



Measuring the Social Impact of Football

Football has qualities that bring people together in ways that often defy usual barriers. People engage across geographic boundaries, age spans or even across the street where otherwise they can struggle to say hello to each other. The potential to harness this for the benefit of communities seems immense.

Of course arguably football also brings disharmony and conflict when groups come together but perhaps this is not where football is a game of qualities but a medium, where anger and disrespectful behaviour can be unearthed, as well as positive traits such as togetherness and cohesion.

Good or bad, football is clearly a language within communities across the UK and internationally, and provides something that very quickly brings people together and engages them. For the 24 national teams, the 55 county football associations, the 125,000 FA affiliated teams in over 2,000 leagues, and over 7 million people playing¹ and countless supporters across England alone, there is undoubtedly a significant social impact of football. And this is without consideration of organisations that daily use football as a medium for making a social impact. But what is this social impact? And in particular what impact do professional and semi-professional clubs make to our communities?

Too often people will say 'well its undefined, intangible, you can't really measure it'. I disagree. When something is difficult to put your finger on it becomes more difficult to define but not impossible to evidence. There are a number of ways to effectively measure the social impact of football; what is vital is getting the right combination of measures for an organisation.

Why bother looking at the social impact of football?

Governments, businesses, social organisations, and communities all make large investments in bringing about a social impact. This investment needs to be targeted where it makes a difference, where social change comes about to maximise the value of the investment. Funders and investors need to ensure their policies and procedures allow these organisations to be recognised and invested in. Equally organisations that bring about a social impact need to ensure they are recognised through clearly evidenced work.

It is also vital that organisations themselves know if they are making a difference to ensure their own resources are well placed and to ensure they are constantly moving forward and responding to change. Knowing what works and what doesn't is crucial to any organisation maximising their impact for the long term. For football organisations this is equally true. Prioritising knowledge of the social impact made can have multiple benefits to an organisation's success.

¹ Statistics from the Football Association,
http://www.thefa.com/TheFA/TheOrganisation/Postings/2006/12/WhatTheFADoes_07.htm

Potential strategic benefits from football organisations measuring its social impact can include:

- Increased understanding of the community it serves
- Improved participation and support of the sport
- Improved participation in football leadership and innovation
- Increased motivation of staff through closer relationships to the grassroots of the sport

In addition the organisation can increase responsible delivery and sustainability through numerous benefits to the communities themselves, such as employment; engaging young people; addressing health and mental health issues; building the capacity of a community.

Furthermore a football organisation that can evidence its social impact can greatly assist its communication with funding organisations and/or investors. Too often fundraisers will say to me they have difficulty fundraising because they haven't got a lot to say. They have limited facts and a thin layer of case studies, which although are often impressive in their own right, don't stand out against thousands of organisations doing the same.

On an individual level it is important for effective performance measurement and management, including recognising achievements and areas for future development.

Importantly the people who are carrying out the work should know if there is a significant social impact being made. It can be extremely rewarding for people (volunteers or paid staff) to know that what they do on a day-to-day basis is part of something bigger and without them the difference would not be made.

But how do you measure the social impact of football when across the country football is making a difference in so many ways, through such wide-ranging structures, within and for such a variety of communities?

A good start is to ensure that everyone who sets out to make a social impact puts in place a measurement framework to show the impact they make. A collation of this evidence can be carried out to get a strong, substantial picture of how football makes a social impact. And this can occur year in year out. It gives more than a snapshot that a well carried out research study may achieve; it gives a true reflection of football as a power for social change. Without this it is largely just talk.

Governing and/or umbrella bodies at a regional, national and international level can take this one step further by encouraging their members to measure a particular type of social impact so that rather than being a random process of bringing together organisations, a coordinated evidence bank is built to support a social change.

But which measures does an organisation choose?

The first myth to debunk is that an organisation has to choose just one method of measuring their social impact. Variety is the spice of life and in the case of measuring social impact this could not be truer. Multiple measures appropriate to the work being carried out is required.

How many methods?

Each football organisation or organisation that implements football to make a social impact will be different.

The methods need to suit the organisation's needs and the context of the organisation.

For example if unemployment is a big issue within a local area and the club decides to prioritise the implementation of a pathway to employment through the variety of roles carried out in football, then the method used should clearly show the impact of the club on local employment, both in terms of skill development and getting a job.

