

Inter-Country Differences In CSR Practices: A Cross-National Comparison Between The French And UK Professional Sport Sectors

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Aim of the research/project

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a multifaceted concept that is viewed and applied differently in different countries. In general, it can be defined as the “economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time” (Carroll, 1979). Recent research into CSR in the sport sector (Paramio-Salcines, Babiak & Walters, 2013) has begun investigating why and how sport organizations demonstrate their social responsibility, and the influence of national and cultural roots on CSR practices. The present study contributes to this emerging research stream by comparing the ways in which professional sports clubs in France and the United Kingdom consider and implement CSR, and by attempting to identify the reasons for these differences.

Theoretical background or literature review

Institutional theory offers an interesting perspective from which to explore the cross-national differences that have been noted in the sport sector (Breitbarth & Harris, 2008) but rarely studied. This perspective and, more specifically, Matten and Moon's (2008) conceptual framework for understanding CSR, allowed us to analyse sport clubs' CSR practices within the clubs' national, cultural and institutional contexts. By dividing CSR into two types — implicit CSR (i.e., values, norms and rules that result in requirements for corporations to address stakeholder issues) and explicit CSR (i.e., voluntary programs and strategies that combine social and business value) — Matten and Moon's (2008) framework provides a useful template for determining the factors underpinning different approaches and attitudes to CSR.

Methodology, research design, and data analysis

The present study used a comparative methodology to compare CSR practices by top-level professional sport clubs in the United Kingdom and France. Our study focused on rugby (Aviva Premiership Rugby vs. Top 14) and football (English Premier League vs. Ligue 1) because they are the biggest sports, both socially and economically, in these two countries. Data collection was carried out in two stages in order to benchmark the clubs' CSR practices. First, we collected secondary data from sources including the leagues' and clubs' websites, published community and social programs, CSR reports such as “Football In The Community”, specialist websites such as Responsiball, and press interviews with club managers. We analysed all these data in the light of Matten and Moon's (2008) implicit-explicit CSR framework. As a second stage, we collected primary data via a questionnaire-based survey carried out for France's national rugby league (Ligue Nationale de Rugby), which runs the Top 14 championship.

Results, discussion, and implications/conclusions

Our empirical investigations revealed differences in the way CSR is implemented in the two countries. CSR by top-level sport clubs in the United Kingdom tends to be explicit and revolve around initiatives such as establishing community education and employment programs, supporting training for administrative staff, and assisting staff with their community projects. Carrying out explicit CSR initiatives has become deeply rooted in the culture of professional sport clubs due to pressure from the governing bodies for different sports. These initiatives are epitomised by community sport trusts, through which clubs can explicitly and strategically demonstrate their commitment to social responsibility. In contrast, CSR practices by professional sport clubs in France tend to be more implicit. Very few of the documents collected describe explicit CSR actions and many executives believe their clubs are inherently socially responsible because of their background as non-profit associations and the supposed socializing values of sport. However, even though we have not yet been able to analyse the primary survey data we collected, we found evidence to suggest that CSR in French sport is starting to become more explicit.

References

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