Measuring and Evaluating Corporate Social Responsibility in Professional Sport

Kathy Babiak, University of Michigan
Lisa Kihl, University of Minnesota
Marika Warner, Maple Leaf Sport and Entertainment
James Lopez, LA Dodgers Foundation
Lisa Kikulis, Brock University

Corporate Social Responsibility has become an essential business function for professional sport teams around the world (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Breitbarth & Harris, 2008; Inoue, Kent & Lee, 2011; Walters & Tacon, 2010). Scholarly attention has focused on numerous process issues related to motivating, formulating CSR strategy, and implementing CSR efforts, however, much less attention has been paid to understanding the outcome and impact of these efforts (Kihl, Babiak, & Tainsky, 2014). In fact, Walzel, Robertson, and Anagnostopoulos (2018) stated that “Sport management research has yet to scratch the surface of sophisticated societal outcome measurement built from the concept of CSR” (p. 523). The field of CSR broadly continues to struggle with how, why, when to measure impact and what and who to measure (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Hopkins, 2005). In the professional sport context, the scope and breadth of what is considered CSR has expanded beyond the traditional approach of community relations to include environmental sustainability, corporate philanthropy, community development, ethical governance, and ethical labor practices (Anagnostopoulos, Byers & Kolyperas, 2017; Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011; Walker, Hills, & Here, 2017). The function of CSR has thus shifted from discrete and siloed projects and initiatives (e.g., through charitable foundations, or community relations) toward an integrated and focused strategic activity that is not only measured by outputs but by broader organizational and societal outcomes. Adding further complexity to these efforts, the tools, approaches, systems, and priorities of measuring and evaluating CSR have also evolved. The role of data and analytics for example, has emerged to help focus understanding of corporate impact on critical social issues (Kasturi Rangan, Chase, & Karim, 2015). Without understanding what constitutes ‘success’ however, data and analytic approaches are rarely helpful.

The aim of this symposium is to reflect and share current best practices, approaches, analytical perspectives, and exemplars of academic / practitioner partnerships to measure professional sport team social impact. Drawing from our scholarly and professional work, the diverse panel of academics (3) and industry professionals (2) will offer conceptual, theoretical, and pragmatic insights into measurement and evaluation of CSR in professional sport teams and leagues.

This session will engage panelists in a discussion of the following relevant questions:

• How is CSR currently being measured / evaluated in professional sport? (e.g., what key performance indicators and measures of CSR are currently industry standard – and what is not being measured?)

• What is the process of CSR decision making and how does that link to measurement and evaluation? (i.e., CSR strategy; use of logic models, theory of change, and strategic outcomes to guide evaluations).

• What are the approaches and impacts related to communicating evaluation results to stakeholders (funders, community partners, fans / customers)?

• What are the most critical industry needs in terms of evaluating and measuring CSR? How can industry-academia collaboration enhance the practice and impact of CSR measurement and evaluation?

An important outcome of this symposium will be the development of a guide for a professional sport team CSR measurement framework and new directions for research and practice.