VIDEO GAME VALUES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES IN

THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

by

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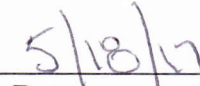
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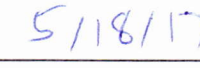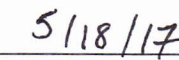
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ABSTRACT

This study sought to identify and describe the organizational values of the most profitable video game companies in the industry. The researcher developed this study from a public relations perspective to focus on organizational values and ethics. Based on the literature reviewed in this study, organizational values are meant to guide organizational and stakeholder actions. The literature also states that organizations have stated values in the past, but the only purpose of the values was to improve the company's image.

Some of the organizations state organizational values very simply by using only single words, while other organizations dedicated multiple webpages and reports to define, describe, and show how the company practically uses the values in business practices. One of the organizations sampled stated its Code of Conduct serves as the company's organizational values. There were two organizations that practiced Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), but they did not have any espoused organizational values.

None of the organizations sampled had the same organizational values on both the website and annual report. For the organizations that did state values on the websites, the manner in which the values were communicated was varied to the point where grounded theory was an ineffective method to use in this study. Overall, the organizations sampled in this study did not communicate organizational values in an effective way.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother. You have given me the drive, determination, and self-efficacy I needed to accomplish this. There have been so many times where I have hit a road block, and I either had to get around it or change directions. No matter how big or significant those road blocks were, they never stopped me, and that is something I learned from you. I love you, and thank you for always believing in me.

This thesis is also for my father, and I can truly say none of this would have happened if it were not for you. You are the reason I game, and even though my path has been wild and completely all over the place, it started with you! I bet 25 years ago you never thought playing video games with your kid would lead to this. I love you, Pops.

Finally, this thesis is for my slightly dysfunctional yet surprisingly loveable QUAD family. My Pops introduced me to gaming; you guys brought me home to it. You were my inspiration for this research, and I thank God that out of all the gamers online, I ended up with you guys. Wherever we go from here, this one is for QUAD. GG.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Video games are a source of entertainment, education, and even therapy for gamers. This generally creates a very positive image for video game companies, but some gamers have other perceptions. The benefits may outweigh the flaws, but there are issues within the field. These issues raise the question, "What do video game companies value?" This is the premise and inspiration behind this study. Some businesses in the video game industry only use public relations to sell the product or to ensure the organization has "good press." When organizations only use public relations for publicity and sales tactics, some of the most important functions of public relations get overlooked. There is a large amount of research that discusses ethical issues that could potentially harm both the video game industry and its stakeholders. The first step for an organization to address these ethical issues is to develop organizational values, and the second step is to communicate and live by them.

Factors like responsibility, good will, and consequences go into values and ethics. Values should not be a publicity tactic; they should hold enough substance to direct decision-making within the organization. "After numerous scandals and unethical activities, it has been noticed that a number of companies have developed ethics programs, but they were frequently just 'window dressing' for the public" (Vig & Dumicic, 2016, p 165). With the rise of the Internet and social media, organizational motives are becoming more and more transparent to stakeholders. They are aware of organizational values, and they look to see how those values apply to ethical organizational behaviors.

Values, and committing to those values, should influence the ethics of an organization. If values are what an organization believes, ethics include what an organization does based on its beliefs. The recent ethical issues in the video game industry will be discussed in this paper, but a

preview of the issues include blacklisting reporters, sending hostile messages to employees, and even serious cases of people being physically harmed. There have been cases of video game companies manipulating information for the sake of marketing campaigns and lying about leaked information. Since there is no code of ethics within the video game industry, it is left to the individual organization to develop values statements. "Top-level management, including board and senior managers, is responsible for ensuring that a company has effective ethics program, and they need to set the highest standards of ethical behavior" (Vig & Dumicic, 2016, p. 168-169). Based on the ethical issues present in the media, if these companies have values statements, they must be extremely vague or are not being enforced by organizational leadership.

One specific issue would be the conflict between video game publisher Bethesda, and gaming website and blog Kotaku. Bethesda blacklisted Kotaku in 2013 for leaking information about Fallout 4, a game that had not yet been announced at the time (Kain, 2015, para. 15). Blacklisting is when organizations do not give certain journalists and publishers access to information because they have published articles in the past that the organization did not like or approve of, regardless of the truth and facts behind the article. There are companies in the industry with media sites that require passwords in order to filter which journalists have access to information and which do not. When companies blacklist certain reporters, they are essentially blocking a perspective they do not like. If stakeholders find out there is something an organization does not want them to know, it could potentially hard the trustworthiness and transparency of the organization. Blacklisting also shows a lack of respect for both the media and the stakeholders who would find that information important.

Another worrisome issue was a similar case between Kotaku and Arkane, a subsidiary of ZeniMax Media Studio. Arkane was in the process of developing a rebooted version of Prey 2

that was not yet announced to the public. When the information leaked, Kotaku published the

information for the public, and Arkane tried to discredit Kotaku by denying the information in

the article was true. Kotaku's response was to publish leaked emails from Arkane's creative

director (Schreier, 2013, para. 10). The emails included inappropriate language, profanity, and

threats. The most troubling part of this specific case is the possibility that the emails might

reflect a hostile environment among employees.

One of the most serious and unsettling ethical issues revolves around video game-related

deaths. There is controversy around these cases because of the debate as to whether or not these

deaths are actually caused by video games. The argument comes down to whether media can be

held responsible for violence. There are other potential factors like mental health and adolescent

ignorance that could cause these incidents. Regardless of the argument, these cases are still

associated with video games and affect stakeholders' perceptions of video game companies.

Specific past cases include shootings, stabbings, and extreme physical violence. Websites such

as PPcorn write about violent cases with titles like "Game Or Die: 8 Deaths Caused by Video

Games" as almost advertising gimmicks (PPcorn, 2016). There are inappropriate and insensitive

images used to pull readers to the article, as well as a copious number of game advertisements on

the website. Articles like these do not come directly from the video game organizations, but

companies still need to think about what sort of message articles like this send to their

stakeholders. The researcher has searched through media databases and press releases, and there

are little to no responses from video game companies regarding these deaths. The reason could

possibly be that they do not want to claim responsibility for these cases.

There has been no huge crisis revolving around the gaming industry, but there is a need

to address issues like sexism (Powell, 2016), hostile treatment of employees (Schreier, 2013),

undercompensating employees (Gurwin, 2016), and manipulative and illegal marketing strategies (Koch, 2016). Making ethical decisions and creating ethical standards can help the industry solve issues concerning all stakeholders who are influenced by video gaming companies.

With the current ethical issues in the field, there is a need to evaluate how video game companies are communicating their values to their stakeholders. Not all of the ethical issues in the field are as extreme as the above cases. Some are as small as withholding information when stakeholders have a desire to know more about a certain game or update. It seems as though the industry is often willing to sacrifice relationships, as with Kotaku or consumers, for the sake of marketing efforts. These broken relationships can be seen in the media, but they can also be seen on company forums or websites like Reddit. There are thousands of gamers who are either unsatisfied or even angry with video game companies. These attitudes can affect the long-term performance and success of any video game company.

Whether these gamers are unsatisfied or not, they are still buying games. The industry is growing significantly with over $23.5 billion in profits during the year 2015 (Entertainment Software Association, 2016). This might look promising from a business standpoint, but from a communication perspective, this is a bit dangerous for the sustainability of a company. Video game companies are selling a product to people who do not hold positive perceptions of them. In 2012 and 2013, *The Consumerist* voted EA the worst video gaming company in the industry. The article stated, "Stop treating your customers like human piggy banks, and don't put out so many incomplete and/or broken games with the intent of getting your customers to pay extra [for fixes] for what they should have received in the first place" (Morran, 2013, para. 1).

Articles like this raise another ethical issue, that of gaming companies releasing poor-quality games for the sake of meeting deadlines, but EA is not the only gaming company to receive this reputation. Websites like Levelskip are made up of gamers and gamer enthusiasts. In July 2016, Levelskip published an article titled, "The 10 Worst Companies in the Video Game Industry." EA remained at the top of this list, as well, but companies like Ubisoft, Capcom, and Rockstar followed EA and were cited for similar offenses. These companies are not keeping stakeholders updated on gaming development; they are rushing the releases of poor-quality games, and treating employees poorly (Levelskip, 2016). Although these actions are all entirely legal, consumers view them as unethical and even abusive. Companies should strive to make their consumers feel like more than "human piggy banks" (Levelskip, 2016).

Because organizations' ethics are based on organizational values, the first step to analyzing this industry-wide issue is to examine how video game organizations communicate their values. In this thesis, the researcher will complete a content analysis of the most profitable video game companies' values statements as found on corporate websites. It is important to note where the values statements are located on company websites, the specificity of the values statements, and whether the organization even states its values. The purpose of corporate values statements is not to act as publicity or image management. Instead, the purpose of values statements should be to lead a company to ethical practices. Examining these companies' values will help to move research towards answering how and why these ethical issues are happening in the video game industry.

The video game industry is not the first to fall short when it comes to creating and distinguishing values that drive ethical decision-making. Values and ethics go hand-in-hand; without one, the other will struggle. "Ethics refers to a coherent system of values" (Groenfeldt,

2013, p. 5). Organizations should have value statements that help leaders and employees make ethical choices, and the public should be made aware of the ethical standards of the organization. "The goal of all of these codes is to make sure that the activity of practicing professionals as individuals, teams, management, or professional organizations, advance and protect human values rather than do damage to them" (Software Engineering Ethics, 2002, p. 1422).

One of the responsibilities of public relations practitioners is to create and maintain mutually beneficial relationships; in other words, their role is to look out for both the company and its stakeholders. The quality of an organization's values determines the quality of the organization's ability to act ethically. Understanding the relationship between values statements and ethical practices is the same as understanding the link between beliefs and behaviors. Organizational values can be broad, such as, "We value learning and growth," or "Our organization values teamwork and leadership." Ethics would be how the organization acts based on those values and beliefs. Brummette, Zoch, and Taylor (2011) wrote, "The values of an organization are intended to serve as the ethical and practical guidelines to which all employee behavior must adhere. They are also the often implicit foundation of organizational policies and procedures" (p. 4). Ethical practices are essentially the ability of an organization to act according to the values they communicate to their stakeholders.

The people buying and playing the games are one of the key stakeholder groups of video game companies. Some of these stakeholders associate with the term "gamer." Organizations like Entertainment Software Association conduct research on video games, as well as own and operate E3, an annual video game convention. With 63% of Americans having at least one gamer in their household, the gaming industry needs to take into consideration the values of those gamers when making decisions (Entertainment Software Association, 2016). The mean age of

gamers is 35 years old, officially making the average person who plays video games a millennial, and 56% of gamers fall between the ages of 18 and 35. Knowing these key stakeholders, organizations within the video game industry should be forming their values based on the values of their younger gamers.

According to the 2017 Deloitte Millennial Survey, 84% of millennials consider it their duty to make the world a better place. The way millennials want to accomplish this goal is through existing businesses. Millennials want to use business as a force for positive change socially, economically, and environmentally (Deloitte Millennial Survey, 2016, p. 7). This means that the next generations of gamers, and employees of gaming companies, are expecting businesses to not only use ethical business practices, but also contribute to global issues. Having organizational values is not enough to this demographic; an organization must have the proof to show that they are making business decisions based on the shared values of their stakeholders.

