



# A global assessment of professional sports organizations' CSR Performance: A Delphi study

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## Abstract

This study presents findings of the first round of a four round Delphi study that aimed to gain sport corporate social responsibility (CSR) experts' opinions about the external and internal pillars and indicators to assess global professional sports organizations' CSR policies and practices. The findings showed both academic and professional CSR experts valued a sport specific CSR measurement and identified the following CSR pillars that measured performance: community relations, diversity and equity, philanthropy, environmental sustainability, communications, corporate governance, labor relations, and stakeholder management. The findings will be used to develop round two survey questions as well as demonstrating the importance of developing a professional sport CSR performance assessment.

## Introduction

The development of international and national corporate social responsibility (CSR) standards, frameworks, and guidelines (e.g., ISO 26000) are driving corporate social performance (CSP) (Pope et al., 2018). CSP is defined as "a construct that emphasizes a company's responsibilities to multiple stakeholders, such as employees and the community at large, in addition to its traditional responsibilities to economic shareholders" (Turban & Greening 1996, p. 658). Globally, professional sports organizations declare they "do good" through different activities. However, the quality of their social performance is unknown. There is no basis to measure it and it is undetermined if the current corporate standards accurately measure professional sports CSP.

Babiak and Wolfe (2013) suggested professional sport CSR standards comprise of "six pillars" (i.e., corporate governance, philanthropy, community relations, diversity and equity, sustainability, and labor relations) to benefit society yet, there is no empirical research to support the relevance of these dimensions or their importance. The global nature of professional sport suggests that relevant dimensions and their indicators are determined by different sport characteristics and the context in which they operate. Taking these considerations into account, developing a valid and reliable professional sport CSR measurement necessitates gaining disciplinary expert opinions.

The purpose of this study was to gain expert opinions about the external and internal domains and indicators to assess global professional sports organizations' CSR policies and practices. Two research questions guided the study. What external and internal domains and indicators accurately assess professional sports organizations' CSR? And what weighting of importance should each CSR domain be assigned and at what threshold?

## Research Design

A Delphi technique guided design decisions.

### Instrument development

Given the existence of CSR pillars and indicators in other fields (e.g., ISO 26000) we engaged in a systematic review which informed the development of the initial questionnaire questions along with our research questions. A database search (EBSCO, Scopus, & SSCI) for key terms including CSR, CSR domains and indicators, professional sport and CSR domains and indicators, and CSR measurement was conducted. Through screening several CSR pillars and their indicators were identified.

### Sampling and data collection

The first-round survey was sent to a global panel of 51 CSR academic and professional experts. We received a total of 30 responses, for a response rate of 58.8%. The experts were asked demographic questions and CSR specific questions about the value of a professional sport CSP specific measure, what existing CSR performance measures are used, pillars that represent CSP and to rate their importance.

