
**Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Effectiveness in the Greek Professional
Sport Context**

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Abstract

The present study examined CSR evaluation issues regarding the effectiveness of CSR activities in Greek professional sport organizations. The initial results illustrated a general absence of CSR effectiveness evaluation. The findings of the study revealed that the majority of respondents have reported that in fact CSR performance is not measured mainly because of a lack of a methodology or a common framework. A major barrier to CSR assessment and evaluation practices is represented by the respondents' perceptions with respect to the nature of CSR. However, executives and managers mentioned a range of estimations to assess the impacts of their CSR actions, thus CSR effectiveness underlies subjective assessments of positive effect observations. Based on the results and the literature, the present study discusses the implications regarding the issue of CSR measurement and evaluation in Greek professional sport organizations.

Keywords: Professional sport, corporate social responsibility, effectiveness, measurement, evaluation

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Introduction

The present study examined CSR evaluation issues regarding effectiveness of CSR activities for Greek professional clubs and sport related organizations. Evaluation as a meaningful managerial process allows managers to appreciate the outcomes of their CSR efforts. In addition, it promotes the accountability of the managerial decisions towards shareholders or stakeholders and generally to the society. The research question “How your club or organization assesses the outcomes of CSR activities” illustrated a general absence of CSR evaluation in professional sport in Greece. Although CSR can bolster image, reputation, achieve financial benefits for sport organizations and is often viewed as “a license of good operation”, it is however rarely measured or evaluated due to the lack of a common framework. In addition, the criteria provided by the literature are overly managerial and one-dimensional. Furthermore, many researchers have encouraged the need for the development of specific criteria in order to integrate measurements into the overall CSR strategy.

Burke and Logsdon (1996) with the notion of strategic CSR have suggested the development of measures for an economic and social evaluation of CSR activities. In their perspective, strategic CSR would give the chance for measurable CSR benefits that expand beyond one-dimensional correlations between philanthropic contributions and profits. The implementation of strategic CSR activities must consider five dimensions: centrality, specificity, proactivity, voluntarism, and visibility. If the design of CSR initiatives encompass these dimensions measures for accessing the effectiveness of CSR activities could be developed regarding those dimensions. The closeness and the fit between CSR policy or program with the mission and objectives of the firm are a measure of *Centrality*. The degree in which the firm creates and internalizes CSR's benefits out of its efforts measure the *Specificity*. When the planned CSR behavior anticipates upcoming social or political challenges this is a measure of *Proactivity* of CSR's strategy, and when firm achieves to make visible all its CSR activities and to gain internal and external stakeholders' recognition of those activities, it is a measure of CSR *Visibility*. Thus, the measure of strategic benefits from CSR implementation into corporate strategy is the value that CSR activities produce for the firm. *Prior to CSR*

implementation firms should identify important stakeholder groups, and determine the socially valuable CSR activities to meet needs and interests. Vilanova, Lozano, and Arenas, (2009) highlighted the fact that while CSR is viewed as “a license to operate” it is rarely measured or evaluated because there is not a common framework. Babiak and Wolfe, (2006) also acknowledged the need to develop criteria to measure the contribution and the outcomes of CSR activities while Lindgreen and Swaen (2010) have acknowledged that CSR is multidimensional by its nature. Moreover, they have mentioned the need to explore ways in which CSR activity can be measured, and to determine the criteria or the indicators about the level of CSR effectiveness. Further, the measurement of the impact of CSR on the different dimensions has to be put forward. The lack of evaluation on CSR projects along with the tarnished reputation of sports have been discussed by Levermore (2010 & 2011) who admits that act as failure factor on CSR. Researchers have allocated the problem in *evaluation techniques that are overly managerial and one-dimensional.* Accordingly, this led to a failure regarding the results when evaluating CSR programs and highlighted the problem of financial performance appraisal from a corporate perspective rather than the social impact of CSR initiatives. Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, (2008) have argued that *monitoring and evaluating social programs should be a priority from the very start to the very end, from conception to implementation.* Breitbarth, Hovemann, & Walzel, (2011) have developed a model for measuring CSR effectiveness in the professional football clubs and conceptualized a CSR Performance Scorecard for this reason. However, they have admitted that *measuring CSR can be complex, confusing, or daunting effort,* but acknowledged that: *CSR measurements influence business strategy, and are a driver for accountability, thus industry and company specific indicators need to be developed.* In addition, measurements should go beyond simple data collection with a *focus on understanding the impact and the meaning of these measurements.* In addition, they proposed the need of a holistic strategic management measurement model in order to evaluate CSR efforts. They have also claimed that the advance of the outline and the content of the BSC regarding CSR in football should emerge from *the objectives and the motives that stakeholders have.* Pomeroy & Dolnicar, (2009) suggested that *consumers’ awareness about the social issues that have been addressed through CSR initiatives is a crucial moderator of CSR effectiveness, thus awareness could be a measure for CSR performance and effectiveness.*