Failure to create and act on these values not only makes the organization appear unethical and irresponsible, it makes the organization look like it does not care about anything other than profits. Refusal to explore those values could reflect an ignorance of ethics, similar to the child's perspective of, "What I can't see can't hurt me" (Groenfeldt, 2013, p. 175). The video game industry is very profitable right now, but at some point, all markets reach total saturation. Focusing on these issues now will help the industry's reputation and profits in the future.

Most research on the video game industry in the fields of both communication and psychology focus on media violence, addiction, and health disorders. From a communication perspective, this researcher will focus on the video game companies rather than the video games. The gaming industry worldwide made $99.6 billion in 2016, and it is projected to grow to $118.6 billion by 2019 ("The Global Gaming Industry Reaches $99.6 Billion," 2016). The amount of

revenue the video game industry is currently making, and is projected to make in the near future, contributes to the relevance of this study. However, revenue is not the only factor that makes an organization successful, and organizations must form and maintain positive relationships with their stakeholders. "For real organizational success it is not enough just to maximize shareholder wealth and profit. Earning money is just one (very important) goal that a company should achieve" (Malbasic, Rey, & Potocan, 2015, p. 439). The world will be a better place when businesses choose to make decisions that are consistent with integrity, fairness, courage, honesty, and the values of their stakeholders (Donker, Poff, & Zahir, 2007, p. 536).

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational Values

What a company does, whether ethical or unethical, reflects a company's values. According to Connor and Becker (1975), values are defined as global beliefs about desirable end-states underlying the behavioral processes (p. 551). Values are what an organization publicly claims it believes, and ethics are what an organization does based on those beliefs. "Behavior generally is viewed as a manifestation of values and attitudes. It is contended here that behavior in organizations is no exception" (Connor & Becker, 1975, p. 551). Other researchers such as Kerwin, MacLean, and Bell-Laroche (2014) define values as "the glue that connects an organization's mission to its vision by creating shared understanding and coordinated action" (p. 28). This metaphor describes how every decision an organization makes, whether ethical or unethical, is driven by values.

Values are important standards that help an organization evaluate both itself and other organizations. "Once a value is internalized it becomes, consciously or unconsciously, a standard or criterion for guiding action, for developing and maintaining attitudes toward relevant objects and situations" (Rokeach, 1968, p. 16). Rokeach explained that values help organizations justify their own actions as well as compare their actions to other organizations (p. 16). If an organization has an explicit set of values, the actions of other organizations will either be congruent or incongruent when compared to those values. Organizations that have values, and do not merely espouse them, but conduct their activities based on them, create a standard for other organizations to consider the welfare of stakeholders, coordinate with stakeholders, and thereby manage the unavoidable social interdependencies (Schwartz, 1999).

When organizations state explicit values, but their actions contradict those values, employees in that organization will form a weak organizational culture (Howell, Kirk-Brown, & Cooper, 2006):

> In such cases, organizations may have simply developed their espoused values primarily to seek competitive advantage. The potential vacuum created by the weakly held or promoted espoused values provides an opportunity for a different set of enacted values to form the more pertinent part of the underlying assumptions existing in the organization and to direct behavior. (p. 742)

Stating values, but not acting on them, can potentially create a toxic organizational culture within a company.

Ethics are associated with the actions an organization takes. It is possible to see incongruence between organizational decisions and stated organizational values. Whether explicitly stated or not, organizations have a set of values that are recognized through actions. Helmig, Hinz, and Ingerfurth (2015) differentiated between stated values and implemented values: "Implemented values are values embedded within the organization, affecting the processes and structures of the daily work" (p. 2557). This idea can be understood through the commonly used phrase, "Actions speak louder than words." This idea is also why it is important for an organization to explicitly state its values so stakeholders do not assume the organization's values based on their ethical or unethical behavior. This is the difference between espoused and enacted values, and this is why organizations must align their decisions with their espoused values. Otherwise, stakeholders may observe an organization's actions and assume they do or do not value certain things.

Many organizational values serve the purpose of protecting an organization legally, however, values are meant to be more than what an organization is required to do. Values are what an organization should have to give the company a purpose larger than just making profits. Some organizations have implemented a "triple bottom line" (TBL) to ensure the organization's mission goes beyond revenue. "TBL is based on the idea that firms should measure performance from the perspective of economic, environmental, and social value added" (Harrison & Wicks, 2013, p. 110). This means that businesses have to think about not just economic values, but the ways in which it creates value in social, environmental, and moral terms (p. 110). Values should be implemented based on the TBL, but they also need to align with both internal and external stakeholders. Stating values is only the first step towards a successful, healthy organization. If the stated values only stay on paper and are not incorporated into the organization's operations, those values have absolutely no power.

Values hold both tangible and intangible benefits for all constituencies surrounding an organization. While an organization's actions have an obvious effect on stakeholders like consumers, their actions have an equally strong effect on both employees and organizational culture. Rekon, Riel, and Wierenga (2006) stated that organizational values have a strong influence on organizational members, and it is worth the effort to assess values as accurately as possible (p. 176). Values can help organizational executives make ethical decisions, and they also help create a positive and productive culture throughout the organization. Since employees often look to executives for leadership, if leaders demonstrate actions that contradict organizational values, employees will form their own attitudes and beliefs that may not be aligned with the values stated by the organization (Howell, Kirk-Brown, & Cooper, 2006). To benefit from organizational values, an organization has to incorporate those values into how it

conducts its business, the quality of its work, how it treats its stakeholders, and other integral parts of its operation.

Ethical Public Relations Practices

The field of public relations has a long-standing reputation among the general public of using unethical practices that have negatively affected many people (Ki, Choi, & Lee, 2012). Although not all public relations practitioners lack personal values, there is no industry-wide standard to which practitioners are held. Ki and Kim (2009) wrote, "A series of unethical public relations practices has gradually degraded the credibility, value, and image of the field" (p. 223).

Because there is no minimum standard, organizations or the individual public relations practitioners have the choice to decide whether or not they make ethical decisions (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001). In the same article by Fitzpatrick and Gauthier, the field of public relations is described as including both self-interested, persuasive tactics as well as genuinely benevolent initiatives (p. 194). While persuasion is a component of public relations, that does not mean organizations should manipulate and exploit persuasive rhetoric. Acting ethically helps organizations foster mutually beneficial relationships with their stakeholders.

Professional organizations within the field, such as the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), have codes of ethics that are constantly growing. However, upholding these codes is not a requirement for any individual to practice public relations. Not all organizations and public relations practitioners disregard their values, but some of the negative perception of public relations is based on truth. "Front groups, conflicts of interest, nondisclosure, unfair competition, representation of dubious clients, deceptive practices, gifts to the media, failure to safeguard confidential information: These are some of the ethical issues for which public relations professionals often are criticized" (Fitzpatrick, 2002, p. 89). Even ethical public

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relations practitioners often do not have the power to decide what activities are pursued, even if they believe the activities to be unethical. These practitioners also may have no authority or even input in deciding the basic values of an organization for which he or she works (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001).

While negative practices may be present in some organizations, in others, public relations practitioners are considered the "social conscious" of an organization (Fitzpatrick, 1996). It is partially the responsibility of public relations practitioners to ensure that their organization is acting as a socially responsible member of society. When given leadership positions, public relations practitioners are well-suited to have a role in defining organizational values that will benefit both the organization and the public. "As the intermediaries between organizations and their publics, they are uniquely positioned to help client companies address increasing public concerns regarding issues of social responsibility" (Fitzpatrick, 1996, p. 249). Both internal and external stakeholders need to be aware of organizational values and ethics. A study by Ki and Kim (2009) examined how many public relations agencies clearly define their value and ethics statements. Only about 40% of public relations agencies in their study even had ethical statements (p. 232). The study included 1,562 public relations agencies, the oldest being formed in 1923 and the newest agencies in 2006 (Ki and Kim, 2009). The article stated, "Comparatively newer public relations agencies that were formed in the 1980s and 1990s demonstrated greater ethical values than their older counterparts" (Ki & Kim, 2009, p. 233).

As stated by Brummette and Zoch (2016), "to be successful, more and more modern organizations are being forced to operate according to the expectations placed on them by the general public" (p. 309). As this research shows, ethics are growing in importance to organizational stakeholders. Organizations must take into consideration the values of their

stakeholders when making decisions. Organizations need to develop values congruent with the values of their stakeholders. The same study by Brummette and Zoch iterates the importance of organizations formulating ethics and value statements with their stakeholders' values at the forefront of their decision-making process. "This phenomenon has forced organizational managers and communication professionals to undertake the arduous task of determining how their organizations can operate in congruence with the value-driven social order that regulates behaviors and actions within their external environments" (Brummette & Zoch, 2016, p. 309).

Ethics extends beyond monetary value, but it can affect variables like profits. Often, that intrinsic value can turn into a tangible variable like profits and sustainability. Ethics can affect every aspect of an organization and its stakeholders: profits, internal relations, media relations, etc. In Water Ethics (2013), David Groenfeldt wrote, "Ethics can be applied to just about anything, but it needs to be applied to something" (p. 4). It is necessary to have guidelines that frame how to make ethical decisions as an organization because individuals have varying values and beliefs. Individuals within an organization have values shaped by their personal experiences, background, and morals (Chonko, Wotruba, & Loe, 2003). As Posner, Kouzes, and Schmidt (1985) state, "our values comprise the things that are most important to us. They are the deep-seated, pervasive standards that influence almost every aspect of our lives: our moral judgments, our responses to others, and our commitments to personal and organizational goals" (p. 294). Values should be a part of an organization's "bottom line," right beside profit goals.

Organizational Principles and Values

For the purpose of this research, principles are synonymous with values. In one study on online engineering ethics, principles are directly linked to ethics: "Professional organizations have developed and articulated common ethical principles—or codes of ethics" (Austin,

Gorsuch, Lawson, & Newberry, 2011, p. 976). This link between principles and ethics, or a "code of ethics," can be paralleled with "values statements" or "organizational values." Whether the semantics of the statements use words like values, ethics, or principles, the purpose remains the same. "Institutions and their leaders rely on these statements as foundational pillars by which to launch new programs, services, carry out applied research, sustain and enhance their operations, and to build a future capacity for change" (Calder, 2014, para. 1). Values, principles, and ethics drive business practices, but they also include relevant messages to stakeholders such as consumers, shareholders, and the community. Organizational values should be inclusive and based on all relevant stakeholders.

Knowing ethics are difficult to measure, the researcher will start by looking at organizational values. It is important to know that organizational values are the driving force of ethics, whether they are directly espoused by the organization or not. The practical use of this study will allow organizations to evaluate their organizational values and use them to evaluate whether or not their business practices and decisions are aligned with their values. This exploratory study will identify what organizations are stating about their values.

Research Questions

The following exploratory research questions were developed based on the previous review of literature:

RQ1: Are the most profitable video game publishers, as identified by Newzoo, communicating organizational values?

RQ2: If they are communicating values, what are the values that are being communicated?

RQ3: How are organizations defining their organizational values?

RQ4: What are the implied uses of the organizational values being communicated?

RQ5: Where do the most profitable video game publishers communicate their

values on corporate websites and annual reports?