If the club needs to show its local council that it is making a difference and a key area for their financial and other support it will be important they recognise their achievements. They may look for specific indicators, in which case the club would include these as part of its measurement framework (collection of methods that could include surveys, financial analysis, observation, feedback groups, event data etc).

Too much to measure?

Prioritise what you want to measure. Invariably organisations that make a social impact make it on multiple levels, to a number of communities, across a range of issues. Prioritise the areas that the organisation seeks to make an impact in. There is a big risk that if you try to measure everything, you'll end up with a thin coat of data that doesn't stand up.

Equally by prioritising the areas to measure a balance of measuring and 'doing' is achieved. If organisations are constantly 'doing' and not measuring, not only can there be a lack of accountability, it is difficult to see if the work is achieving anything. Alternatively if an organisation is constantly 'measuring and not doing' any impacts found will lack substance. It can be useful to set a percentage of resources to measuring within the organisation to ensure this balance is sustained. For example from an operational budget for a project 5% is a reasonable amount to allocate to measuring.

Which social impact methods are right for an organisation?

There are a number of areas that an organisation needs to consider before it embarks on showing the social impact it makes. Particularly as it is unlikely that an off-the-shelf one stop tool will satisfy all of the needs of the organisation. An organisation has to be certain about why it is measuring the social impact of football and/or its football initiatives and the benefits and challenges they face within its structure. In particular the community and business advantages of different forms of club ownership, focussed on within this particular context.

First point of call is the needs of the organisation.

The social impact of football will mean different things to different organisations. Some organisations will be **driven by the social impact** it makes through football (e.g. a community owned and driven club), others will have made a commitment to making **a social impact as part of its business** (e.g. a professional club with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) objectives), while others will want to know if they have made a **social impact without specifically targeting** this area as an organisational objective (e.g. a club with no social objectives).

The social impact of each may be just as significant as the other however the way in which it is measured may be quite different.

Football businesses with a commitment to making a social impact

This type of organisation will have committed resources to making a social impact for a number of reasons. It may be part of a wider commitment to corporate social responsibility or to give something back to the communities that have supported their business. Either way it may be that a more financial method of measuring their social impact is deemed the best way forward.

A financial measurement can provide a more substantial reporting system for the organisation. A common way of expressing this is through a balanced score-card or through triple bottom line reporting. These types of measures provide a clearly defined financial value to the social impact made and can be carried out through identifying monetary values to the activities carried out.

For those organisations that wish to communicate to stakeholders who prefer a financial measurement, such as clubs driven by business objectives with a CSR programme of support, then the value of its social impact may be best placed within a financial method of measures.

However in saying this a financial indicator of social value is difficult to achieve, can be argued as unrealistic or tokenistic, and may miss the point of the social impact itself. A difference in the community is rarely concerned with the financial impact and more aligned with the difference it has made to the day-to-day lives of people. A genuine social impact will be recognised by the community itself and a methodology that investigates what that impact is to those people will be far more meaningful.

A Contingent Valuation Method (CVM) or valuing public good approach seeks to merge these ideas by translating a financial measure from the social impact perceived by the targeted community or by directly asking the community to place a financial value on the impact made.

Similarly those methods that provide a ratio such as Social Return on Investment (SROI) can also provide a useful, externally recognised financial value for the social impact made. A SROI framework establishes the total net value of financial and non-financial benefits and costs an organisation creates, where social value is considered within a wider economic value.

The benefit of this for a football business with a commitment to making a social impact is that they can report a financial value that has been identified by the stakeholders themselves either directly or indirectly. It provides a more meaningful measure than someone arbitrarily setting a value and applying it to the social impact made. It also provides a clear easily recognised indicator that people understand and can compare across other organisations. Particularly relevant if those people have to make a decision between two organisations, such as required in a process driven government funding application.

However there are difficulties both in concept and in practice. An organisation going through this process will need to commit to a significant amount of resource that will in turn be most useful for communicating to others. It will therefore best suit those that can afford to commit to a large resource to input into a larger financial reporting structure.

It will struggle to satisfy those carrying out the planning and development of strategic organisational initiatives that make a difference in the future as much of the more insightful knowledge will be lost in the translation to a quantitative measure. This would still need to

be done to ensure that the organisation's future commitment is organised and deployed to full effect.

