



UNIVERSITY OF
TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

Responsibility Revolution:

An International Investigation of Corporate
Social Responsibility in Professional Sport

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ABSTRACT

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has emerged as an increasingly important role in business and society today. However, prevailing approaches to CSR in professional sport are fragmented and disconnected from business strategy and have obscured many of the greatest opportunities for companies to benefit society. Increasingly, organisations need to find ways that their CSR initiatives can be more strategic and sustainable. Thus, the theoretical framework for this study emphasised shared value creation, a nexus between instrumental and normative based CSR theories. In other words, organisations can gain economic value by addressing the needs and challenges of society, resulting in shared value for the organisation and society alike.

The aim of this research was to understand how CSR can be strategically implemented within professional sport organisations in order to create business benefits. To achieve this, multiple case studies were undertaken with 12 professional sport organisations based in Australia, North America and the United Kingdom. Interviews were conducted with senior executives from these sporting organisations who were responsible for the design, implementation and management of CSR policies and programs. Organisational documents and archival records were acquired over a period of 30 months to provide secondary supporting data. Collected content and

transcribed interviews were analysed using a directed approach to content analysis, which involved three levels of coding.

Results from this thesis identified ways in which PSOs bring social and economic goals into alignment through the notion of shared value, to improve both business and society. Specific dynamics, challenges and opportunities of stakeholder management, governance, strategy and measurement were examined. The research also identified significant perceived business benefits associated with CSR initiatives including cost savings, competitive advantage, brand association and awareness and commercial growth opportunities. These results were presented across three distinct geographical regions, highlighting international differences in CSR implementation.

From a theoretical perspective, results reflected a progressive shift towards the concept of shared value, indicating that societal and economic goals can strategically align to improve an organisation and the communities in which it operates. This research extends the current two-dimensional understanding and conceptualisation of shared value theory to a third dimensional addition of an integration spectrum. Integration of CSR with core competencies and business operations was identified to be critical for successful implementation and realisation of shared value. This research also provides practical evidence-based implications of how sport management practitioners may transform the role of CSR into an opportunity for shared value creation.

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Sarah Dai Cobourn

Date

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFL	Australian Football League
AUS	Australia
CAQDAS	Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software
CFP	Corporate financial performance
CITC	City in the Community
CSP	Corporate social performance
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
CSV	Creating Shared Value
EYP	Eagles Youth Partnership
MLB	Major League Baseball
MLSE	Maple Leaf Sports Entertainment
NA	North America
NBA	National Basketball League
NFL	National Football League
NHL	National Hockey League
PSO	Professional sporting organisations
SROI	Social Return on Investment
UK	United Kingdom

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