Exploring the Use of Values Statements in NSOs and NGBs: A Comparison across Sport Contexts

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As globalization permeates and businesses move to succeed in a global arena, management by values (MBV) continues to grow as a preferred management strategy (Dolan, 2010). MBV is a strategic tool that highlights the trend towards autonomy and professional responsibility, as well as the need for quality and customer orientation (Dolan & Garcia, 2002). Dolan, Garcia, and Richley (2006) noted that organizations may benefit from publicly stated and understood values as it limits the need for individuals to impose their own values in their job and leads to greater value congruence within the organization (see also Dolan, 2010). Further, the trend towards values based management has the potential to lead to more successful organizations (Ginsburg & Miller, 1992; Dolan & Garcia, 2001).

Canadian national sport organizations (NSOs) and American national governing bodies for sport (NGBs) are organizations that may contribute to our understanding of the emergence of MBV within the sport context. In particular, these are national level sport organizations that are influential across their respective countries and often provide guidance for regional and local sport programming. Research suggests that MBV is an emerging trend in NSOs specifically, as government policy is moving toward increased accountability for non-profit sport organizations (Bell-Laroche, 2010). With the increase in athletics scandals related to professional sport in the US (Teitelbaum, 2010), NGBs may also be moving toward the adoption of values based management as some sport organizations struggle to uphold a positive public image.

Given the potential influence of values on organizational (Dolan, 2010; Ginsburg & Miller, 1992) and employee (Fenton & Inglis, 2007; Ghosh, 2010; Grays, Stewart, Goodstein, Bing & Wicks, 2008; Schuh & Miller, 2006) outcomes, it is important to understand if and how organizational values are being communicated to sport employees as well as to the public. One method of communication that has the potential to transmit values statements to a number of stakeholders is the organizational webpage. The purpose of this study was to examine the webpages of NSOs and NGBs to determine if, how, and what values are communicated to internal and external stakeholders. This is preliminary research that may provide a benchmark for understanding the current state of MBV in national level sport organizations.

As stated by Patton (2002), document analysis provides a rich source of information about organizations, including the use and organized understanding of values statements. Thus, document analysis was the method of choice for this study. In total, 85 organizational websites (40 NSOs and 45 NGBs) were examined to determine the location and ease of identifying values statements. Paralympic sports were excluded from the study as a number of their webpages were not distinct from NSOs or NGBs websites. Location and ease of identifying values statements was determined by the heading of the page where the statement was located and the number of ‘clicks’ (i.e., pull down tabs counted as one ‘click’) from the main page of the official website. If an organization had a number of values statements, the statement that took the least amount of clicks to locate was recorded. If no values statement was found upon initial examination of the website, a search of the terms values, mission, and purpose was conducted in the search tab available on the main website. Finally, the content of each values statement was recorded.

Results revealed that 36 of 40 NSOs websites had values statements that took an average of 2.11 clicks to locate. Websites ranged from zero clicks to four clicks with two clicks being the most frequent ease of identification. Of 36 NSOs websites with values statements, eight of these sites had values statements found in a downloadable PDF. The values statements that were most predominant on the websites related to the promotion of the sport locally and internationally, as well as the long term development of the current and future athletes and coaches in the sport. A secondary value that was espoused on several NSOs websites was the desire to win or develop athletes to be the best in the sport. In comparison, NGBs had an average of 2.28 clicks to locate values statements with four of 45 websites showing no values statements. The ease of identification of values statements on NGBs websites ranged from one to four clicks with two clicks being the most frequent ease of identification. Of 39 NGBs websites that espoused values statements, 20 had values statements in a constitution or PDF of the bylaws of the organization. The common values that were found on NGBs websites related to the promotion and development of the sport.

To sum, 90% of NSOs and 86.7% of NGBs had at least one values statement accessible on their website. The ease of access to these statements was slightly lower for NSOs (M = 2.11) than NGBs (M = 2.28). Finally, the use of standard PDFs that outline the bylaws was a practice used more often by NGBs (51%) compared to NSOs (20%), and the development of sport was a
common theme within the values statements.

The majority of NSOs and NGBs websites indicated a values statement, which is consistent with research that suggests that MBV is increasing as a management strategy (Dolan, 2010). However, it is important note that on average it took over two search clicks to locate these statements on both NSOs and NGBs websites; a finding that supports Bell-Laroche’s (2010) conclusion that the adoption of MBV lies on a continuum. Consistent with government policy associated with NSOs (Bell-LaRoche, 2010), these national level sport organizations place an emphasis on the importance of long term athlete development in their espoused values statements. NGBs had less explicit values statements related to this theme, which may indicate that NGBs values statements are less likely to be directly linked to policy related organizational strategy. As stated by Ginsburg and Miller (1992), organizational values are important for an organization’s success and may be promoted in varying degrees in different contexts (see also Bell-Laroche, 2010). The varying degree of acceptance and use of values within NSOs and NGBs was evident in the analysis of values statements on their official websites.

This research provides a basis for understanding if and how values statements are espoused within the external communication of national level sport organizations across North America. As suggested by Bell-Laroche (2010), an initial step in MBV is sharing and disseminating values statements with a variety of stakeholders. Thus, future research could address the degree to which sport organizations are intentionally using values within their organization and how values are communicated internally. This may further enhance our knowledge regarding MBV, and contribute to theory regarding values communication in sport organizations. By increasing understanding regarding how and what values are espoused within NSOs and NGBs, the results may also be beneficial to managers and organizational personnel in other sport contexts who are interested in externally communicating values and values statements. Additional implications for research and sport managers will be discussed.