CHAPTER 3 - METHODS

This study consists of a qualitative content analysis of the websites and annual reports of the most profitable video game publishers in 2016. The list comes from Newzoo (https://newzoo.com/insights/rankings/top-25-companies-game-revenues/), a leading provider of market intelligence covering global games, e-sports, and mobile markets. The Newzoo ranking is based on an analysis of financial reports from the third quarter of 2016. The most profitable video game publishers at that time were Tencent, Sony, Activision/Blizzard, Microsoft, Apple, and EA. The content analysis will include a thorough search for organizational values listed by these corporations. Rather than searching for specific words, the researcher will use grounded theory and open-ended coding to categorize the values listed. Grounded theory is a qualitative research method through which a researcher generates an explanation of a process, action, or circumstance (Creswell, 2007). This theoretical framework offers a set of flexible, analytic guidelines that allow researchers to focus on their data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2004).

Grounded theory, or the discovery of theory from data, provides us with relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations, and applications of concepts such as organizational values, the purpose for the content analysis in this thesis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As with other methods, both qualitative and quantitative, those that are rooted in grounded theory consist of systematic approaches for collecting data. "Recording data systematically prompts us to pursue leads that we might otherwise ignore or not realize. Through making systematic recordings, we also gain comparative materials to pinpoint contextual conditions and to explore links between levels of analysis" (Charmaz, 2004, p. 511).

Instead of forcing data into pre-determined categories, grounded theory focuses on the relationships between and among categories. "The analysis process in grounded theory involves

concept labeling, categorizing, identifying core categories [and] finding relations among categories" (Cho and Lee, 2014, p. 7). Rather than extracting data and placing it into categories, grounded theory looks for the relationships between categories to explain why something is happening. The reason grounded theory is appropriate for this study is because the media have uncovered a number of ethical issues in the gaming industry, but there is no research on organizational values in the video game industry. Since it in not possible to do a content analysis of media reports without understanding organizational values, this study seeks to uncover and understand what the most profitable video game companies value. The best way to discover and understand these values is through a grounded theory approach because there are no studies that can be referenced to conduct a content analysis of organizational values in the video game industry. The ethical issues are industry-specific and require exploratory research methods to analyze and understand the data.

A major strength of grounded theory is that it provides tools for analyzing how things are done, and these tools hold potential for studying social justice issues (Charmaz, 2004). The issue of ethical lapses, or lack of ethics, within the video game industry prompted the current research on espoused organizational values. Sometimes espoused organizational values differ from enacted organizational values, and the goal is to synchronize the two. "Espoused values are values that are expressed on behalf of the organization or attributed to an organization by its senior managers in public statements such as in the firms' annual reports" (Khandelwal & Mohendra, 2010, p. 20). In other words, espoused values are those directly communicated by an organization to its stakeholders. Espoused values can differ from enacted values if an organization's actions do not reflect its stated values. This is why it is important for organizations to do more than just publish corporate social responsibility reports or news stories

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of them volunteering and donating to charities. While that is a good thing, it is not enough. Stakeholders will assume an organization's values, or lack of values, through both positive and negative news coverage. By identifying how organizations first define their values and then actually communicate these values, the researcher hopes to suggest a practical way to enact the espoused values to address the ethical issues identified in the literature. In this way, perhaps organizations can be proactive in preventing these ethical lapses from happening.

In content analysis, researchers identify themes and categorize the observed data based on what they observe. Throughout the data collection process it is important for researchers to be alert to emergent themes that could change or add to their coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). When a researcher begins the data collecting process, he or she begins to open code the observed data. In this study specifically, open-ended coding is the process of labeling the organizational values into categories (Cho & Lee, 2014). The categories arise from the observed values, and when a new theme arises during data collection, a new category is created. "Grounded theory methods consist of simultaneous data collection and analysis, with each informing and focusing the other throughout the research process" (Charmaz, 2004, p. 508). In this way, the research focuses on the categories that emerge from the data rather than forcing the data into pre-determined categories. "During open-ended coding the data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 62).

Open-ended coding also helps the researcher remain unbiased during data collection and analysis. Although personal experiences will always shape how researchers interpret data, open-ended coding allows for the fullest possible diversity of categories and properties. "Open-ended coding involves generating as many categories as possible in the light of these various

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possibilities, without prejudging which will prove most valuable at this state in the analysis"
(Dey, 2004, p. 85). It is open-ended so new categories or properties can always be generated and
related to one another (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Axial coding will come after the researcher has named and categorized phenomena
through close examination of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During axial coding, the researcher
makes connections between the categories by using systematic coding involving conditions,
contexts, action/interactional strategies, and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The open-
ended coded data establishes broad categories, and axial coding lists the properties of the
relationships between and among those broad categories (Gallicano, 2013). During axial coding,
researchers identify connections between the open-coded data. Open-ended coding will broadly
label what the organizational values are, and axial coding will establish what those
organizational values really mean. The reason the researcher is using grounded theory for this
content analysis is because emergent themes can help us understand similarities or differences
between what an organization claims are its values and what is actually going on in the gaming
industry.

A major strength of grounded theory is that it provides tools for analyzing processes, and
these tools hold potential for studying social justice issues (Charmaz, 2004). The issue of ethical
lapses, or an overall lack of ethics, within the video game industry prompted the current research
on organizational values. By identifying how organizations first define their values and then
actually communicate these values to their stakeholders, the researcher hopes to discover a
practical way to use the espoused values to address the ethical problems identified in the
literature.

For this study, when the researcher analyzed the website, she looked for the following terms: values, principles, and ethics. For the purpose of this research, all of those terms can be associated with organizational values. The researcher looked through the websites, beginning at the home page for each organization, and navigated through the pages to find the best possible route of accessing the information. Because where the information is located on the website is relevant, the researcher recorded how many clicks it took to get to the values, where on the webpage the values were located, and the webpage title and URL of the values. The researcher noted what words are used to state the values, how the values are defined, the practical uses of the values, and finally, for whom the organizational values are intended. Organizational values may be for internal business practices, but they can also be inclusive of other stakeholders such as consumers, shareholders, and competitors.

The researcher analyzed the annual report of each organization, looking for espoused organizational values, principles, or ethical statements. Part of this analysis was to discover if the organizational values in the annual report are congruent with the espoused values on the organizational websites. The researcher analyzed the websites and annual reports, where published, of the entire list of the six most profitable video game companies. A second coder analyzed two of the six companies as a check that the researcher was finding all relevant information, as well as verified the number of clicks to find the information. The secondary coder analyzed Apple and Sony's annual reports and websites using the research questions from this study, and training provided by the researcher. The training included using a video game company that was not on the list (SquareEnix). The researcher displayed to the second coder the process for finding information based on the research questions, terminology, and concepts mentioned in the literature review.

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CHAPTER 4 - FINDINGS

The following data were collected from the organizations' web pages and most recent annual reports. The findings were organized by research question and organization, and the discussion immediately follows the findings. In addition to this researcher's textual analysis of all five organizations' web pages and annual reports, the second coder recorded findings and generated discussion points for two of the five video game organizations – Apple and Sony.

RQ1 and RQ2 Overview: Are the most profitable video game publishers, as identified by Newzoo, communicating organizational values? If they are communicating values, what are the values that are being communicated?

Tencent Website/Annual Report

The Tencent website did communicate organizational values, but the Tencent annual report did not. The webpage where Tencent listed organizational values is titled "Culture," and can be found at https://www.tencent.com/en-us/culture.html. The only mention of the word "value" on the 2015 annual report referred strictly to monetary value. There is also a mention of values on the home screen of the Tencent website in a paragraph titled "Our vision, Our values." In that paragraph, the website states,

> Tencent's mission is to become the most respected Internet enterprise. Tencent maintains a steadfast commitment to corporate citizenship, our public charity programs and the promotion of respectful Internet communities on our user platforms. With each new product and invention, Tencent strives to embrace philanthropy, expand the Internet, and be a model for all corporations who strive to improve our world through technology. (Tencent, 2017)

On the web page titled "Culture," Tencent included a vision statement, a mission

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statement, a management and business philosophy, and organizational values. Tencent's values are listed exactly as "*Integrity+Proactive+Collaboration+Innovative*" (Culture, 2017). There is no definition or elaboration on what these values mean to the organization; there are simply the words connected by plus signs.

Sony Website/Annual Report

Sony had a lot of policies that could be interpreted as organizational values, but there were no espoused organizational values listed on the Sony website (http://www.sony.com/). While searching for an annual report, it was discovered that Sony has not published an annual report since 2013. The financial audits are made public, but there is no annual report in which Sony could communicate its organizational values. Sony's website did include a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) report, but that does not serve in the place of organizational values.

On the Sony website, there is a long trail of web pages that redirect to a different website. It is necessary to find this second website before finding anything that could be considered an organizational value. Sony's "Code of Conduct" serves as a document of standards for internal directors, officers, and employees. Though some of these standards could be interpreted as values, there are no espoused values listed anywhere in the code or on its website. There are no values listed in an annual report because they have not published one since 2013. The 2013 annual report did not state organizational values, and included the same CSR report found on the website.

Activision Blizzard Website/Annual Report

The Activision Blizzard website (http://www.activisionblizzard.com/) did communicate organizational values, but the 2015 annual report only mentioned "value" in terms of monetary value and worth. Activision Blizzard published its values on its website within its Code of

Conduct. Unlike Sony, Activision Blizzard describes its Code of Conduct specifically as "...here

to help us live by our values and do business the right way for all our stakeholders – gamers,

fans, customers, business partners, fellow employees, shareholders and everyone else who is a

part of what we do" (Activision Blizzard, 2016). Activision Blizzard specifically states that its

code includes its values that enable it to be an ethical organization. The listed values are

responsibility, *creativity*, and *integrity*. While the website does include espoused organizational

values, the annual report did not list any.

Microsoft Website/Annual Report

Microsoft was one of only two organizations that communicated its organizational values

on the home page of its website (https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/). In the 2016 annual report,

there is a lot that could be considered organizational values found within the "Letter from the

CEO," however, they are not clearly designated as values nor do they match the values listed on

the website.

Microsoft openly listed its values on its landing page and linked them to individual pages

that described the organizational values more in-depth. The values listed were *diversity and*

inclusion, accessibility, Microsoft in education, Microsoft philanthropies, corporate social

responsibility, and *privacy*.

In Microsoft's annual report, there were principles listed in the letter from the CEO. The

espoused values in the annual report included *collaboration*, *mobility, intelligence,* and *trust.* The

biggest difference between these two sets of values is the brevity of the annual report values

versus the in-depth definitions and explanations of the organizational values found on the

Microsoft website.

Apple Website/Annual Report

The Apple website, similar to Microsoft's, listed its organizational values on the home page of the website (http://www.apple.com/). The Apple 2016 annual report, also similar to Microsoft, had no espoused values. The only mention of value in the annual report was to mention monetary value.

On the home page of the Apple website, the organizational values were linked to pages that described them in more detail. The espoused values on the home page were *accessibility, education, environment, inclusion and diversity, privacy,* and *supplier responsibility*. The annual report did not mention values in terms of principles or ethics, but only used value to express monetary worth. The first characteristic that stood out was the context of the company's last value, *supplier responsibility*. Out of all of the organizations sampled in this study, Apple was the only organization that stated this as an organizational value.

