Authentic CSR in Professional Sport Organizations: Examining its Antecedents and Outcomes

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Relevance/significance of the topic to sport management

Although the majority of previous studies in sport management have focused on the factors that lead professional sport organizations (PSOs) to engage in CSR activities and outcomes (Babiak & Kihl, 2018; Breitbarth et al., 2015; Chelladurai, 2016; Heinze et al., 2014; Walker et al., 2017; Walzel et al., 2018), little is known about the authenticity of the initiatives. Three critical factors influencing CSR success are (a) the authenticity of the initiatives, (b) fit (i.e., congruence) between the types of CSR initiatives and organizational competencies, and (c) stakeholder views of the CSR initiatives (de Jong & van der Meer, 2017). The purpose of this study was to better understand when, why, and how PSOs can develop authentic CSR activities that can have a long-term positive impact on stakeholders. To achieve this understanding, a conceptual model was developed for how authentic CSR can be adopted and implemented to create value for the organization, the stakeholders, and broader society, thereby enhancing the long-term success of CSR initiatives.

Review of relevant literature and theoretical framework

To fill the gap, this study aimed to develop a theoretically driven conceptual framework and propositions that specifies the process (i.e., antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes) of authentic CSR in PSOs. Drawing on stakeholder theory and attribution theory, a parsimonious framework was created to better understand when, why, and how stakeholders might perceive authentic CSR and its subsequent outcomes. The model consists of four parts: (a) determinants of CSR activities (i.e., external CSR and internal CSR), (b) stakeholders’ views of the sports organization’s CSR motives, and their congruence, (c) stakeholders’ perceived authentic CSR, and (d) outcomes of perceived authentic CSR.

Discussion/Contributions/Conclusions

This conceptual paper makes several contributions to the body of sport management research. First, the study specified four fundamental components—anticipating, planning, implementing, and evaluation—that jointly influence perceived authentic CSR in the PSO context. In doing so, perceived authentic CSR was emphasized as both ongoing and contingent upon an organization’s communication efforts, as well as stakeholders’ evaluations. Also, this approach shifted the traditional perspective of CSR, which focuses on antecedents and outcomes, to a process-oriented technique between both stakeholders and PSOs. PSO engagement in stakeholder dialogue would enhance the credibility of the initiatives. Second, this study expanded on Babiak and Wolfe’s (2009) framework by assessing the influence of different stakeholders on the implementation of authentic CSR activities. The current study thus took a step forward by elucidating and prioritizing those stakeholders who may best increase the credibility of CSR activities. Specifically, this study not only clarified the association between powerful stakeholders and CSR engagement but also provided a better understanding of the role of owners and employees in adopting authentic CSR. Third, research on authentic CSR has just begun to emerge and therefore provides few clues about how stakeholders perceive PSOs’ CSR activities. This framework underscores that PSOs do not merely rely on their motives and CSR fit but also on their ability to communicate and influence stakeholders.