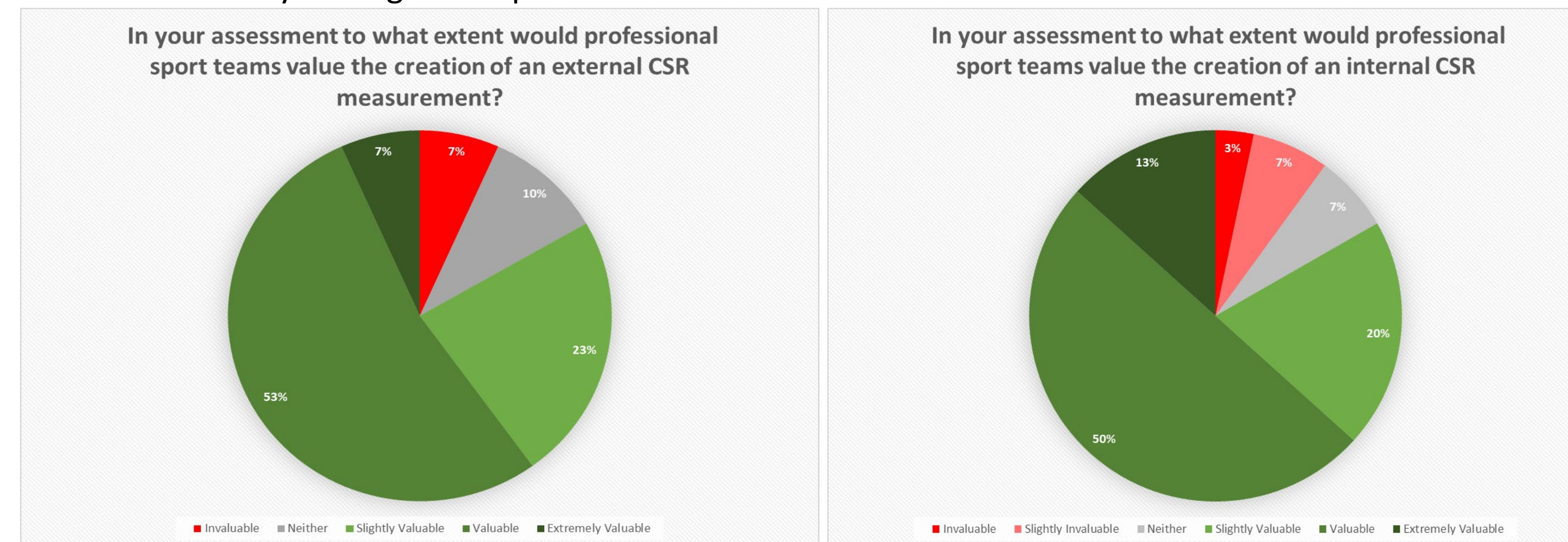
### Analysis

Descriptive and parametric statistics (median, mode, and percentages) were performed on the quantitative data and the qualitative responses were content analyzed.

## Results

Country	Freq.	%	Country	Freq.	%	Country	Freq.	%
USA	5	16.7%	Switzerland	1	3.3%	Netherlands	5	16.7%
Canada	2	6.7%	Belgium	4	13.3%	Cyprus	1	3.3%
Australia	3	10.0%	Germany	1	3.3%	Spain	1	3.3%
United Kingdom	5	16.7%	France	2	6.7%	Total	30	100%

Table 2 - Country of Origin of Experts



Pillars	Extremely Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Extremely Agree	I Don't Know
Community Relations	3.3%	0%	0%	3.3%	3.3%	13.3%	76.7%	0%
Diversity & Equity	3.3%	0%	0%	6.7%	3.3%	26.7%	60.0%	0%
Governance	3.3%	0%	0%	0.0%	20.0%	23.3%	53.3%	0%
Labor Relations	3.3%	0%	10.0%	0%	23.3%	23.3%	40.0%	0%
Philanthropy	0%	3.3%	10.0%	3.3%	23.3%	23.3%	36.7%	0%
Stakeholder Mgmt	3.3%	0%	0%	3.3%	30.0%	23.3%	36.7%	3.3%
Environmental Sustainability	0%	3.3%	0%	6.7%	10.0%	13.3%	60.0%	6.7%

Table 2 - Relative Importance of the Pillars

## Discussion & Conclusions

On average, experts agreed that creating an external and internal CSR measurement tool, specific to professional sport and based on the six pillars identified by Babiak and Wolfe (2013), has value. The findings support calls for a professional sport CSR measure (Breitbarth et al., 2011) and offers sufficient evidence and cause for additional Delphi rounds in order to investigate what external and internal indicators are useful to accurately measure professional sport CSP.

Future rounds will focus on re-evaluating the usefulness of creating such a tool in order to reach stability in expert responses. The usefulness of pillar specific indicators that can measure each pillar will be questioned as well as the availability of these internally and externally. Additionally, experts will be allowed the opportunity to suggest indicators they believe are accurate measures for each pillar.

Lastly, a global sample offers an understanding of how to approach measuring professional sport CSP across sports and countries.

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