EA Website/Annual Report

EA was the only organization that did not list espoused organizational values on either the website (https://www.ea.com/) or in the annual report. There was a "Code of Conduct," but it did not serve as organizational values, principles, or ethics statements. EA was also the only organization that did not have anything listed that could even be interpreted as an organizational value. There were no values of any kind listed on the website or annual report. EA did have a Code of Conduct that served as a list of rules and regulations for its employees, but these primarily involved legal policies. In addition, this Code of Conduct was not actually listed on the main website, but was instead on a separate website specifically for shareholders.

RQ3 will be broken down by organization: How are organizations defining their organizational values?

Tencent Website/Annual Report

Although Tencent did have what it stated were organizational values, they were communicated in a list format with no definitions or explanations as to how the values are used in a practical way. On a webpage titled "Culture," Tencent listed the following organizational values: "*Integrity+Proactive+Collaboration+Innovation*" (Culture, 2017). There was nothing additional relating to the values on the page or elsewhere on the website.

Sony Website/Annual Report

Sony's website redirects users to another website that included its "Code of Conduct." Inside this Code, there are words or statements that could be considered values, but there are no values explicitly stated. The section on the "Code of Conduct" that mentions ethics states,

> Sony Group's policy is to comply with all applicable laws and regulations of the countries and regions in which it operates and to conduct its business activities in an honest and ethical manner. All Personnel are expected and directed to comply with all applicable laws and regulations as well as all internal company rules and policies relating to their business activities. It also is all Personnel's responsibility to know and understand legal, regulatory and internal requirements as they apply to their jobs. (2016)

The definitions and regulations in the Code of Conduct pertain mostly to laws and compliance with corporate policies. Sony lists its CSR efforts as corporate governance, environment, community engagement, human resources, and ethics and compliance. The CSR webpage states, "This website summarizes the CSR activities of the Sony Group worldwide during fiscal 2015 (which began on April 1, 2015 and ended on March 31, 2016). It also includes reporting on some material activities, such as major organizational changes, up to the end of July, 2016" (Sony CSR Report, 2016).

Without any other mention of organizational values on either the CSR Report or the Code of Conduct, the researcher and the second coder concluded that Sony had no espoused organizational values.

Activision Blizzard Website/Annual Report

Activision Blizzard listed its organizational values as *responsibility, creativity*, and *integrity*. The organization included a brief definition under each espoused value, and further along on the page they described how employees could practically use these values in their work or learn more about the values.

The first listed value is *responsibility*, and Activision Blizzard described this as, "See it, do it, own it. We believe in taking the lead, lending a hand, owning the problem and the solution". The second value is *creativity*, and it is defined as, "Find the best way. Constantly ask 'is there a better way?' But understand that creativity doesn't mean change for the sake of change". The final value is *integrity*, and they describe this as, "Do the right thing. Don't sacrifice the 'right thing' for the 'fast thing' or the 'easy thing'" (Our Code: It Matters, 2016).

Below these three values, there are a few paragraphs that include information specifically for the company's internal employees. Activision Blizzard explained to its employees how they all adhere to the same Code of Conduct whether they are an intern or a head of a department. Activision Blizzard states, "We all work together, and we're all expected to follow our Code—doing the right thing and even admitting when we're wrong" (Our Code: It Matters, 2016). The next paragraph describes how all employees are expected to take responsibilities for their own decisions. Activision Blizzard clearly states that employees should know the code and should incorporate that into their day-to-day work lives.

The page wraps up by giving resources to employees to learn whom they can talk to

about the Code, the laws and regulations that apply to the business, and how to use the Code of

Conduct. There is also a link that redirects employees to an in-depth training page on the Code of

Conduct. This Code of Conduct training is broken down into six chapters: respecting each other,

protecting our company, maintaining our shareholders' trust, protecting our fans and customers,

working with our business partners and communities, and how we act. The annual report did not

include any organizational values, so there were no definitions or implied uses.

Microsoft Website/Annual Report

Microsoft dedicated separate webpages, which could all be located directly from the

homepage, to defining and showing the practical uses of each of its organizational values.

Diversity and inclusion. The first values page listed was diversity and inclusion, and a

link to workplace demographics is at the top of the webpage. Below the demographics link,

Microsoft further explains the value by stating, "In over 20 years of committed diversity and

inclusion efforts, we've learned that diversity is not a finite goal; it is a journey that requires

constant self-assessment and recommitment" (Global Diversity and Inclusion, 2017). Microsoft

explains the internal communities that support a diverse range of employees, and the reasoning

behind these communities as "Community Accelerates our Progress."

> Our employees are a bridge to our customers. So it's important that they feel encouraged
>
> to contribute their unique insight and skills to help solve some of the most complex
>
> technology challenges. We support seven major employee groups and over 40 employee
>
> networks that help us build a supportive community across Microsoft. (Global Diversity
>
> and Inclusion, 2017)

Underneath the description are a series of links, including "explore how we're helping

our employees thrive" and "employee resource groups," which redirects the reader to pages that

support Asians, Blacks, people with disabilities, LGBTQ, Hispanics/Latinos, parents, and women's groups. The second reason behind these communities is "And our progress accelerates our communities."

> Our approach to building the communities around us is holistic in who we reach, how we reach them, and how far we reach. We increasingly do business with minority- and women-owned companies. We globally invest in the development of the next tech industry leaders. And we pursue diverse candidates who are ready to help us do our best work yet. (Global Diversity and Inclusion, 2017)

Below this paragraph is a link to the company's programs and partnerships. Microsoft not only defines what *diversity and inclusion* means to the company; they offer evidence to prove they use these organizational values in their business.

Accessibility. *Accessibility* is the second organizational value, and Microsoft describes this value by stating, "There are no limits to what people can achieve when technology reflects the diversity of everyone who uses it" (Accessibility, 2017). Under the first statement is a paragraph about the company's commitment to empowering people and organizations worldwide to achieve more for those with disabilities. Microsoft goes more in-depth by stating,

> Microsoft's mission is to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more. With over 1 billion people with disabilities in the world, we're passionate about ensuring that our products and services are designed for people of all abilities.(Accessibility, 2017).

Further down the webpage, there are three separate links to pages titled "Inclusive Hiring at Microsoft," "Join our Community Forum," and "Give us Feedback." The next links on the page redirect the user to guides to find information and tips for using accessibility features in

Windows and Office. The bottom of the page includes conformance reports, public policy considerations, and developer resources. Microsoft also offers links to show other developers how to use an inclusive design in their technology.

      Support of Education. *Microsoft in Education* is the third value, and it is briefly explained as "empowering every student to achieve more. Our mission is to support educators in guiding and nurturing student passions" (Microsoft in Education, 2017). Other than the initial statement, the page includes advertisements for products that are available for schools to purchase. There are links to sign up for management tools and subscribe to a monthly newsletter. This is the briefest of the organizational values pages because, although it is an espoused value, the actual webpage only included products that Microsoft wants to sell.

      Being Philanthropic. *Microsoft Philanthropies* is the fourth value, and they express how technology is a force for inclusion.

> Technology is a powerful force for improving people's lives. But right now, half the world does not have access to the benefits and opportunities that technology offers. That's why we're committed to doing more globally to bring the benefits of technology to the people and organizations who need them most. Together with our grantees, partners and employees around the world, we're working to fulfill Microsoft's mission to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more. (Microsoft in Education, 2017)

      The *philanthropy* page is divided into four sections: technology, grants, employees, and voice. Microsoft wants to help nonprofits achieve their missions through the power of technology. Microsoft also offers grants to make digital skills and computer science education accessible to all young people. For its employees, Microsoft states it wants to empower them to

address issues facing our communities and our world. Finally, the site states the company wants

to use its communal voice to spotlight issues and inspire actions. Each of these sections includes

links that redirect viewers to pages that list specific initiatives that are helping Microsoft achieve

its philanthropy goals.

Corporate Social Responsibility. *CSR* is the fifth value listed on the website, and

Microsoft explains this value as "working to apply the power of technology to ensure corporate

responsibility, safeguard human rights, and protect our planet" (Corporate Social Responsibility,

2017).

> At Microsoft, our policies and business practices reflect a commitment to making our
>
> planet a better place. This commitment is central to why many of our employees come to
>
> work every day, and it impacts the type of products and services we develop. We take
>
> seriously our responsibilities to help the world achieve more. And we are committed to
>
> meeting our responsibility to address economic, social, and environmental issues in our
>
> world today. This site is a living report on our most current policies and practices for
>
> advancements in these critical areas. (Corporate Social Responsibility, 2017)

This webpage included the key CSR reporting areas of principled business practices,

respect for people, and respect for the planet. Below the reporting areas, there are three separate

links that lead to webpages titled "Learn more about our business practices," "Learn about our

approach to empowering people," and "Learn about our environmental sustainability efforts."

Finally, the page includes a letter from the CEO that includes Microsoft's mission to empower

others, spread economic opportunity, and dedicate itself to the challenges humankind faces, the

role technology can play, and the unique contributions Microsoft can make.

Privacy. The final value listed on the Microsoft website is *privacy*: "Your data, powering

your experiences, controlled by you" (Privacy at Microsoft, 2017). The site defines how the

company uses privacy as an organizational value by focusing on six key privacy principles. The

first is **control**, which is described as putting the consumer in control of his or her privacy with

easy-to-use tools and clear choices. The second is **transparency**, or the company being clear and

open about data collection and use so the user can make informed decisions. The third is

security, or the promise to protect data the user entrusts to the company through strong security

and encryptions. The fourth is **strong legal protections**. Microsoft describes this as respecting

the user's local privacy laws and fighting for legal protection of the user's privacy as a

fundamental human right. The fifth principle is **no content-based targeting**, or the dedication to

not using emails, chat files, or other personal content to target ads to the user. The final principle

is **benefits to you**, and the site explains how Microsoft's data collection is used to benefit the

user and to create a better experience.

Under these six principles, there are links to the Microsoft Trust Center and the Microsoft

Cloud to learn how the company protects that specific data. Microsoft also clearly defines what

kinds of data Microsoft collects. Microsoft provides numerous links that show users how they

can change their privacy settings and customize their data.

The interesting thing about Microsoft's annual report is that the values listed on the

website do not match the principles listed in the opening letter from the CEO. The values listed

in the annual report are *collaboration, mobility, intelligence,* and *trust*. The descriptions of these

values are found in the following paragraphs.

People still do important work as individuals, but *collaboration* is the new norm, so we

build our tools to empower teams. We aspire to help everyone be productive no matter

where they are, regardless of the device they use. Your data, apps, and settings – all of

your content – roam with you across your computing experiences. *Intelligence* is an

amazing force multiplier. To be successful amid the explosion of data, people need

analytics, services, and agents that use intelligence to help them manage their scarcest

resource – time. Finally, *trust* is the foundation upon which everything we do is built.

That's why we are investing deeply in security and compliance that set the standard for

enterprise-grade productivity. (Annual Report, 2017, para. 8)

While none of these values contradict the values listed on the website, they are defined

differently from the website values. The website has significantly more information on

organizational values while the annual report is brief in mentioning values. The researcher

believes it is possible the letter from the CEO mentions values because they make an

organization appear more ethical (Vig and Dumicic, 2016, p 165).

Apple Website/Annual Report

The Apple website is formatted similarly to the Microsoft website. The values are clearly

stated on the home page, and each organizational value links to a separate page that describes

that value in more detail.