The purpose of this study was to *determine the evaluation practices of CSR* in the Greek professional sport context, and to *identify the perceptions of executives and managers* regarding the specific CSR topic. Measurement is the only tool that a sport manager possesses in the arsenal in order to tackle the rightness or wrongness of the decisions. Likewise, the examination of the existence of CSR evaluation practices can *uncover if sport managers (in the specific context) have reflections or a second thought when implementing a CSR activity about the effectiveness of their actions*. In addition, evaluation is a meaningful managerial process that allows managers to appreciate the CSR outcomes, thus it promotes the accountability of the managerial decisions towards shareholders or stakeholders. The existence of a CSR evaluation could *reveal the degree of accountability of such efforts* or put it in other way, “How accountable CSR managers feel about the outcome of their CSR efforts.”

Methodology

Seven case studies have been carried out with the use of personal interviews as a data collection method. The participated managers or executives from different sports organizations (clubs, leagues, and sport betting firms) have been interviewed and were encouraged to expand on their opinions about the idea of CSR measurements. The main query was “How your club or organization assesses the outcomes of CSR activities” particularized to the CSR initiatives that their teams or organizations experienced the last five years. Their responses were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim to electronic documents as cases and then content analyzed. Individual responses have been tabulated as Case (1- 7) and can be seen on Table 1.

Table 1. CSR Effectiveness Measurements: Responses per Case.

Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7
Perception: the benefits are immense	Observe a positive effect (feeling).	Measuring impact on ticket sales	No measurement of CSR activity's effectiveness	Perception: not easily measurable	Observational assessment of the comments of the fans	An estimation of the results rather than measurements
Perception: CSR activities affect the local area	Positive fan's opinion as a measure	No tracking on CSR performance data	Measuring firm awareness in the public and stakeholder groups	There is no certified procedure of measurement.	Assessment from the media pull (radio, newspapers, web site)	Take account of long-term outcomes (not something specific).
Effect on tickets	the fans appreciate CSR efforts (feeling).	Perception: a feeling, recipients of the action gets the benefit.	Measuring satisfaction from CSR activities	The idea that measurement practice does not exist in the literature	newspapers, web site)	General assessment of responses received from benefited associations
Influence in the Academy	Perception: difficult to measure the effectiveness among the fans	Perception: effectiveness cannot be measured.	Perception: tangible	Effectiveness does not appear on TV or in social media	Perceptions: There are long-term benefits	General assessment of responses received from benefited associations
No specific measurement program	A	Empirical		Does not	Not measuring effectiveness	General assessment from thank you
questionnaire	Recognition of				Research on the type of	

has been adopted	absence of a measurement	calculation from the	benefit to society	connect with other	actions	letters
A Customer management system is present	Fans economic response as	display of actions	Partial use GRI (Global Reporting Index)	indicators and this is a disadvantage	Take account of what other teams do	Ignorance of possible effects on ticket sales
Monitoring site traffic	CSR measurement	Maintain print, electronic & audiovisual	Survey conduct	Perception: Cannot measure quantitative indicators	Looking for ways to implement	Ability to measure site traffic & clicks on the banner of action
Academy as a measuring index	Perception: reputation is not	archived material		Perception: Cannot measure the moral benefits – intangible virtue	Perception: it is impossible to isolate the effect	Confidence about the impact of the action (feeling)
Daily contact with the world as a measuring practice	measurable parameter	Absence of numerical data		Indexing of press reports as a mean of assessing communicative impact	Measuring Web site traffic but not specialized on CSR	Intention for analytical measurements
	Perception: there is an "overall reward" feeling	Calculation of website traffic due to promotion		Propose an exit poll or a questionnaire	Desire for measurements	Perception: there is a social return of operations. A budget need for measurements
	Non-systematic observation, subjective assessment of effectiveness	Calculation by tracking an increased viewership on TV or ITV (internet TV)				
	Propose: post event measurements would apply					
	Coincidental post event assessment					
	Perception: necessity for effectiveness measurement					

