

Organizational Perception Management as a Means to Legitimate Sport Venue Subsidization: A Conceptual Framework

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In the United States, professional sport teams are increasingly engaging in corporate pro-environmental behavior (CPEB). Since 2008, the facilities of nine professional teams across North America's four major sport leagues have received Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). Additionally, prominent sport venue design firms such as Populous and AEG have pledged commitments to sustainability. Within sport facilities, professional teams have incorporated sustainable initiatives in the management of their facilities and events (cf. Babiak & Trendafilova, 2009). On a larger scale, some of sport's most visible events, including the Olympic Games and FIFA World Cup, emphatically have endorsed the reduction of their environmental impacts.

In addition to its ecological and economic benefits, for-profit businesses may also engage in CPEB in order to control its public image, reputation, and identity. Elsbach (2006) characterized the maintenance of an organization's public status as organizational perception management (OPM). While any organization can benefit from proper engagement in OPM, professional sport organizations should be especially cognizant of their public perception due to the elevated influence of community members: In addition to their role as consumers of the team's products and events, on occasion community members—including fans and nonfans—have significant influence as voters on sport facility subsidization referenda.

One method through which agreement on public spending issues is measured is ballot measures, which represent a democratic process aimed at legitimating the government's allocation of public funds (Fort, 1997). As discussed in this presentation, sport organizations may allay the concerns of wary referendum voters by engaging in OPM, thus circumventing potential subsequent resistance. That is, the purpose of this presentation is to suggest that the incorporation of pro-environmental design in a planned facility enhances a team's image, reputation, and identity—particularly among non-sport-consumers in the community—thereby increasing the likelihood of referendum success.

In this purpose, two complementary arguments are made. First, organizations can enhance their legitimacy through the use of CPEB. Second, organizational legitimacy can be enriched when an organization seeks the approval of community members by supporting a vote by referendum (i.e., rather than curtailing the efforts of anti-subsidy activists). However, professional sport teams interested in legitimacy might avoid referenda out of fear the subsidy measure would be defeated, a supposition supported by the lack of sport facility subsidy referenda in recent years. However, this presentation argues that CPEB—particularly when incorporated in the proposal and design stages of a facility—increases the likelihood of referendum success. Therefore,

these two arguments reinforce one another. On the one hand, CPEB and referenda drive legitimacy; on the other, sustainability increases the odds a referendum will pass.

In a broader sense, this presentation demonstrates how professional sport organizations benefit from the employment of OPM. One increasingly prevalent strategy relied upon by organizations in order to influence others' perceptions is the implementation of CPEB, and sport teams are no exception. For sport organizations seeking to garner public financial support for an improved or new facility, the management of their images, reputations, and identities is critical. CPEB may be a particularly effective means through which perceptions of the organization can be managed favorably because it attracts the attention of forward-thinking citizens who may otherwise be dispassionate in and unsupportive of the organization's facility campaign. This presentation illustrates the leveraging influence of OPM through the lens of a pro-environmental professional sport organization engaging in CPEB in order to obtain a desired referendum outcome. Based on this description, the Desired Voting Outcomes Framework will be presented to illustrate the benefits produced through the engagement in OPM by professional sport organizations.

Despite the long-term economic benefits, professional sport organizations stand to benefit more immediately by engaging the public's interest in environmental causes. To demonstrate how CPEB can be used to influence public opinion, OPM and its components will be defined. Next, the arguments for and against the subsidization of professional sport facilities will be summarized. Additionally, a brief history of public and private sport facility funding in the United States will be provided. Finally, the concepts of OPM, CPEB, and sport facility funding will be fully integrated in order to illustrate the potential influence of professional sport organizations. This discussion will include implications of this line of inquiry and directions for future research.

The Desired Voting Outcomes Framework makes several contributions to the field. Generally, this conceptualization offers an alternative and legitimate approach to obtaining public support for a professional sport facility. Additionally, the Desired Voting Outcomes Framework considers the significance of the organization's long-term reputation. Sport facility referenda are becoming increasingly infrequent, partially due to organizations' avoidances. However, as this presentation will show, scholarly consideration of referenda is essential, as referenda can confer hundreds of millions of dollars along with a reputation of increased legitimacy. Through OPM, the organization may not only gain public support for its facility, but it may also enhance others' positive perceptions of the team's image, reputation, and identity.

References

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