Accessible Technology. The first espoused organizational value is *accessibility*, which

Apple defines as,

We believe that technology should be *accessible* to everyone. The most powerful

technology in the world is technology that everyone, including people with disabilities,

can use. To work, create, communicate, stay in shape, and be entertained. So we don't

design products for some people or even most people. We design them for every single

person. (Accessibility, 2017)

Underneath the description of the value, there are various product offers for workout apps, the

Apple watch, Mac, iPhone, iPad, Apple TV, and accessories.

Education. The second value on the website is education. Apple defines this value by talking about the ConnectED initiative that Obama started under his administration.

> Giving products, support, and opportunities to schools that need them most. Apple has joined President Obama's ConnectED initiative and pledged $100 million of teaching and learning solutions to 114 underserved schools across the country. We're donating an iPad to every student, a Mac and iPad to every teacher, and an Apple TV to every classroom. And we're implementing a process that provides planning, professional learning, and ongoing guidance so every school can experience the transformational power of technology. (Education, 2017)

After Apple describes the initiative, it lists specific steps that define different parts of what participating in ConnectEd means to the company. The first is **establishing goals**, and Apple describes what they do for this step by stating, "We work with school leadership to form a core group of individuals responsible for defining clear and measurable goals" (Education, 2017). The second step is **building infrastructure**. Apple states under this step that they help schools develop their existing network infrastructure and upgrade their networks. The third is **preparing teachers**, and Apple states it does this by helping every teacher become more comfortable with new technology. The fourth is **delivering devices to students**, or more specifically, delivering an iPad to every student in a school that is a part of the ConnectEd initiative. Last, Apple **provides ongoing support** to build relationships with the schools to help them reach their goals.

Protecting the environment. Apple's third value is the *environment*, which is divided into three parts: climate change, resources, and safe materials.

We're creating new solar energy projects to reduce our carbon footprint. We're switching to greener materials to create safer products and manufacturing processes. We're protecting working forests and making sure they are managed sustainably. We're even creating a more mindful way to recycle devices using robots. (Environment, 2017)

Under climate change, Apple states that 93% of its energy came from renewable sources in 2015 and that the company is constantly looking for ways to reach 100%. The resources section states that 99% of the paper in Apple's packaging is recycled or sustainable because the company wants to protect and create more sustainable forests than it uses. Finally, under safer materials Apple indicates that mercury does not belong on our wrists, on our desks, or in our pockets. Apple states it is toxins from its devices. "In 2015, we started a Full Material Disclosure program that shows us the chemical composition of every material in every component of our products" (Environment, 2017).

Inclusion and Diversity. Apple's fourth value is *inclusion and diversity*. Apple states on the top of this page that "the most innovative company must also be the most diverse" (Inclusion and Diversity, 2017). This page profiles eight specific individuals and shares their diverse backgrounds and stories. The page also lists the demographics of current employees and new hires, and includes hiring trends. Apple mentions pay equality at Apple, and clearly states, "Equal work deserves equal pay" (Inclusion and Diversity, 2017). This past year, Apple claims it has looked at all the company's US employees and closed the gaps it found, and now the company is analyzing data for its employees worldwide. The final mention on the page is the goal to create a culture of inclusion. The webpage states, "We foster a diverse culture that's inclusive of disability, religious belief, sexual orientation, and service to country" (Inclusion and Diversity, 2017).

Privacy. Apple's fifth value is *privacy,* and this is defined as, "At Apple, your trust means everything to us. That's why we respect your *privacy* and protect it with strong encryption, plus strict policies that govern how all data is handled" (Privacy, 2017). The first part of this webpage is a message from the CEO that discusses Apple's business model. This letter openly states that a small part of the business model includes advertisers, but Apple's business model mostly revolves around the consumer's privacy. After the letter, Apple includes three separate links that lead to webpages titled, "Our Approach to Privacy," "Manage Your Privacy," and "Government Information Requests."

Holding supplier responsible. The final espoused value is *supplier responsibility*, which they divide into four sections: "Accountability, labor and human rights, empowering workers, and environment, health and safety" (Supplier Responsibility, 2017). The section on accountability discusses how Apple not only holds itself to high standards, but its suppliers must follow a Code of Conduct as well. Apple includes a link that takes the reader to a page that details the support the company offers its suppliers. Labor and human rights is where Apple states it ensures that all of the people who work for its suppliers are treated fairly, and the company includes a link with specific information on how its suppliers treat employees. Apple describes empowering workers as giving them access to quality education and helping workers to become more informed in their careers. Apple describes these efforts as "including the opportunity to earn a bachelor's or associate's degree, attend vocational training, and take classes in language, arts, finance, and basic life skills" (Supplier Responsibility, 2017). Finally, the section on the environment, health, and safety indicates Apple's respect for the environments in which we work and live. The organization does this by collaborating with suppliers to enforce strict environmental policies and safety measures. Apple concludes the page with a link to the

2017 Progress Report that provides an overview of everything Apple does to specifically contribute to manufacture and product integrity. There are a series of additional reports below with a link to each title: "2015 Conflict Minerals Report," "Commitment to Responsible Sourcing," "Efforts to Combat Human Trafficking and Slavery," "Regulated Substances Specifications," "Smelter and Refiner List," "Supplier Code of Conduct," "Supplier List," and "Supplier Responsibility Standards."

Apple's annual report includes one sentence about the company's Code of Conduct that includes a link to outside of the annual report. The webpage the annual report redirects to includes two of Apple's values—corporate social responsibility and the environment. The values on this page link to the same webpages that were found on the website. The second coder located Apple's business strategy on the annual report, but there were no espoused values located in this section.

EA Website/Annual Report

There are no espoused values on EA's website or annual report that can be identified or defined.

RQ4: What are the implied uses of the organizational values being communicated?

Tencent Website/Annual Report

The Tencent Website provided no practical uses, only a list of values. The espoused organizational values were not in the form of sentences, so understanding how these values are used in practice is a guess at best. The words "*integrity, proactive, collaboration and innovation*" all have very positive definitions, but if the organization does not define what they mean to it in practice, it is not possible for employees to incorporate them into actually making ethical decisions. Stakeholders, both internal and external, have no specific guidelines to describe how to use these values in their day-to-day lives. Tencent also does not indicate to which stakeholders

its organizational values apply. Other companies, such as Microsoft, explain that they expect

certain values from their internal publics as well as their external publics. Tencent's annual

report only included financial information; there was no mention of the word "value" in terms of

organizational principles or ethical standards.

Sony Website/Annual Report

Sony did have a CSR report, although nothing on its website about its values. As stated in

the methods section, CSR may be something that an organization values, but CSR efforts are not

the same as organizational values. For example, Microsoft (2017) lists corporate social

responsibility as one of its organizational values, and then explains what that value means to

Microsoft and how Microsoft achieves that value.

Activision Blizzard Website/Annual Report

The first thing written on the webpage is, "Our Code: It Matters." This Code of Conduct

applies to all Activision Blizzard employees worldwide, and is used to "do business the right

way" (Our Code: It Matters, 2016). The organization's values are only inclusive of its

employees and how the company expects its employees to make good decisions in their work. It

acknowledges that there are many diverse groups among its employees who have their own

individual values. However, all of their employees know and live by three overarching values:

responsibility, creativity, and *integrity*.

Under the *responsibility* section, there is a short definition and a long definition. The

short definition is good because it offers a brief description of the values while being memorable.

The longer definition gives a more in-depth perspective: "We believe in taking the lead, jumping

in, lending a hand, owning the problem and the solution" (Our Code: It Matters, 2016).

The *creativity* section is briefly described as "find the best way." Creativity in this sense

can also be interpreted as *innovation*. However, Activision Blizzard does not want change for the sake of change. This definition means the company values calculated risks. While the company does want to be creative innovators on the market, it does not want the costs of *innovation* to outweigh the benefits of creativity.

Integrity is very briefly, and broadly, described as "do the right thing." For an international company, this offers the potential for different interpretations among different groups of employees, different departments, and different locations within various cultures. *Integrity* can be defined as a lot of things, but Activision Blizzard tells employees to not look for the fast or the easy way to get things done.

Towards the lower part of the page, Activision Blizzard is very explicit about how the code applied to everyone—regardless of position or longevity of employment. The organization offers resources for employees to learn more about the organization's values, so there could very well be practical application of the values within company training. However, that would make the company's values non-inclusive of external stakeholders such as consumers, shareholders, and media outlets. The bottom of the page does include links for employees on how to use the Code of Conduct. Right above the practical application is a section on obeying the law. Activision Blizzard does not need every employee to memorize laws, but the company expects them to be ethical enough to understand when they need to get in touch with the legal department. There is a lot of responsibility placed on the interpretation by the individual employee, and there is nothing informing external publics about how Activision Blizzard practically uses these espoused organizational values.

The Activision Blizzard annual report does not mention values in terms of ethical practices or principles. Shareholders are normally a big audience for the annual report while

consumers are a big audience for the website. While we cannot assume why its values are not

present in the annual report, the organization is not providing that information to a specific

public. The same, however, can be said about the values listed on the website, as they are

primarily directed towards employees.

The link at the bottom of the page leads to an in-depth manual of rules and regulations for

employees. This training shows employees how the espoused organizational values are expected

to be used in their work. The training includes examples, scenarios, and case studies that help

them understand the policies that were formed based on Activision Blizzard's espoused

organizational values. While the organization is very detailed about what is expected of its

employees, there is no mention of how these values apply to any external publics. There is also

no mention of how the organization helps achieve these values in any way other than the

business practices of its internal employees and stakeholders.

Microsoft Website/Annual Report

The organizational values were clearly stated on the homepage, and they redirect to

webpages specifically dedicated to each organizational value. The first value is *diversity and*

inclusion, and the first thing on the page is a link to Microsoft's workplace demographics. The

page states the company values *diversity and inclusion*, which is then supported by showing data

that is relevant to the value. Microsoft simply states that diversity and inclusion equate to

success; then it explains in-depth what that means for the company. This page is very interactive

with multiple links to demographic data, resource groups for employees, programs, and

organizations with which Microsoft partners.

The second value, *accessibility*, is where Microsoft states that its services are designed

for all people. Microsoft states its goal is to empower everyone, regardless of disability. It is

clearly defined what the company values, why this value is important, and how the company

does business based on this value. There are links on the website to guides that show people who

have disabilities how to use the *accessibility* features on Microsoft products. The webpages are

very inspirational and inclusive of both internal and external publics, including the company's

competitors. There is a link at the bottom of the page that redirects technology developers to

resources about making technology accessible.

Microsoft offers its first two values, and then supports those values by showing its own

actions and initiatives. However, the third value, *education*, focuses more on advertising to

schools. There is information on how to set up Microsoft's education programs, but the only

links on the page lead to sign-up forms for Cloud-based tools for schools. There was not a lot of

information on how Microsoft values *education*, unless schools are willing to buy and use its

products.

The *Microsoft Philanthropies* section ties back to the company's values of *diversity and*

inclusion and *accessibility*. Technology is Microsoft's tool for improving people's lives. There

are links to pages that show Microsoft donates technology and grants with specific dollar

amounts and where the money is going. This researcher believes the transparency of the value

comes from the detail with which Microsoft describes how it achieves this value. This

information is present for employees, competitors, consumers, and people who may want to

utilize these *philanthropies*. Microsoft shows its guidelines for eligibility as well as offers a place

to sign up for company resources.

