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Global and contextual values for business in a changing world

Editorial

Geoff Moore & Christoph Stückelberger

The papers in this Special Issue of the *Journal of Business Ethics* all have their origins in the International Society for Business, Economics and Ethics (ISBEE) World Congress that was held in Cape Town, South Africa in July 2008 (see www.isbee.org). ISBEE, as many will know, aims to be a truly global association which draws together scholars and practitioners from all continents. In doing so, it helps to counter the kind of parochialism that is all too often a temptation – to work with others and write for others that share similar cultural assumptions. South Africa in general, and Cape Town in particular, was a good venue to host such a conference with its history as a meeting place for the peoples of the world.

The title of the World Congress (sometimes referred to as the Olympics of Business Ethics conferences because it meets every four years) was “Global Fairness – Local Integrity”. We have tried to reflect some of that diversity in the choice of papers for this Special Issue. Two of the papers are from African authors, two from North America, four from Europe and one each from Latin America and Asia. While attempting to attain this level of geographical diversity we have also sought papers that were within our (admittedly broad) title for this Special Issue of “Global and contextual values for business in a changing world”. We have also ensured that the normal quality standards expected of an internationally reputed journal such as the *Journal of Business Ethics* have been adhered to through the usual double-blind reviewing process. We would like to take the opportunity to thank all of those who reviewed papers for us.

The content of the papers reflects the breadth of the discussions at the ISBEE World Congress. We begin with a reflective article by **Georges Enderle** in which he considers the concepts of wealth and wealth creation. As he argues, it is a topic which is often assumed in discussions of business ethics – we are all *for* wealth creation, it’s just how it’s created that matters. But Enderle shows that the concept of wealth is a rich and varied one – that it includes physical, financial, human and social capital wealth, takes both private and public forms, involves a consideration of both wealth creation and distribution, and has both material and spiritual aspects. Sustainability is also an essential element of any serious consideration of wealth creation. Hence there are challenges here for business and business ethics in considering the purpose of business – what it is for – rather than just how it does it.

Ntibagirirwa Symphorien makes the argument that cultural values underpin the pursuit of self-interest and rational choice that have led to growth and development in western economies. That these cultural values are fundamental to economic growth is often an unstated assumption, and such an assumption then leads to the simplistic conclusion that self-interest and rational choice can be universalised. In showing that this is not the case, he derives a powerful explanation for the failure of economic development in sub-Saharan Africa and, by considering shared African values, he argues for the development of an “Ubuntu economy” which is true to Africa’s cultural heritage.

David Lutz’s paper follows this and looks for a theory of global management which is consistent with the common human nature. He proposes the African Ubuntu philosophy of com-

munity orientation as the foundation for such a theory. He shows the differences in various Ubuntu concepts and asks what it means for an Ubuntu style of management. The author also finds similarities between Ubuntu philosophy, Confucianism and the Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy. He also warns that nepotism and corruption can become the negative side of the coin of Ubuntu. He shows an outline of a theory of global ethical management based on Ubuntu philosophy.

Christoph Stückelberger's paper has more direct practical implications. He considers the issue of dialogue and the ethical criteria and conditions for creating a successful dialogue between corporate actors and their stakeholders. He sets the paper within the context of theories of dialogue, drawing on Habermas' work for example, considers some practical examples to ground the discussion, before offering a typology of dialogues. A consideration of the fundamental values that might be used to evaluate dialogues is followed by a discussion of the ethics of compromise – so often an essential component of any dialogue between actors with different objectives. The paper concludes with a set of conditions for ethical dialogue.

Rosa Chun compares the ethical values towards environmental responsibility of employees in state-owned and private companies in China. The case study with questionnaires in seven Chinese companies in the energy sector concentrates not on the legal framework or management decisions as most such studies do, but on employees' attitude and behaviour. The research shows significantly lower corporate citizenship and environmental responsibility in state-owned than in private companies.

Till Talaulicar shows the tension between “global and contextual values in business”, in line with the theme of this Special Issue, by analysing two legal disputes (Wal Mart and Honeywell) on implementing U.S. codes of ethics in Germany. Workers rights are in the center of the dispute. Global companies are confronted with competing legal systems in states of law. How then can global standards and codes be implemented? The author analyses the companies' codes and proposes solutions for their contextualisation.

Thomas Maak challenges the mainstream view that companies are private institutions. He considers the multinational corporations as a political actors with respective responsibilities such as human rights and environmental and social justice. He refers to the ancient and modern concept of cosmopolitanism in its moral, legal, political and cultural dimension. As a conclusion he calls for the cosmopolitical corporation as a member of the global public sphere. Finally, he criticises the concept of corporations as governments, taking on the role of political governments. He shows the more participative concept of global corporate citizenship in the global public sphere.

M. Virginia Halter and Cecila Arruda describe and analyse the phenomenon of corrupt practices in the private sector in Brazil. Through field research they analyse the ethical behaviour of the purchasing department of a multinational company. A special focus is put on the supplier-buyer relationship. Transparency is seen as the key ethical value and communication as a key tool to reduce corruption.

Geert Demuijnck presents a case study of Auchan, a large retail company in France and Europe. The company shifted over the decades from an implicit Christian catholic corporate culture to a concept of corporate ethical responsibility in more secular structures and justification schemes. Being personally involved, the author describes this development from within. The catholic value system and its implementation especially in the company's ethics

committee is analysed. The articles closes with a typology of six scenarios of responsibility and lessons for further research

Finally, the paper by **Fred Bird, Thomas Vance and Peter Woolstencroft** takes a 'big picture' perspective on fairness in international trade, focusing particularly on North America (Mexico, Canada and USA). They note four typical normative views of what represents fairness in trade and, while acknowledging that any universal resolution between these views is unlikely, offer some common points of reference which might usefully be used to inform and help towards resolution in such debates. In particular, they focus on the way in which abusive transfer pricing can distort international trade relations and suggest a possible mechanism for resolving this issue.