For example it may be found that the impact an organisation has made to young people taking up activities is worth £100,000 as the football programme has meant those young people have avoided crime, and reduced costs in social interventions and truancy controls to that value. However it does not show whether the programme produced the best value for money, where in fact the best value lies, what issues should be addressed to maximise the impact in the future or whether a different programme of activities would have produced a more meaningful result for the community. Also the value itself can be argued against as causal relationships are invariably far more complex than the formulas used to set the value.

Conceptually it does not satisfy an authentic interest in making a social impact. For those genuinely trying to make a difference through football the most important measure will be the change it makes, not a financial value of it. This will be true of those that invest in social value as well.

It will be important to consider who the organisation is trying to communicate with before prioritising a financial set of measures. If it is those that value the change made rather than the financial value, a resource commitment to such a method may not be reap the benefits first thought.

Football businesses with a commitment to making a social impact

Priority for Measuring...

Communicate to business stakeholders/investors
- financial measures that are cost effective

Informed strategic decision making
- qualitative measures developed internally

Ethical monitoring
- generic framework that has external validation and is well recognised

Football Organisations Driven by Making a Social Impact

For those organisations that seek to make a significant social impact as a core part of their operations there are a range of options that can be taken up. The considerations detailed above to provide a financial value either outright or as a ratio will need to be taken into account.

Those looking to communicate to a potential business investor and/or some governmental funds may consider that an investment in a financial or monetary value of their impact is worthwhile. Equally the organisation may decide that their interest is to secure investment from organisations that wish to see a social return that has greater meaning than just a pound sign. Charitable foundations, some government funds and philanthropic donors/investors are more likely to look for a more substantial measure of social impact.

A socially driven organisation, whether wholly or in part will also need to ensure that it is achieving its objectives. This requires a more in depth investigation into the impact on its targeted communities. To do this an investigative approach is required to which quantitative measures will struggle to show on their own.

A more substantial analysis will be required to show how the social impact was made and take into consideration a community dynamic that is ever changing. Quantitative measures frequently provide a necessary baseline of data. When combined with qualitative measures an informative and flexible set of measures that can show such an impact can be achieved.

But how to construct qualitative measures so they are not resource intensive and do not dominate operations but rather support them?

This requires a commitment to measurement from the outset, where measuring the social impact is considered at a strategic level from the outset of its operations to the achievement of significant social impacts. For example, qualitative measures set out within a clear long term operational plan can reap significant benefits, both in terms of communicating to key stakeholders and to the organisation itself.

However it requires a dedicated approach and is reliant on an organisation that seeks to learn constantly and is prepared for an ever changing environment. It also requires an organisation to be patient. Qualitative measures may not reap positive results for some time however when they do they are more likely to be substantial.

Qualitative measures also provide a depth of understanding and evidence that is difficult to argue and manipulate. Qualitative measures that place stakeholders at their centre even more so.

For example an organisation that aims to provide football activities or interventions to its community in a way that positively benefits that community, such as bringing people together, making decisions that benefit the local community as a priority, and/or targeting specific issues within the local community (e.g. employment, anti-social behaviour, family togetherness) will best prove their work by asking, observing, demonstrating the change that has been made.

Social accounting is a method that aims to bring some of these indicators to the forefront of an organisation and assist in their articulation to stakeholders. There are a variety of social accounting tools that have been developed, each of which have their own merit and challenges. The common benefit of social accounting tools are the provision of a generic framework that can be developed for specific communities or sectors.

The difficulty with social accounting is that although it may include a quantitative and qualitative mix, it is preferred that the qualitative measures are translated to quantitative values to make it a simply and straight forward account of the social impact made.

An accounting approach also attempts to determine what ought to happen within a community or sector, an established value for good work. Although it may be a useful short term measure of the social impact made by an organisation, like the quantifiable methods outlined above, the more meaningful impacts made can be lost to achieve an easily communicated summary. An organisation must consider whether an investment in this method alone is worth the loss of knowledge for decision making within the organisation.

It is possible however for the organisation itself to determine the measures by which it is to be measured. Too often organisations think that an external solution is required, when in practice they know their business the best. Organisations can set their own qualitative measures, bespoke to their own approaches and business. The downside being that there

is unlikely to be a comparative approach for potential stakeholders, to which the other methods are more likely to offer.

However if you are achieving a social change that has not been achieved before it would be very limiting to be compared on a prescribed framework of measures. It is likely that if your organisation has made a difference not achieved before that you are original in your approach and need to communicate this in a unique way. As long as the method has sufficient evidence, carried out in a reliable and ethical manner it is likely to be considered as a sufficient indicator of a major social impact.