Philanthropy also includes employees by matching employee donations and allowing

employees to participate in projects to address important issues in their local communities. The

value includes monetary donations, but the company goes a step further by donating the actual

time of employees to help with *philanthropy* programs. There are many programs and projects

that people can get involved with, and Microsoft does not limit that to employees. Anyone

viewing the website can sign up to receive updates from Microsoft's *philanthropies*.

CSR is another one of Microsoft's values. As mentioned earlier about Sony's values, *CSR*

can be an organizational value, but it does not fit the same description as organizational values.

For example, Microsoft's *CSR* is broken down into three different sections: principles, people,

and planet. The website explains how *CSR* to Microsoft means using policies and business

practices that reflect a commitment to making the planet a better place. The page is driven by

economic, social, and environmental practices that are further described in its *CSR* report.

Finally, *privacy* is Microsoft's last value. *Privacy* is also talked about in Apple's values

because both companies operate in more than just the video game industry. *Privacy* is a very

important value for the technology industry, and Microsoft is very detailed about what this value

means to it. The detail with which Microsoft describes this value adds to the believability that the

company takes this seriously. While there is a lot of information on the page, all of it is useful

and not meant to deflect the attention off of *privacy*. Microsoft openly states that it does collect

data, but it is only to benefit the user. Microsoft's system for organizational values seems to

work by stating and defining the value, stating the importance, and stating the company's actions

around the value.

In the opening letter from the CEO in Microsoft's annual report, there are different values

from the ones discussed on the website, and they are not mentioned anywhere else in the annual

report. The values in the annual report are very briefly stated and defined, which is a stark

contrast with the in-depth discussion on the Microsoft website. While the website appeared

inclusive of all publics, the annual report appeared to only focus on shareholders and investors.

Apple Website/Annual Report

Apple and Microsoft had very similar layouts with the values on the homepage linking to webpages that describe the values. *Accessibility* was Apple's first value, and the webpage was very inclusive of all types of people with different interests. The bottom of the page, however, turned into an advertisement for Mac, iPad, iPhone, Apple TV, apps, and accessories.

Education is the second value, and although Apple had a lot of positive things to say about education, the webpage turned into a description of ConnectEd. Apple's involvement in the program looks generous, but it is not inclusive of schools that are not in the ConnectEd program. In fact, the company states on this page that there are only 114 schools involved. There are over 2,000 public schools in the state of Virginia alone (VA Public School Directory, 2017). A lot of Apple's stakeholders could read this value and feel that it does not apply to them because they are not involved with ConnectEd.

The *environment* webpage is filled with creative, effective solutions to treating our planet in the best possible way. Apple includes links to reports with data on how Apple is contributing back to the environment through safer materials, renewable energy, and climate change. There is nothing about selling products on this page, which is good. Apple states its value, defines what that means for the company, and then provides the materials to show what it is doing based on this espoused value. This page is inclusive of multiple stakeholders through the resources at the bottom of the page that allow people to recycle their Apple products. The page also includes lessons on conservation, ecosystems, and ecology.

Inclusion and diversity opens with the stories of eight individuals who work for Apple, and it gives their backstories. Apple includes demographics of its current employees, and it also includes the demographics of its hiring trends. This is relevant information to Apple's

stakeholders who value *diversity and inclusion*, and it adds to the company's transparency on the value. Apple talks about pay equality on this webpage as well, which is unique because no other company among the top earners in this study mentioned the subject. The organization states that it has closed the gap in the US, and the company is working toward pay equality at all of its international locations.

     Privacy is an interactive webpage with an opening letter from the CEO. This letter not only shows respect for a user's privacy, but it also openly explains the company does collect some data and where it obtains the data. The interactivity of the page is at the bottom where it is explained how to manage privacy. Apple states it values *privacy*, and it informs users how Apple is taking steps to protect privacy as well as what users can do to protect their privacy.

     Supplier Responsibility is an interesting, yet very important, value to have. In video games, or technology in general, there is a supply chain ranging from individual part all the way to the software on the devices. With many people in this chain, having supplier responsibility shows that the company publishing the product cares about where the product originated. For Apple, this might be a response to working with Foxconn, which had terrible working conditions for employees (PC World, 2012). On this webpage, Apple directly addresses its belief in protecting the rights of all people in its supply chain. After stating and defining this value, Apple provides a progress report and actual case studies with real examples.

     The second coder described privacy as Apple holding the values of customer *privacy* as a priority. Apple encourages users to know about the information it is sharing and who can see it. The management at Apple designs its products with consumer privacy in mind. Given Apple's suppliers are from various countries across the globe, the company has a commitment to creating safe and fair employment conditions for its global work force. Apple mentions strong standards,

a focus on workers and human rights, and preparing workers for a lifetime career.

While there are no values listed on the annual report, there is a link that redirects to a webpage titled "Corporate Governance." This page includes the link to Apple's corporate social responsibility and environment webpages.

EA Website/Annual Report

EA explains on its careers page that it expects the culture of the organization to be that everyone shares the same values, beliefs, and attitudes; however, the company does not define what those values are. Although there is information about different activities and partnerships the company engages in, there are no espoused organizational values. There are no values listed, but EA includes news articles about its donations to charities and volunteer actions.

RQ5: Where on corporate websites and annual reports do the most profitable video game publishers communicate their values?

Tencent Website/Annual Report

Tencent's values are very accessible with the link on the homepage leading directly to its organizational values. There is also mention of organizational values on the homepage, but there are not any espoused values on the homepage.

Sony Website/Annual Report

Sony had no espoused values on the website or annual report. The closest thing that could be considered a value is its CSR report. While it takes only four clicks to reach this document, the researcher and second coder were redirected to another website entirely. The URL changed from sony.com to sony.net. The annual report archives can also be found on the Sony.net URL; however, Sony has not published an annual report since 2013.

Activision Blizzard Website/Annual Report

It took the researcher two clicks to reach Activision Blizzard's Code of Conduct, which also serves as its organizational values. There is a webpage dedicated to stating and defining these values. There is a link at the bottom of the page that redirects to the training, which is more based on organizational policy and regulation. It was not difficult to find the organizational values, and they were located on the same URL as the homepage. There are no espoused organizational values included in the annual report.

Microsoft Website/Annual Report

Microsoft had a transparent layout with the values listed on the homepage. However, it took multiple clicks on each organizational value webpage to find all the information relevant to each specific value. None of the information appeared hidden or only targeted toward one intended audience until the annual report. The values on the annual report do not contradict the values on the website, but they are different. It took only three clicks to reach the annual report, and the webpage URL stayed the same as the homepage. The values here are located in the first few pages of the annual report within the letter from the CEO.

Apple Website/Annual Report

Apple's website was set up similarly to Microsoft's where the organizational values were listed on the front page. There was a lot of information on each value's webpage, so there were links that redirected to more information. While the website was filled with clear, easy-to-find information, the annual report did not include any organizational values.

EA Website/Annual Report

There were no espoused organizational values on the EA Website or annual report.

CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION

While analyzing the data, the researcher discovered she was not able to do a true grounded theory analysis because the companies were so diverse in how they communicated their organizational values when those values were found. Grounded theory has not worked with this study because it was impossible to put the organizational values into themes or categories because of how they were presented and because so few of the organizations had espoused values. Some organizations simply stated words as their organizational values, while other organizations stated their values, defined them, and gave examples of how the values are practically used in the company. No organization had matching values on its website and in its annual report, and only one organization mentioned values in the annual report.

Overall Discussion of Findings

Tencent's annual report included only financial information; there was no mention of the word "value" in terms of organizational principles or ethical standards. The way the values are communicated makes this researcher think they might not be formed or developed by communication specialists. Because Tencent's annual report only included financial information, this could be interpreted to mean the organizational leadership believes that shareholders do not need to know information about its values. In addition, because the espoused values on the website are so brief, looking at the annual report makes the researcher wonder if there is any practical use for these values at all. If there are no practical uses for the values within the organization, the purpose of stating these values on its website would be strictly for influencing its consumers' attitudes and opinions. It is possible Tencent wants its customers to see the organizational values, but either they do not want their investors to see their values, or know their investors do not care. The fact that the values are not present in the annual report suggests

that values are not something of which shareholders should be aware. If values are stated on the webpage, but not the annual report, it is unclear which publics the organizational values are meant to reach.

Similarly, because public relations practitioners strategically direct messages to intended publics, the researcher also wonder which of Activision Blizzard's publics are meant to see its values. On its website, Activision Blizzard states and defines its values. However, if website viewers want to understand how those values apply to business practices, they need to go through six chapters of training meant for employees. There is also a great deal of room for interpretation as to what "lending a hand" or "owning the problem and the solution" could mean for different people and in different circumstances. For instance, how does this value apply to gamers versus public relations practitioners inside the organization?

Activision Blizzard does state that its values are for all of its employees worldwide. However, if there is no specific interpretation of how the value is applied practically in the company, there is a lot of room for varying interpretations among different groups of employees. These values take a step further than Tencent's values, but they still do not explain how employees are actually supposed to incorporate these values into their work, and the values strongly resemble only a Code of Conduct. Activision Blizzard is a merger of two organizations. If both Activision and Blizzard are analyzed as two different organizations, there are a separate set of organizational values in each company. However, when the researcher was looking for the most profitable companies in the industry, Activision Blizzard combined company revenues to make the list.

This researcher believes that Microsoft does not just state its values, but the company provides the proof that shows Microsoft operates according to its values. These values feel

inclusive of both internal and external publics, leading the researcher to believe Microsoft holds

all of its publics to the standard of these values. The researcher also believes Microsoft values

accessibility because it is willing to provide resources to help its competitors improve the

accessibility of their own technology. Microsoft took this value a step beyond its employees and

consumers to include outside stakeholders. Allowing others to have the technology to make their

products and software more accessible gives other developers a competitive edge on Microsoft.

This supports the idea stated in the literature review that the purpose of organizational values is

not to make a profit. Values are what an organization believes about what is right and wrong,

good and bad, and how those beliefs affect its business practices.

Apple, like Microsoft, also indicates it values *accessibility*, but the researcher believes

from the qualitative analysis that the advertisements on the page suggest that accessibility is a

value because it makes profits. Values encompass what an organization believes, but they also

include what an organization does. Looking at the *inclusion and diversity* page, the organization

offers information about pay rate statistics between men and women of equal positions. Apple

claims the organization has leveled the pay gap in the US, and the organization strives to close

the gap with its locations worldwide. This is encouraging for women and minority groups who

would not get the same treatment at another organization. Apple's value of *supplier*

responsibility was different from every other company on the list. The researcher interpreted this

value as a response to the Chinese supplier Foxconn's crisis in 2010. Foxconn manufactured

products for Apple out of China, and the workers at Foxconn were abused with constant

violations of human rights. After a string of worker suicides, Foxconn responded to the issue by

placing nets around the building to prevent deaths from jumping (Newman, 2012). Even if this is

a response to Foxconn, it makes Apple appear responsible to not only include this as an

organizational value, but to also incorporate this value in its business decisions.

