Understanding how Values are Manifested and Managed in National Sport Organizations

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In their seminal work, Slack and Kikulis (1989) posited that sport organizations are reflective of society’s values and beliefs about the nature of sport activities, and highlighted that the use of values in the management of sport is worthy of systematic inquiry. To date, sport management scholars have examined issues related to the meaning of values in national sport organizations (e.g., Hoebel & Frisby, 2001) and have explored the nature of value congruence between employees and their organization (Hamm, MacLean, Kikulis, & Thibault, 2008), yet interestingly there has been a dearth of research regarding the intentional use of values in the management of sport organizations (Bell-Laroche, 2010).

Arguably, sport administrators would benefit from understanding the management philosophy that exists within their organization; however, exploring management approaches in Canadian sport organizations in particular may not be an easy task. The sport system is complex in that sport is delivered within municipal facilities, clubs, leagues, provincial/territorial and national organizations as well as schools, colleges, and universities (Bell-Laroche & Corbett, 2008). Canadian sport has been described as being fragmented, uncoordinated, and lacking the innovation, collaboration, and connections that are necessary to achieve excellence at all levels (Balyi, Cardinal, Higgs, Norris, & Way, 2007). In addition to this complexity, a rise in sport-related initiatives has occurred as a result of government policy. Thus, leaders in sport may be thinking differently about what they are trying to accomplish and how they define overall effectiveness (Bell-Laroche, 2010; Bell-Laroche & Corbett, 2008; Sport Canada, 2002).

It has been argued that values are at the core of business operations, where a shift from management by objectives (MBO) to management by values (MBV) has taken place (Dolan & Garcia, 2002). MBV is defined as a management philosophy that guides organizational functioning away from purely financial or monetary standards and towards practices based on an established set of organizational values (Dolan & Garcia, 2002). This balance in management philosophies may be particularly salient in sport organizations that operate with little funding or in a “not-for-profit” context. Despite its dominance as a management strategy and the relevance of MBV in defining effectiveness in contemporary organizations (Dolan, 2010), there is scant research regarding the nature and influence of MBV within organizations. Thus, the primary purpose of this study is to establish a scale to measure MBV and explore if and how organizational values are intentionally used in Canadian National Sport Organizations (NSOs). A secondary purpose is to determine the impact of values based management on relevant outcomes. Given the lack of empirical evidence regarding the nature and influence of MBV specifically, the current study is exploratory in nature and hypotheses regarding impact were not posited.

Recently, Bell-Laroche (2010) explored how values were intentionally used to manage sport organizations. Taking an appreciative inquiry approach through a positive organizational scholarship lens, Bell-Laroche conducted interviews and document analysis within nine NSOs. Her findings suggested that a 4-I Values Framework represented how values were experienced in this context. Within the 4-I Values Framework, the use of values was described as, (a) inactive: where values might be dormant or not used; (b) intuitive: where values are shared and experienced at the individual level and are leadership dependent; (c) intrinsic: where values are embedded system-wide and evident in policies, practices, and procedures; and (d) inspirational: where values are leveraged intentionally as a strategic communications vehicle to engage and inspire members to achieve a common objective. The identification of this framework provides a benchmark for empirically measuring the stage of intentional use of values and its subsequent influence on outcomes; a step that may be paramount to systematic inquiry regarding the use of values within NSOs.

Dolan, Garcia, and Richley (2006) suggested that the potential benefits of MBV can only be realized when employees understand and appreciate the content of their organization’s values. Specifically, Dolan et al. (2006) identified a triaxial model that supported a three-pronged taxonomy of organizational values: economic-pragmatic (e.g., related to planning, quality control, financial management), ethical-social (e.g., related to honest, congruency, integrity), and developmental (e.g., related to creativity, adaptability, growth). Each category is described as being an integral component of assessing the nature of MBV within organizations (Dolan et al., 2006). Identifying the types of values used in sport organizations may be particularly useful in determining how MBV manifests itself in the sport context.

The potential influence of MBV on important group outcomes is of continued theoretical and empirical interest (Bell-Laroche, 2010). Recently, Hobman and Bordia (2006) suggested that values play a role in the emergence of conflict in that disagreements...
result from a lack of value similarity between individuals within a group. Thus, it may be assumed that as an organization progresses through the 4-I Values Framework, employees develop more congruent views of organizational values that could result in reduced conflict. The connection between values and conflict may also have further implications for performance in the non-profit sport setting (Hamm et al., 2008); an outcome that is relevant for both organizational theory and practice.

The population for this study is paid staff within NSOs in Canada, with approximately 500 potential participants invited to participate. An industry contact has acted as the primary conduit for access to this sample. Data collection is via a web-based survey instrument. The online survey is comprised of self-constructed multi-item measures of (a) 4-I Values Framework (i.e., inactive, intuitive, intrinsic, inspirational), (b) triaxial model of organizational values (i.e., economic-pragmatic values, ethical-social values, developmental values), and (c) organizational performance. Further, Jehn et al. (2010)’s intragroup conflict scale (i.e., task, process, and relationship conflict) was used to measure the level of perceived disagreement among paid staff. During data analysis, the internal consistency of each scale will be measured via Cronbach’s alpha statistics. In addition, the data will be analyzed using exploratory factor analysis to determine the factor structure associated with the measures of the 4-I Values Framework and triaxial model of organizational values. Following these preliminary analyses, correlation and regression statistics will be run to determine the association between the independent and dependent variables of interest. The potential for moderating and mediating associations will also be explored based on the steps outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986).

Discussion of the results will first highlight the theoretical implications associated with the development of an instrument to measure MBV in NSOs. Second, the influence of organizational values and stage of MBV on outcomes will be addressed with regard to its relevance to previous values research in the sport management domain. Sport managers may also find the results useful in providing a foundation for the promotion of values-based management in this particular context. Additional implications for research and sport practitioners will be discussed.