



**GHENT
UNIVERSITY**

EMBEDDING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN SPORT
THROUGH A CODE OF ETHICS:
OPPORTUNITIES, PITFALLS, AND GOOD PRACTICES

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OVERVIEW

1. Good governance
2. Code of ethics: opportunities and pitfalls
3. Case: the Olympic federations
4. Conclusions

GOOD GOVERNANCE (1)

- Major ethical challenge in sport: poor governance
- Possible effects of the (percieved) corruption of sport-governing bodies:
 - Loss of credibility
 - Drop of public interest
 - Less economic investment
 - Less public funding

GOOD GOVERNANCE (3)

- “mandatory for sports’ autonomy and self-regulation” (Geeraert, 2015)
- “it is relevant and timely to implement GG principles in sport management, particularly as the sport industry faces new challenges’ (Kartakoulis et al., 2015)

ETHICAL CODES (1)

- Different strategies can be used to promote GG, e.g. the use of ethical codes
- Definition (Kaptein & Schwartz, 2008):
“ a distinct and formal document containing a set of prescriptions developed by and for an organization to guide present and future behavior on multiple issues for at least its managers and employees (members) toward one another, the organization, external stakeholders and/or society in general”

ETHICAL CODES (2)

We need to make a clear distinction between

- Ethical codes that regulate the behavior of the athletes/coaches (issues such as doping, fair play, rules of the game, violent behaviour..) -> conduct on and off the field

“sport ethical codes”

- Ethical codes that regulate the conduct of board members and management (bribes, conflict of interest,..) -> GG conduct off the field

“good governance ethical codes”

CASE (1) – THE OLYMPIC FEDERATIONS

- 35 olympic international sport federations
- The majority has an ethical code on good governance

! Sport ethical codes vs. Good governance ethical code

! Conditions for effectiveness:

- Motivation
- Design
- Content
- Tone
- Ethical orientation
- Support for whistle-blowers

CASE (2) – THE OLYMPIC FEDERATIONS

- 35 olympic international sport federations
 - The majority has an ethical code on good governance
 - However...
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- 26% good governance ethical code
 - 63% sport ethical code
 - 57% mixed document
 - 26% separate documents

CASE (3) – THE OLYMPIC FEDERATIONS

1. motivation

- Effectiveness depends on true ethical concerns as the motor for code establishment
- Some Federations offer a clear rationale for the development of their code, e.g. the International Skating Union:

“the code is being adopted to a) declare that high ethical standards must govern pursuit of the purposes and mission of the ISU, b) assure compliance by all involved persons with the fundamental policies and values of the ISU, c) inspire public and internal confidence in the fairness, honesty and integrity of the ISU” (ISU, 2012)

CASE (4) – THE OLYMPIC FEDERATIONS

2. Design: involvement of different stakeholders

- Important for the acceptance of the code
- Avoids a gap between policy and practice

- The codes that were investigated did not offer information about the design, neither on which persons or groups were involved.
- This should be encouraged!

CASE (5) – THE OLYMPIC FEDERATIONS

3. Content

- A lot of Federations mix up the 2 types of codes
- e.g. FISA, IAAF, IBSF – consider ethical challenges such as doping in the same document as the guiding principles of GG
 - > hinders the legibility and practical use of the code
 - > too long to be effective
 - > not specific enough for the intended audience
- Good examples: ITF, FIS

CASE (5) – THE OLYMPIC FEDERATIONS

4. Tone

- effectiveness is higher when the code contains both inspirational and regulatory elements, rather than when either one of them is used
- The target audience wants clear guidance on how to behave in certain situations, as well as more philosophical aspirations
- Good practice: IBSF, e.g. they articulate ‘equality’ as a central value in their conduct, followed by concrete guidelines on how to put this principle into action:

“No discrimination by gender, race, marital status, religion, disability, or political opinion shall be allowed in the selection and use of technical personnel, employees, collaborators, managers, or any other person who performs duties in either an operational or representative capacity (..).”

CASE (5) – THE OLYMPIC FEDERATIONS

5. Ethical orientation: deontology vs consequentialism

- deontology is the most prevalent foundation for the formulation of statement in codes of ethics
 - > risks:
 - Too rigid
 - No involvement in the act of moral deliberation and judgment

CASE (5) – THE OLYMPIC FEDERATIONS

5. Ethical orientation: deontology vs consequentialism

e.g. FIH (2012)

“volunteers or staff shall not, directly or indirectly, solicit, accept or offer any form of remuneration or commission, nor any concealed benefit or service of any nature, connected with the organization of the Olympic Games or of events sanctioned by FIH”

<-> “persons bound by this code may only offer or accept gifts or other benefits to and from persons within or outside FIFA, or in conjunction with intermediaries or related parties (..) which do not create a conflict of interest” (FIFA,2012)

CASE (5) – THE OLYMPIC FEDERATIONS

6. Support for whistle-blowers

- Important for the effectiveness of the code
- Several Olympic Federations do not yet present this protection in the documents
- Good practice: e.g. ITF (2012):

“in the event that you become aware that anyone who is subject to this Code of Conduct has committed any breach then you must report your concerns immediately to the Compliance Officer for further investigation. Any concern which you report will be treated in confidence and investigated as soon as possible. Unless doing so would compromise the course of any investigation or enforcement action, the Compliance Officer will keep you informed of the status and ultimate outcome of that investigation.”

CONCLUSIONS (1)

- Already a lot of Olympic federations have decent guidelines in place
- However, a group of federations still has a considerable amount of work to be done if they want their ethical codes to be of any significance for the organization in particular and for ethics in sport in general

CONCLUSIONS (2)

- A code of ethics is a necessary but not a sufficient condition
e.g. FIFA : one of the best codes available among sport-governing bodies
<-> no federation is talked about so often on account of good governance scandals.
- > a solid, **comprehensive ethics program** must be in place: an ethical code, but also an ethics committee, ethical leadership, an ethics training program,...

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