

Go Green Or Get The Green: An Analysis Of Environmentally-Focused Professional Sport CSR Determinants

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Aim of the research

Sport's inherent qualities (e.g., equality, access, diversity) and unique features (e.g., mass media distribution, positive health impacts, cultural understanding and integration) allow professional sport teams the potential to contribute positively to some of society's key problems (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). Professional sport teams have moved towards developing approaches linked to the environmental dimension of CSR in an effort to realize cost savings, which Babiak and Trendafilova (2011) suggest is indicative of the centrality of environmental sustainability as a business practice. Understanding CSR strategically as a business opportunity (i.e., the connection between CSR and corporate financial performance) in many instances makes sense. However, there are corporations who understand their social responsibility through a more altruistic lens whereby the needs of stakeholders are prioritized. Specifically, the range of stakeholders in the sport industry now includes pro-environmental groups and the local community, which has emerged beyond the traditional view that included only suppliers, owners, shareholders, customers, and employees (McCullough, 2015). Alternatively, organizations are looking to strike a balance by aligning corporate and community benefit to justify CSR efforts and maximize return on investment.

The aim of this presentation is to analyze the determinants that are driving professional sport teams across the five major leagues in the United States and Canada to engage in environmentally-focused Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities. Specifically, using Babiak and Wolfe's (2009) proposed CSR framework, the aim will be to consider the role of environmental CSR within the corporate financial performance-social responsibility mix. Furthermore, this paper intends to understand the relationship between determinants and thematic variances of environmental CSR in professional sport.

Literature review

Motives driving social responsibility within professional sport are complex. Through applying a resource-based approach, Babiak and Wolfe (2009) discovered that in the professional sport industry both internal (context, content, constituents, control, and cause) and external (valuable, rare, and inimitable) determinants are at play. Based on this propensity of an organization to be internally or externally inclined, Babiak and Wolfe categorize CSR delivery in to four dimensions: stakeholder-centric, strategic, corporate-centric, and ad hoc. More importantly, Babiak and Wolfe's findings, which have been reified by other scholars, suggest that a movement is taking place in which organizations are departing, while not totally, from purely intrinsic motivations with objectives congruent with the economic bottom line, to a broader responsibility that is determined by an organization's external orientation.

Babiak and Wolfe (2009) also suggest that internal and external determinants influence the types of CSR activities that organizations are likely to enter in to. For example, "An organization with a high internal resource orientation and a low external orientation is classified as practicing corporate-centric CSR" (p. 735). Stakeholder-centric CSR is the opposite scenario where an organization demonstrates high external resource orientation and low internal orientation. These organizations are demonstrating borderline altruistic intentions by prioritizing meeting societal needs over their own economic bottom line. The other CSR-typology of note is strategic-CSR, which is when an organization emphasizes "synergies between their core business activities and CSR" (p. 735) — in other words, recognizing both internal and external determinants. Furthermore, Babiak and Wolfe argue that strategic-CSR is the optimal approach.

Methodology, research design, and data analysis

The content analysis includes 143 professional sport team websites and Google key word searches to capture disclosed CSR initiatives, both in-stadium and out-of-stadium, with an environmental sustainability focus. The researchers are adopting a coding frame based on a similar analysis undertaken by Blankenbuehler and Kunz (2014) who differentiated "green initiatives" into nine categories: Recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation, alternate transportation, waste reduction, LEED, food-donated, recycled paper products, and solar. In addition to categorizing the CSR initiatives by sustainable theme, we are also applying Babiak and Wolfe's (2009) CSR framework to understand whether these initiatives were 1) making use of core competencies, and 2) meeting community and/or corporate needs.

Results, discussion, and implications

Data collection is currently underway; therefore, results will be discussed in their entirety during the presentation. This research will build on both Babiak and Wolfe (2009) and Blankenbuehler and Kunz (2014) to understand if, how, and where sport organizations are implementing environmental CSR strategically. Understanding the implementation of environmental CSR initiatives is important given the current influx of such initiatives and the current political climate around environmental initiatives in the United States. Therefore, the presentation will be undergirded by a contextualization of the current structural level motivations for implementing environmental CSR initiatives in order to discuss the generalizability to other sport leagues; for example, European professional sport leagues.

References

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