Results

It is revealing that *the majority of respondents have reported that in fact the CSR performance is not measured*. Participants of the study have also admitted that there is a need to measure the effectiveness of their CSR actions or initiatives, emphasizing that *the lack of a methodology or a common framework is the problem*. Despite the absence of CSR evaluations or measurements, all participants have perceived that their CSR activity has immense and long-term benefits, for the local area, the society, the recipients of the action, and felt confident for the impact of their actions. They have also acknowledged that fans are able to appreciate the team's social involvement efforts, thus they perceive an "overall reward" feeling. The *barrier to CSR assessment or evaluation practices is the respondents' perceptions about the nature of CSR*. Some perceive that CSR effectiveness is not measurable, that CSR effectiveness is a qualitative indicator thus cannot be a measurable parameter, or it is impractical to measure the moral benefits of CSR, and that it is difficult to isolate the effects of CSR. Others support their reluctance against CSR measurements and express the view that the effectiveness of social actions is difficult to be captured among the fans or even that

a practice in the academic literature does not exist. Rather than measurement, *executives and managers are using a wide range of estimations to assess the impacts of their CSR actions*. Most respondents reported that they estimate the effectiveness of CSR actions by taking into account the opinions, comments and responses when contacting different groups of people, fans, or associations, and by the “thank you” letters, they have received. As a result, *CSR effectiveness underlies subjective assessments of positive effect observations*. The analysis of the interviews revealed that the *majority of clubs use the internet to assess the impact to the public of their CSR activities*. Regardless the obstacles or their perception towards CSR activities, many respondents have expressed their desire or intention for conducting CSR measurements.

Discussion

The majority of professionals have reported that in fact CSR performance or effectiveness is not measured confirming Vilanova's et al., (2009) findings which have highlighted the fact that while CSR is viewed as “a license to operate” it is rarely measured or evaluated because there is not a common framework. As we realize the absence of measures to evaluate the effectiveness is not a sport region phenomenon. The opinion that there is not a common place for CSR evaluation also mirror the need to develop common criteria to measure the contribution and the outcomes of CSR activities as Babiak and Wolfe (2006) have acknowledged. However, a strategic approach is what it is really needed. The criteria are easily conceptualized when the measurement dimensions are known. This is what Burke and Logsdon (1996) have suggested for strategic CSR in order to develop measures for economic and social evaluation of CSR activities. The five dimensions of the strategic CSR they have proposed can act as a field for measuring the effectiveness of CSR actions when the appropriate measures of centrality, specificity, proactivity, voluntarism, and visibility of CSR activities will develop. The same direction of strategic CSR follows the model that Breitbarth et al., (2011) have developed for measuring CSR effectiveness in the professional football clubs and the conceptualized CSR Performance Scorecard where the evaluation criteria should also come from stakeholder's objectives and motives. The consumers' CSR awareness that Pomeroy and Dolnicar, (2009) have alluded, is also a crucial moderator of CSR effectiveness, thus CSR awareness could be a measure for CSR performance and effectiveness.

Conclusion and Implications for Sport Managers

The absence of evaluation for the effectiveness of CSR projects and programs in the realm of sport clubs and sport related organizations is not a regional phenomenon. Due to the lack of a common methodology, the effectiveness is a non-measuring parameter. In the Greek context, the correspondents to the study raised the argument that the reason for CSR effectiveness not to be measured is due to its qualitative character, besides the reality of a non-common framework. However, estimations for the impact of their CSR actions and their willingness to implement measurements supports the argument that they feel accountable for the outcome of their CSR initiatives.

The findings of the present research justify that sport managers should learn how to evaluate CSR practices because of their growing importance. In order to measure CSR effectiveness a common methodology or framework is needed. Evaluation should use multidimensional and not overly managerial criteria. In addition, criteria for the specific industry (sport industry) need to be developed as tools that will enhance the effectiveness and the accountability of sport managers regarding the efficiency of their CSR efforts. The measurements also should expand to appraise the awareness of CSR activities among fans or different groups of stakeholders. In this perspective, implications for the sport marketing also exist.

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