The findings of this study are not aligned with the literature on organizational values. Though many of the organizations did have espoused values on their websites, none of them communicated the same values in their annual reports, if values were even present in the annual report. This leaves room for interpretation when trying to decipher what the values actually mean practically, which stakeholders the values are for, and makes it almost impossible to discover the actual purpose for the values. The literature shows that companies utilize values as publicity tactics. "It has been noticed that a number of companies have developed ethics programs, but they were frequently just 'window dressing' for the public" (Vig & Dumicic, 2016, p 165). Contrary to this view, a recent survey showed millennials care about values and ethical business practices (Deloitte Millennial Survey, 2016), so having values statements is a positive and strategic move for these organizations that rely on millennial consumers. However, if the values are not listed on important documents such as annual reports, stakeholders may be led to believe that these companies do not actually incorporate organizational values into business practices.

Both EA and Sony still need to develop organizational values. The researcher believes that while Sony's CSR report is better than having no espoused values, the organization needs to explicitly state its values and indicate to whom the values apply. "Top-level management, including board and senior managers, is responsible for ensuring that a company has effective ethics program, and they need to set the highest standards of ethical behavior" (Vig & Dumicic, 2016, p. 168-169). Kerwin, MacLean, and Bell-Laroche (2014) define values as "the glue that connects an organization's mission to its vision by creating shared understanding and coordinated action" (p. 28). Without guidelines and expectations with which to lead these organizational processes, organizations leave themselves vulnerable to stakeholders developing

negative attitudes towards the company or to making internal or external decisions that could prove harmful to the organization. Creating organizational values is a proactive measure to ensure the organization's actions are going to be aligned with the values and beliefs of all relevant stakeholders.

Organizational values go beyond ethics, policies, and regulations. Values come from what an organization and its stakeholders believe and not what is expected of them. Many of the companies had codes of conduct. These codes include rules for how employees were supposed to treat one another and conduct business within the company. Brummette, Zoch, and Taylor (2011) wrote, "The values of an organization are intended to serve as the ethical and practical guidelines to which all employee behavior must adhere. They are also the often implicit foundation of organizational policies and procedures" (p. 4). While values do shape internal conduct among employees, they go beyond codes of conduct. Values help businesses choose to make decisions that are consistent with integrity, fairness, courage, honesty, and the values of their stakeholders (Donker, Poff, & Zahir, 2007, p. 536). This includes more than just internal stakeholders, and values go beyond regulations and policies.

Microsoft and Apple are Fortune 500 companies, and because of their size have a much broader range of stakeholders. They manufacture and sell a wide range of technology including computers, phones, tablets, televisions, audio, etc., while EA and Activision Blizzard publish video games for consoles, personal computers, and cellphones. Apple and Microsoft may share "gamers" as a similar stakeholder, but they cater to a wider range of stakeholders than just gamers. This could be one reason Apple and Microsoft have detailed values on their websites. Apple's and Microsoft's stakeholders outside of gamers may demand it, while there has not been that demand made on organizations that strictly operate in the video game industry.

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Microsoft and Apple each have very detailed organizational values listed on their websites, however, their annual reports were lacking, compared to other Fortune 500 companies. For example, UnitedHealth Group is another Fortune 500 company with organizational values listed clearly on both its website and in its annual report. The values listed on the website include *integrity*, *compassion*, *relationships, innovation*, and *performance* (Mission & Values, 2017). The webpage specifically breaks down each value into three sections: what they believe, how they value compassion, and how they behave based on that value. In the annual report, the same organizational values can be found on the cover page (UnitedHealth Group Annual Review, 2016). This congruence between website and annual report shows stakeholders the organization openly communicates its values to all stakeholders. Microsoft and Apple might share the same title as "Fortune 500 company" with UnitedHealth Group, but they are from two very different industries: medical and technology. The other organizations in this study are similar to Microsoft and Apple in the sense that they are video game publishers. However, Microsoft and Apple conduct business in other markets outside the video game industry.

Even though the researcher was unable to build theory, she still was able to analyze the data using qualitative content analysis. The discrepancies in organizational values, the different markets in which the organizations operate, and the different countries and thus cultures in which the organizations are located, made it impossible to group the values together using grounded theory. Because new themes emerged from every company and every value, the researcher used qualitative content analysis to interpret the findings. In this method, the researcher collects data and compares the findings to one another, drawing connections through similarities or differences. The researcher took the observed data from all of the organizations and drew connections among the values. The purpose of using this method was to describe commonalities

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among the organizational values.

Sony and EA can be grouped together based on the companies' not communicating organizational values. Apple and Microsoft had similar values, but they were described and acted upon in different ways. It is important to note they are a part of other markets outside of the video game industry. For example, Apple and Microsoft both create a variety devices, software, and apps outside of publishing video games (Apple, 2017; Microsoft, 2017). They have no specific values for their gamer stakeholders. They have the most specific and inclusive organizational values, but they do not focus strictly on video games. Activision Blizzard is strictly a video game developer and publisher, and its organizational values were organized similarly to a Code Of Conduct, which is different from organizational values. It may be that Microsoft and Apple have better organizational values because they are bigger companies with a more diverse group of stakeholders. It could also be a possibility that the reason for this difference is that gamers are not yet demanding organizational values from video game publishers.

Sony also has a variety of products in different markets, however, the difference between Sony and Microsoft and Apple is where the organizations are located. Sony is Japanese while Apple and Microsoft are American. Intercultural communication could lead to a new study in itself to see how different cultures communicate, or do not communicate, organizational values. Tencent is a Chinese investment holding organization whose subsidiaries provide media, entertainment, payment systems, Internet, and mobile phone value-added services, as well as operating online advertising services in China (Tencent, 2016).

Recommendations for the Industry

The Tencent espoused organizational values were very positive, but stakeholders need more than just words. Stakeholders need to know what those words mean to Tencent and how the company expects its stakeholders to enact those values. For example, Tencent values *integrity*. How, then, does Tencent incorporate *integrity* into business practice for its executives, managers, and employees? As stated in the review of literature, weakly held or promoted espoused values provide an opportunity for a different set of enacted values to form the more pertinent part of the underlying assumptions existing in the organization and to direct behavior (Howell, Kirk-Brown, & Cooper, 2006). With only stating simple words as organizational values, there is the potential for various stakeholders to interpret the values differently. For example, *integrity* can be interpreted as having good character or doing the right thing. However, "do the right thing" has different definitions from person to person. Without clearly defining and showing how to practically use the values, stakeholders could interpret the values however suits them best.

The values on the webpage need to be more detailed and described, and those same values need to be communicated in the company's annual reports. Annual reports are a great way of giving company information to investors and shareholders. The next generation of shareholders, and the younger current shareholders, are millennials. As stated in the introduction, millennials care about business practices as well as profits. Organizational values, ethics, and principles are all important information shareholders need from an organization to ensure they continue to invest in that organization.

Tencent should continue to display its values transparently on its website. One thing Tencent did very well was mentioning its organizational values on the homepage. There were

two links on the homepage that directed the website viewer to Tencent's "Culture" page, and this is where the espoused organizational values could be found. The researcher believes this is very positive in terms of transparency and suggests the company continue to make the information easy to access.

There was a lot of room for interpretation on the Sony website in the sense that there were many things that could be considered an organizational value, but there were no espoused organizational values found on the website. As we saw in Microsoft's and Apple's values, CSR can be an organizational value, but it does not take the place of other values.

"Values influence the perception and interpretation of different situations, and, therefore, they can show how social science students acting as consumers in a specific cultural context can perceive a social initiative launched by a company" (Ghani, Ahmad, & Mir, 2012, p. 11). CSR can be seen as an organization reconciling with the environment in which it operates. "These initiatives can take many shapes, such as policies with providers, policies to reduce environmental impact, social programs, sponsorships, corporate volunteering, and cause-related marketing" (Villagra et al., 2016, p. 134).

CSR takes into consideration what the organization takes from its community (socially, environmentally, and financially), and it creates initiatives to give back some of those resources. If an organization has values such as community, harmony, or equality, it might create CSR initiatives to show stakeholders the actions behind those values. CSR can be a piece of what an organization values, but it does not take the place of espoused values. The positive thing about Sony is that it is currently doing good work through its CSR initiatives, however, the organization does not state what that means in terms of the organization's other values.

Sony needs to have an annual report and make it accessible to its stakeholders. Shareholders and investors need more information about the company than just the monetary figures. Once Sony creates and defines organizational values, they need to appear on the annual report. Not creating any values takes away from the organization's transparency, and it sends a negative message to stakeholders. This information needs to be on the same website, as well, because another thing that takes away from Sony's transparency is that the web trail to its CSR report changes websites. If the viewers start at www.sony.com, they are eventually re-directed to a www.sony.net URL. It is important to keep these web addresses consistent so viewers do not think the message is not inclusive of all stakeholders.

Activision Blizzard stated and defined its organizational values within the Code of Conduct. The organizational values are clear, concise, and easy to find on the website. While Activision Blizzard does state the values apply to every employee, the values are not inclusive of any other stakeholder except internal stakeholders. The organizational values were only relevant to internal business practices, and they described how employees are supposed to treat each other while working. This is almost the opposite problem that Sony had. Activision Blizzard should create values that are inclusive of other stakeholders such as consumers, people in the community, shareholders, and competitors. The researcher believes Activision Blizzard should explicitly state CSR as an organizational value, and the company should incorporate some of the current initiatives under this value.

Microsoft clearly stated the organizational values on its website, and each stated value was a link to its own webpage that described what the value is and how Microsoft achieves this value. This was the first organization in the study to take values to the next level; Microsoft stated the values, defined them, and backed the values with proof. This proof came from

Microsoft showing its business actions that pertain to this value. For example, when Microsoft

claims the organization values *diversity and inclusion*, the website states diversity is equal to

being successful. Microsoft then provides information for external stakeholders on workplace

demographics, and the company includes information for internal stakeholders by providing

resources for different employee groups.

Another thing Microsoft did well was make its organizational values relevant to the

industry. Multiple stakeholders such as Microsoft employees, consumers, and even competitors

can share organizational values like privacy and education. While there was a lot of good

information on the education webpage, the purpose of the information appeared to be to sell

educators and students Microsoft products. The goal of having values should not be to enhance

profits, and a webpage describing company values is not the appropriate place to promote

products.

The researcher believes the organizational values on the website should match the

organizational values on the annual report. The website values were very detailed and offered

specific examples that showed how Microsoft incorporates the values into its business practices.

The annual report had a small paragraph that mentioned values in the letter from the CEO, and

those espoused values did not match the values on the website. The values did not contradict one

another, but it could make stakeholders wonder if Microsoft's values are just for show or

publicity. The values on the website are articulated very clearly, so Microsoft should align those

organizational values with the ones in the annual report.

Apple, much like Microsoft, has a very transparent way of communicating organizational

values right from the homepage of its website. Each value links to a webpage that states, defines,

and proves Apple incorporates the values into the work place. Apple's values were transparent and relevant to the industry, with values such as *accessibility, privacy*, and *education*.

Apple did not communicate organizational values in its annual report. Since the values are listed clearly and openly on the webpage, the researcher believes Apple needs to include the same values in its annual report for shareholders and investors. This suggestion stems from the next generation of shareholders and investors. Millennials are the current group of young investors as well as potential future investors, and they care about how companies do business. It is important to report financial standings as well as how Apple achieved those financial standings.

