Community-based social exchanges and corporate social responsibility (CSR) have become progressively more important to sport organizations (Bradish & Cronin, 2009), and in efforts to meet the demands of the sport marketplace, social responsibility research has seen remarkable growth and scholarly acceptance within sport management (e.g., Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Breitbarth & Harris, 2008; Jones & Stokes, 2003; Misenar & Mason, 2009; Walker & Kent, 2009). Even so, the study of CSR in sport is developing and consequently, the extant literature remains underdeveloped in several areas (Walker & Kent). One area in particular that has gone largely uninvestigated is how the quality and characteristics of a sport organization’s CSR personnel (i.e., employees tasked with the responsibility of developing, maintaining, and promoting a sport team’s CSR activities) contribute to CSR effectiveness, especially sport consumers’ perceptions of CSR activities on the part of sport teams.

Although several CSR studies have been published about organizational personnel, the focus of these studies has been managers’ and executives’ perceptions of/motives for engaging in CSR activities (e.g., Davis, 1973; Fitzpatrick, 2000; Ford & McLaughlin, 1984; Hine & Preuss, 2009). Consequently, much less is known about the quality and characteristics of CSR personnel and how these individuals can effectively employ influence tactics to improve consumers’ perceptions of a sport team’s socially responsible behavior. Therefore, in this paper, we propose that CSR effectiveness, as represented by the positive perceptions of sport consumers, is significantly related to the individual qualities and characteristics of CSR personnel, in addition to information about the perceived reputation of the sport organization and how this information is packaged, conveyed, and successfully transmitted to sport consumers. Indeed, we argue sport organizations and the communities in which they operate are inherently political (e.g., Mintzberg, 1985). Thus, in order to achieve a high level of personal and/or organizational success, employees must be able to develop relationships and effectively persuade and influence peers, supervisors, sport consumers, and community leaders.

Accordingly, the qualities and characteristics of sport organization CSR personnel are considered through the lens of political skill (Mintzberg & Ferris, Treadway et al., 2005). This concept represents the only social effectiveness construct that has been “explicitly developed to assess an employee’s ability to recognize and then navigate the political realm of interpersonal relationships” (Treadway et al., 2010, p. 139). Political skill consists of four dimensions (i.e., social astuteness, networking ability, interpersonal influence, apparent sincerity). This concept provides one possible explanation for how certain characteristics may enable CSR personnel to be more effective in the execution of their attempts to influence sport consumers’ perceptions of sport organization reputation, and, in parallel, shape how consumers perceive a sport organization’s CSR activities.

We also argue that at the core of how consumers perceive a sport organization’s socially responsible behavior is information (e.g., Mohr & Webb, 2005; Mohr et al., 2001), and in line with Ferris, Berkson et al. (2002), an organization’s reputation may represent “its greatest information link to outsiders because it is formed by the mass appeal generated by such things as its behaviors and process outcomes” (p. 365). Organizational reputation is therefore believed to demonstrate a significant impact on sport consumers’ perceptions of a sport team’s CSR, regardless of the actual outcomes of the CSR activities. Consumer perceptions of reputation are not, however, often formed solely from the actions of the organization.

How consumers perceive a sport organization’s reputation also can be strongly influenced by external forces (e.g., media, community leaders, activist groups; Rindova & Fombrun, 1998), many of which may have a bias against sport organizations. As a result, it is important for a sport organization’s CSR personnel to have a strategic hand in CSR effectiveness through influence strategies (i.e., modes of communication) that can positively shape consumer perceptions of organizational reputation (Deephouse, 2000).

Insofar as CSR is inherently community focused, and the success of such campaigns are highly dependent on organization-community social exchanges and relationships (Beckmann et al., 2006; Wallace, 2004), we propose that consumers’ perceptions of sport organization reputation can be influenced through two modes of information transmission. Specifically: (a) persuasive communication about reputation via direct sport consumer-CSR personnel exchanges (dyads) and (b) information about reputation communicated by third parties (triads). Overall, this paper is part of a much larger and continuing line of research.
inquiry, and therefore represents an initial attempt to conceptualize the role and importance of sport personnel to CSR effectiveness.

Forming the foundation for this paper is the reputation/information framework proposed by Ferris and colleagues (2002). Their framework, which is grounded in an organization-based recruitment perspective, emphasized the importance of effective recruitment programs in maximizing job candidates’ job offer acceptance in a highly competitive marketplace. That is, the framework was an attempt to explain “how organizations may increase their attractiveness through promotion of reputation in the interview context” (Ferris et al., p. 360).

Information is central to the framework because it was argued to be at the core of job applicant attraction to an organization. In addition to job attributes, organizational reputation was specified as a key source of information. Persuasive communication (by recruiters) about reputation was the proposed mode of information transmission. On the whole, Ferris, Berkson et al. (2002) highlighted the important role of human resource management (HRM) practices on organizational effectiveness (i.e., obtaining top talent in a tight labor market).

Incidentally, we believe the reputation/information framework also serves as a useful foundation for our conceptual paper because the principal activity of the framework is similar to what CSR personnel undertake with sport consumers. In effect, CSR and HRM personnel are both engaged in recruiting. The difference is, instead of recruiters using organizational reputation and persuasive communication to influence job applicants during the recruitment interview process, CSR personnel are using organizational reputations and various modes of information transmission to influence sport consumers and improve CSR effectiveness.

Although Ferris, Berkson et al. (2002) discussed multiple interviewer attributes (e.g., cognitive complexity and organizational identity) that may affect influence tactics, they did not include characteristics that impact both the selection of influence tactics as well as the method of execution. We therefore expand on the ideas of Ferris and colleagues and utilize the reputation/information framework as a guiding perspective to inform the creation of testable propositions about how politically skilled CSR personnel may increase the effectiveness of their attempts to influence sport consumers’ perceptions of a sport organization's reputation, and its CSR efforts.

In sum, this paper is centered on the premise that CSR effectiveness is linked to the qualities and characteristics of CSR personnel as well as consumer perceptions of organizational reputation, which can be influenced through different modes of information transmission. Because critical components of CSR effectiveness are consumer perceptions and the connections between the sport organization and a variety of stakeholders, CSR personnel must be exceptionally adaptable to diverse situations, keen networkers and relationship builders, persuasive influencers, and viewed as genuinely authentic. In short, they must be politically skilled.