In addition if your organisation has taken the time and effort to ensure that the communities you have targeted have truly benefited then why would you not seek to take a comprehensive method of evidencing this. Not all organisations will have done this so it is important that you can distinguish yourself in this way.

Arguably setting bespoke qualitative (and quantitative) measures is an intensive process that can be resource heavy. However it will be resource heavy *within* your organisation, which can reap further benefits. Your staff will become focussed on whether their work is making a difference and start the wheels turning for building a learning organisation, where the organisation is constantly moving forward, responding to a dynamic environment.

Practically, putting in place both quantitative and qualitative measures will mean an initial investment, both financially and in terms of time. However this will be a one off investment with only a review each year to ensure measures are capturing priority social impacts required. It also removes the reliance of external expertise (following the initial set up) and builds the expertise for measuring social impact within your organisation. Staff become motivated and strongly identify with the organisation as they can clearly see where their work inputs into the overall difference the organisation makes.

Football Organisations driven by making a social impact

Priority for Measuring...

Communicate to stakeholders/social investors

- qualitative and quantitative measures developed internally and well evidenced

Informed strategic decision making

- qualitative and quantitative measures developed internally

Communicating to non-social investors/economic funders

- financial measures that are cost effective and/or
- generic framework that has external validation and is well recognised

Football Organisations without a Social Driver

For some organisations although making a social impact is not on their agenda by their very nature a social impact is made. Measuring this type of social impact is challenging as there are no targeted communities or outcomes preset for these communities. The first thing an organisation needs to do in these circumstances is prioritise the communities and the areas they are going to investigate and why. For example if a club suspects it has

helped to employ local youths then young people (community) and skill development and/or employment (area) would be prioritised.

If an organisation is aiming to set social objectives for the future then advice ought to be sought from both within and out with the organisation as to what areas are believed to be supported by the organisation. Those seeking to establish the social value of their operations so they can maximise or further invest in these for the future, need to consider the depth of information and knowledge that will be required to set their objectives in the future.

If an organisation is being driven by an ethical or social responsibility agenda to which they wish to prove their value then a more generic approach may be more suitable. Those aiming to prove a responsible approach to business may want to consider standardised benchmarks to which they can show evidence of their achievement.

For those organisations that have not set out to achieve a social impact the cost of measuring increases. It becomes more guesswork than knowledge based decision making, and as such an investment in measuring may only find a small impact. The silver lining to this is at least there would now be a starting point to set objectives and to reduce measurement costs in the future.

Football Businesses/Organisations without a social driver

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Overall Considerations

Cost

1. There are a number of reasons why the social value of football might be measured and no matter which measures are used a commitment from the organisation is always required. Ensuring this commitment is part of the strategic decision-making at the start of any one year will not only be cost effective (information can be easily collected as you go along) it will also provide more in-depth analysis than an exercise very quickly agreed and carried out at the end of an operational year. In addition internal collection of data is much more likely to be cheaper than engaging an external consultant to collect retrospective data as part of an evaluation/assessment at the end of the year.
2. The cost of an organisation's measurement framework has to make financial sense. If an investment in a standardised model requires a large investment, it is important to ensure there is at least an equal return in terms of its value. Again internal investment is likely to be more cost effective than external development.
3. Common sense suggests that direct investment in social initiatives by socially minded investors/funders will be the result of a genuine commitment to the social initiative. A framework that cannot provide a depth of understanding and/or achievement is likely to be less cost effective as a result.

Appropriateness

1. The type of framework needs to match an organisation's priorities.
2. Internal ownership can ensure a better framework and more appropriate measures that can be used for multiple purposes.
3. Although initially a significant investment is required to set up a measurement framework appropriate for the organisation (which may include initial external expertise), the benefits can be seen for the long term if set up for the organisation and not just its external stakeholders.

Benefits

1. A commitment to measuring the social impact of football can have huge benefits, not just for the game but for the organisations and communities involved.
2. By engaging with stakeholders to find out what impact has been made, stakeholders themselves can feel more closely linked to the organisation and the way it operates. (Of course if they are just consulted and not reported back to or recognised in any way the opposite could be true)
3. Whereas in the past people may have accepted that doing something good was enough to invest or donate, the current world is not quite so giving. Accountability for claims of good work is increasingly being demanded. If an organisation can evidence their social impact a wider confidence in the organisation can result.

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