sport and finance only. However, there is also a public dimension and social relevance to professional football clubs. Internationally, clubs are increasingly carrying out social activities in their communities. Through these activities, which are mostly focused on education, participation and health (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009), the clubs are not only targeting financial goals and sporting success *on* the field, but also social goals *off* the field. As such, it can be argued that professional football clubs are nowadays also involved in managing social issues. Professional football clubs in the Netherlands frame their social activities as corporate social responsibility (CSR). CSR deviates from the neoclassical economic view that the sole objective of the firm is to maximize shareholder value. CSR has developed from a charitable activity to an integrated aspect of strategic management in order to add value to the business (Porter & Kramer, 2006). The creation of added value cannot be separated from the interests of stakeholders to which the organization's actions should contribute. This means organizations need to refer to the various values in their context. Further, values can be described as 'complex personal judgments based on knowledge as well as an emotional reaction' (Bozeman, 2007, p. 13).

The increased social role for professional football clubs makes it interesting to study the way social actions in this particular sector are organized, how club management tries to create public value (cf. Bennington & Moore, 2011) and in what way these are determined by underlying values - especially since it can be argued that knowledge of the professional sport sector's role as creators of public value is underdeveloped (Leisink, Boselie, Hoskin & Van Bottenburg, 2013).

Methodology, research design and data analysis

A three year research was conducted among all professional football clubs and their social partners in the Netherlands. The study consists of

- a) surveys among all of the managers responsible for CSR activities at all the 36 professional clubs, conducted after the seasons 2009-2010 (N=31), 2010-2011 (N=35) and 2011-2012 (N=36),
- b) surveys among the social partners of the clubs, conducted after the seasons 2009-2010 (N=82), 2010-2011 (N=104) and 2011-2012 (N=136),
- c) case studies at PSV, FC Utrecht, NAC Breda, NEC, Cambuur Leeuwarden and Willem II, in which club managers and practitioners within the social projects were closely monitored through observations and interviews.

Results, discussion and implications

General developments, like the emergence of CSR in the private sector, changing political views on the public value of sport and specific developments in professional football have resulted in emphasizing the social role of football clubs. At the same time, the 36 Dutch clubs do not propagate and execute their social role in the same way.

It will be argued that clubs' CSR approach is determined by:

- The different notions of public, economic and sportive value that should be created by professional football clubs. The club and its stakeholders operate in a local context-specific arena of forces and mutual relationships that determine the dominant value that should be created by its CSR strategy and policy.
- The underlying public, cultural and business values. The values that are most dominantly expressed in a club's CSR policy seem to be heavily determined by the specific historical and social background and the particular club culture. These contexts vary for each club.

The club managers' competences. The diversity in, and tensions between, the various value and values affects the actions and roles taken by managers. The way CSR programs and partnerships within professional clubs in the Netherlands are designed

and organized, in order to create public, political, economic and sport-related value, greatly depends on the managers' abilities to operate in this arena.

We argue that professional football clubs – at least in the Netherlands – need to be considered as hybrid organizations, having features of both private and public organizations. Given their specific context and nature, regular managerial theories and CSR-related approaches cannot so easily be applied to clubs. Rather, we see that club managers develop their own specific CSR strategies and policies by juggling with the value and values present in the local context.

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