
Foreword by the president of Business Ethics Network Africa

Nigeria is perhaps as ideal a place for holding a business ethics conference as one could possibly wish for. Nigeria is a vibrant country, boasting the largest population and the second largest economy on the African continent. The country is rich in energy resources, its financial and communication industries are growing, infrastructural renewal is gaining momentum and the informal sector contributes widely to general economic growth. There is, however, also another side to the story, one that is characterised by extreme poverty, inequality, gender discrimination, poor education, health care challenges and widespread systemic corruption. In the midst of such dynamics and with sprouts of a new age of progress, Nigeria offers a fertile environment for reflections on business ethics, not just for the sake of Nigeria alone, but also for the benefit of other contexts with similar attributes.

The 2013 BEN-Africa Conference was held from 30 October to 1 November at the Lagos Business School. The trip from Murtala Muhammed International Airport to the school offers, at a slow pace and amidst dense traffic, a window onto this diverse socio-demographic landscape where poor living conditions are interrupted by new developments, where potholed roads merge with ones newly built and where street vendors compete with modern businesses for the attention of customers. Some areas make the visitor feel like one is driving through a living mall. In this context, the Lagos Business School of the Pan-Atlantic University presents itself as a resource for business education embedded in humanistic management and business ethics. As such, it offers the ideal conversation space for a business ethics conference where societal issues can be seriously debated in a values-based educational environment.

The 2013 BEN-Africa Conference ventured through the business ethics landscape in a variety of ways. Whilst Nigeria was not the focus of the conference, it so happened that 80% of the conference delegates were Nigerian and therefore, the majority of conference contributions were also focused on Nigerian issues. Keynote addresses and panel discussions were also used to identify, analyse and reflect on ethical challenges that pervade Nigerian society. Emerging from these sessions were concerns around systemic corruption, too little formal education in business ethics, weak support for ethical behaviour in institutions, organisational cultures conducive to unethical behaviour and the lack of political will to deal with ethical challenges across industries and societal sectors. A question from a panellist perhaps aptly summarises the systemic challenge at stake here: How do you take people to a place where they believe that ethical behaviour can be profitable?

Three workshops brought the academic and practitioner communities together and dealt respectively with the role of HR practitioners in corporate social responsibility, the contribution of business to education improvement and the recognition of the human dignity of employees. These workshops were indicative of a new and intensifying awareness in Nigeria regarding the imperative for businesses to invest in human development.

Learning journeys offered exposure to real-life examples of organisations led by leaders who positively opted for ethical conduct. Four different conference delegations spent an afternoon with a furniture dealer, a gas and oil company, a social entrepreneurship entity and a non-profit organisation. These visits offered a window onto the world of ethical leadership and personal character; of what it means to build ethically resilient organisational cultures; and of the challenges involved in managing critically important stakeholder relationships in a context of widespread corruption, without sacrificing values and standards.

The conference papers can be separated into two categories. The first was more generic in scope and dealt with topics around business ethics in management education, humanistic management, corporate governance, stakeholder theory and social innovation. The second category had very specific Nigerian issues as a focus, such as the public sector, recruitment in small and medium-sized enterprises, superstition in business decision-making and ethics education for accountants, the hospitality industry and the telecommunications industry.

Five conference papers were selected for this special conference issue of AJoBE. Arnold Smit explores the emergence of a new paradigm in management education, namely one that incorporates the development of responsible leadership. The paper contends that management education in the pursuit of responsible leadership will have to engage with three critical issues, namely the meaning and place of ethics in theories of management, the development

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of managers as responsible leaders and the design of a curriculum that will effectively integrate matters of ethics and responsibility across the spectrum of management subjects.

Rose Catacutan critically engages with the presumption that, by attending ethics courses provided in business schools, students will acquire certain cognitive, behavioural and managerial competencies that will enable them to act with integrity as professionals in the future. Despite renewed efforts to increase business ethics teaching and to redevelop curricula to ensure a more integrated approach, the results seem to remain disappointing. Common among critics of business ethics education is the claim that a person's character is normally formed at a much earlier age and that teaching ethics to adult graduate school students is not likely to have much impact on their moral development. The aim of the paper is to propose the perspective of Thomas Aquinas on moral development as a framework for establishing the goals of business ethics education and as an alternative to the view of moral development offered by cognitive developmental psychology.

Domènec Melé argues that humanism and economicism represent two opposing views, both founded in the first stages of modern management and still persisting at the beginning of the 21st century. The paper reviews the antecedents and current situation of humanistic management, generally presented as an alternative perspective to the economic paradigm in management and organisational theories. The paper discusses a number of management approaches that contribute to further development of humanistic management.

Elmé Vivier contends that the unique contexts and experiences of SMEs have recently been taken up as a gap in business ethics scholarship. The paper is based on a case study and examines owner-managers' perceptions of ethics and CSR, as well as their experiences with and ethical challenges arising from their employee relations. The case illuminates the deep uncertainties and contradictions that permeate owner-managers' values and practices and points to ethics as a process of reflection.

The paper by Okechukwu Enyinna argues that stakeholder theory claims to promote moral values in business and that this claim is generally accepted. Yet, literature shows that the theory is fundamentally strategic and only incidentally normative. The paper explores the assumptions of philosophical pragmatism that underpin the theory and concludes that the theory does not qualify as normative, since its conception of morality is basically hypothetical.

BEN-Africa now boasts 13 years of business ethics conversations in different locations on the African continent. The 2013 conference's significance was to be found in the dense concentration of Nigeria-specific issues, thereby highlighting the critical role of thought leadership in business ethics for a country in transition. The practice of business ethics in such a context goes beyond academic reflection and becomes an act of leadership.

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