

Organisational Learning Process By Sport Organisations For Social Responsibility

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Aim of the research

CSR implementation requires major changes at the strategic, organisational and operational levels. Therefore, organisations must adapt and develop novel attitudes, competences and ways of working within their organisation and with individuals, groups and organisations that evolve within their network (Fortis, Maon, Frooman, & Reiner, 2016). In other words, CSR and organisational learning (OL) are interrelated as CSR implementation entails substantial learning processes for the organisation and its members in order to unfold CSR within the organisation.

In this context, it is important to understand how learning activities frame and guide the way CSR unfolds in sport organisations. To date, however, we lack theoretical understanding of how OL occurs when sport organisations implement social programmes. Despite the acknowledgement of the importance of OL in the development of CSR (Fortis, Maon, Frooman, & Reiner, 2016), the sport management scholarly community has failed to explicitly address the role of OL in the implementation of CSR in all types of sport organisations. Our twofold purpose is to examine how OL develops through inter-organisational and intra-organisational relationship and how OL facilitates CSR implementation. To this end, the following research question is put forward: how does OL occur and influence the implementation of CSR by sport organisations?

Theoretical background

OL has been defined as a process referring to the ways in which organisations as collectives learn through interaction within their internal and external environment (Cybert & March, 1963). OL is multilevel and occurs at individual, group and organisational levels (Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999). "The I framework" identified four interconnected processes of intuiting, interpreting, integrating and institutionalising that occur over the three levels within the organisation (Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999). Furthermore, research streams contend that learning is not restricted to the three levels and can occur at a fourth interorganisational level (Powell, Koput, & Smithdoerr, 1996). Collaboration can indeed facilitate the creation of new knowledge and the transfer of existing knowledge (Hardy et al, 2003).

To address the need for a multilevel model of OL for CSR, the present study analyses the dynamic interactions between intra- and inter-organisational learning processes in CSR implementation by sport organisation.

Methodology, research design, and data analysis

The study adopts an interpretative and multiple case study design, which has often been used in previous studies on CSR implementation and organisational learning. This research was conducted among three Belgian sport federations: two regional (i.e., Hockey and Golf) and one national federations (i.e., Football). The selection of these cases was based on their level of CSR development.

This study utilized two data collection techniques, namely, semi-structured interviews and organisational documents. We conducted 30 interviews from May 2016 to May 2017. Employing a 'key informant technique' and following the principles of theoretical saturation, we interviewed key individuals within the federations (i.e., top management and middle management, board members) as well as main stakeholders (e.g., sport clubs, non-profit organisations, academics and public authorities) involved in the CSR implementation process.

Results and implications

Overall, the analysis showed that anchoring CSR in sport organisations of this type requires the embedment of knowledge within the organisation, which implies both internal and external learning sub-processes. Therefore, the learning process is articulated around four levels: individual, group, organisational and inter-organisational. We put forward that the processes of *intuiting*, *interpreting*, *integrating*, *institutionalising* and *intertwining*.

The present paper contribute to the literature in two ways. First, we provide empirical insights in the role and influence of learning processes in CSR implementation process. This question is particularly central to improve the understanding of sport organisation' ability to integrate CSR and address social issues (Breitbarth, Walzel, Anagnostopoulos, & van Eekeren, 2015). Second, by investigating OL in this inter-organi-

sational setting, we shift the focus of current sport research on CSR implementation from individual and organisational and network level (Anagnostopoulos & Shilbury, 2013), which appears to be a promising unit of analysis in general CSR literature (Fortis, Maon, Frooman, & Reiner, 2016).

In doing so, it indirectly suggests a need to move away from examining CSR *per se* and consider it as a 'contextual platform' upon which concepts and processes from organisation theory are examined (in our case, OL). The hope is that such research will indirectly lead to a better understanding of CSR in the field of sport management. This is not, of course, a call to 'run away' from a concept that is attracting more and more scholarly attention. On the contrary, and in contrast to Doherty's (2013) recent call, we advocate that, given the fractured, complex and vague nature of CSR, micro-theorising might be the best way to move forward.

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