EA needs to first establish organizational values as the researcher was unable to discover any espoused organizational values on either the website or annual report. On the website, there were various news articles about EA employees making donations and doing charity work. These are really positive news stories, and they can lead stakeholders to believe EA has positive values. However, whenever negative news stories arise, stakeholders may assume EA has negative values or no values at all. How a company operates, either positively or negatively, reflects what a company values. "Behavior generally is viewed as a manifestation of values and attitudes. It is contended here that behavior in organizations is no exception" (Connor & Becker, 1975, p. 551). Stating organizational values leaves no room for interpretations by stakeholders, whether internal and external. Stakeholders such as consumers and investors know from the espoused values what to expect from the organization, and stakeholders such as employees and managers know the company's expectations about the decisions they make.

As an industry, video games are becoming more and more diverse. We see this through the characters in the game (Serrano, 2017) and the gamers (Entertainment Software Association,

2016). Multiple stakeholders of the industry are even demanding video game companies be more accountable with who they are hiring (Mulkerin, 2017). Stakeholders want more diverse representation inside the organizations because they, themselves, are becoming more diverse.

Issues within the video game industry contradict some of the organizational values found in this study, and some organizations in this study do nothing to address the issues. Apple and Microsoft mentioned *diversity and inclusion*, and Apple went on to describe the pay gap in depth. However, none of these organizations specifically addressed issues like sexism in video games (Powell, 2016); in addition, none of the organizations that operate only in the video game industry espoused values concerning issues like poor treatment of employees (Gurwin, 2016; Schreier, 2013).

Apple, Microsoft, and Sony are different from Activision Blizzard and EA because they are a part of the technology industry as a whole, rather than just publishers of video games. Tencent is in its own category because that organization is an investment holding company. Even so, Apple and Microsoft were the only organizations that mentioned the treatment of employees. The literature states that a majority of gamers are millennials, and millennials truly value ethics. They expect companies to incorporate them into all business practices. The gaming industry is going to continue to diversify (Black, 2017), and it would be a strategic business and public relations decision to evolve organizational values to match the values of stakeholders.

Internal stakeholders, such as executives and employees, are going to figure out what is "okay" and "not okay" within the organization based on the culture observed within the organization and the industry as a whole. Even if the values are not explicitly stated, these internal understandings drive an organization's behavior, and that behavior could be ethical or unethical. From the literature, we can see that there are video game companies in the industry

that have struggled with unethical decisions. Arkane attempted to discredit media outlet Kotaku

by lying about leaked information. Arkane then proceeded to send internal email with

threatening messages to its own employees (Schrier, 2013). Codes of conduct may establish rules

that prevent employees from treating each other with disrespect, but rules are not enough to

change a culture. Video game companies have a strong need to establish, explain, and utilize

organizational values. These values will serve as ethical guidelines that employees can use to

judge their behavior and actions. Values create shared understanding and help coordinate ethical

action (Kerwin, MacLean, & Bell-Laroche, 2014).

From the observations made in this study, the researcher believes it may be possible for

the most profitable organizations in the video game industry to use public relations in a more

effective way. Some organizations suffer from disrespectful media relations and internal

communication (Kerwin, MacLean, & Bell-Laroche, 2014), and other organizations act as if

nothing can harm them even if their actions are unethical. The literature in this study also

mentions Hello Game's marketing fiasco over No Man's Sky. Although they were not charged

with false advertising, the player count plummeted only a week after the game came out (Russo,

2017). Players saw this game as being built on a lie and still do not trust Hello Games. The most

unfortunate part about this incident is that Hello Games is not mainstream nor anywhere close to

the top video game publishers. It is very important for the industry to not foster a toxic culture

that could trickle down from the top publishers, to indie publishers, and finally to the gamers.

This places even more responsibility on the most profitable video game publishers to not only

establish values to guide their own ethical behavior, but to also be a model for other publishers

and all stakeholders.

Because these organizations are so silent or inarticulate about their values, gamers have no accountability when it comes to things like sexism, racism, and age discrimination. "The mainstream industry has spent years pandering to a hardcore demographic of young men, but when aspects of that audience indulge in abusive and threatening behaviour online, via social media and gaming forums, there's very little comeback from the major publishers" (Ramanan, 2017).

In the early stages of this study, the researcher attempted to find the responses to the ethical issues noted above from the video game publishers. The reason she was unsuccessful is because there are no responses. The most profitable video game companies either do not communicate their values or they communicate them ineffectively. Creating a "Code of Conduct" and labeling it "Values" does not take the place of actual organizational values because these values should apply to all stakeholders, not just employees. These top companies can start changing the industry culture as a whole by clearly stating their values, explaining how to use them, and then stop tolerating the negative behavior coming from gamers. Just because the industry has turned a blind eye to these issues does not mean they cannot take the steps now to fix them. Industry culture starts with individual organizations, and this is why it is unsettling that the most profitable video game companies either have no espoused values or so few espoused values.

Out of the organizational values that were listed by the most profitable video game companies, not many of them were related to the issues occurring in the industry. It is difficult to consider Tencent's values as practical because the values only consist of four listed words. Sony had a Code of Conduct, but that does not take the place of organizational values because organizational rules are different from organizational beliefs. Microsoft and Apple both had very

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detailed webpages dedicated specifically to organizational values. They stated, explained, and supported their values with proof that the values are used in business practices. However, Microsoft and Apple failed to communicate these same values on their annual reports, and both of these organizations operate in the overarching field of technology rather than just the video game industry.

Activision Blizzard labeled its Code of Conduct as the organizational values of the company. The Code of Conduct had information that could serve as organizational values, but the values were only inclusive of employees and not other stakeholders. This goes back to the researcher's belief that what a company requires employees to do and what a company values are two separate things. Values go beyond what you have to do, and they extend to what you should do. EA has had public relations issues in the past, and has gotten some bad representation in the media (Levelskip, 2016). It appears the only way EA combats this bad representation is to publish its own articles on various CSR efforts. From these articles, one could assume that EA has values, but the organization does not state them. From a public relations standpoint, the goal of these articles could be to generate publicity rather than to show ethical business practices. These articles and CSR efforts are a start, but EA needs to dive into why the organization focuses on these CSR efforts. Like Apple and Microsoft, EA might value CSR and just not espouse that value. It is important for the organizations not to leave it up to the varying groups of stakeholders to interpret organizational values. For values to be effectively used, organizations need to define and explain how to practically incorporate that value into making ethical decisions.

Limitations and Future Research

When the researcher chose grounded theory as the methodology for this study, she expected the video game industry to more cohesively articulate organizational values. During the

pre-test using video game company SquareEnix, the researcher was able to pull themes from the organizational values located in the SquareEnix annual report. However, when the researcher collected data from the six organizations with the highest revenue, it was impossible to identify mutual themes. New themes arose from each organization and organizational value. For instance, Tencent values *integrity.* That is the only thing stated under its organizational values. Activision Blizzard also values *integrity;* however, the company describes this as doing the "right thing" rather than doing what is "fast" or "easy." Both organizations state the same value, but it would not be right to categorize them the same. One has a definition and the other does not. This could be considered a limitation, but all this did was change the course of research from grounded theory to qualitative content analysis.

Perhaps the largest limitation in this study was that the researcher has life-long experience playing video games and has been aware of previous ethical issues in the video game industry. The fact that the researcher was familiar with these ethical issues limited her ability to form a completely objective analysis. The purpose of grounded theory is to look at information objectively and from a completely unbiased perspective. However, as stated in the literature review, because of her experience and interest in gaming, the researcher was aware of the ethical issues occurring in the industry. This awareness gave her an idea of what she would find on the websites and annual reports, although that was not supported by actual data until after the companies were analyzed. The researcher also had previous beliefs and attitudes about some of the specific companies and issues presented in this study. To off-set this predisposition, a second coder was chosen based on his inexperience with video games and the gaming community. The second coder was able to analyze the video game companies without previous knowledge or attitudes about the organizations or ethical issues in the industry. As described in the methods,

the second coder analyzed Sony's and Apple's websites and annual reports as a check on the values found by the researcher. This coder also found and interpreted Sony's CSR report as organizational values. However, this study stated that although CSR can be an organizational value, it does not take the place of values. His findings on Apple's organizational values were the same as the researcher's; the values were well articulated on the website but missing in the annual report.

This sample of organizations came from a list of the most profitable organizations that operate within the video game industry. What this unintentionally led to was organizations being sampled that operate within the larger industry of technology. For future researchers, it would be beneficial to sample organizations that only operate in the video game industry. The purpose of this study was to research organizational values in the video game industry, but some of these organizations do more than just publish video games. This gives the organizations in the technology field a wider range of stakeholders.

Another limitation of the study was that not every company listed in the study is an American company. It is both unfair and unrealistic to judge all cultures based on the same sets of values. Factors like individualism, collectivism, power-distances, and the contexts of messages all go into forming organizational values. When companies are international, they also have to take into consideration that their stakeholders are not all from their country of origin. Although the intercultural aspect of this study was not taken into account, it does open the door for potential future research on how international companies communicate their values to stakeholders of different nationalities.

This limitation also transitions into additional future research. There are many variables that make up intercultural communication. Because the video game industry operates on an

international level, it could be beneficial to analyze the cultural differences and understand how culture affects organizational values. Just like the companies, gamers are from everywhere on the planet. Since gaming companies have stakeholders from all over the world, if they want to align their values with their stakeholders, they first have to understand what their stakeholders from dozens of different countries value. Future researchers could look for countries where video game publishers concentrate and analyze values based on cultural differences. There is a large body of research on intercultural communication in which future researchers can use to develop this type of study. Researchers could use the findings of such a study to bring the gaming community together on an international level and connect with stakeholders from all over the world.

This study used the most profitable video game companies as the research sample; however, many of the companies in the sample also operated outside of the video game industry. Sony, Microsoft, and Apple are a part of the larger technology industry, while Activision Blizzard and EA are video game publishers, and Tencent is an investment organization. For future research, the sample should be of companies that operate only in the video game industry. The ethical issues identified in the introduction and literature review were specific to the video game industry and not the technology industry as a whole.

Identifying what video game companies value would also allow future researchers to analyze media publications to see if company decisions align with organizational values. Since there was no research prior to this study that analyzed the values of these companies, the researcher could not say with any certainty whether or not these ethical issues in the industry were either aligned or unaligned with organizational values in the video game industry. It would be interesting now to see if video game companies have values that might address the ethical

issues in the industry, or if there is a set of issues completely unrelated to the values analyzed in this study. For example, sexism is a subject in gaming that has been talked about for decades. However, only Apple specifically mentioned this issue on its *inclusion and diversity* page in the form of pay inequality. Out of all the organizations in this sample, Apple was the only organization to espouse values related to gender inequality. Future researchers can try to make connections between the values and the ethical issues by using content analysis. It would be interesting to see if the organizational values stated by companies in the industry are even related to the ethical issues occurring in the industry. In other words, future researches could seek to discover if companies are trying to address ethical issues in the industry, or if such issues are being unnoticed or ignored.

Conclusion

After researching numerous articles about ethical issues within the industry, the researcher sought to understand what the most profitable organizations in the industry value. The values across the organizations were diverse, but the study included companies that do more than just publish video games. The purpose of the study was to direct attention to the growing diversity of stakeholders, the continued publication by media outlets of reports of ethical lapses and issues within the video game industry, and how organizational values can create a more positive culture in which the video game industry can thrive. Establishing organizational values based on stakeholders and what stakeholders need can start to shift the industry culture in a more inclusive and open-minded direction. While some companies in the industry are starting down this path, if others follow, the video game industry has the potential to grow and thrive by catering to a more diverse range of stakeholders.

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