

Fighting and preventing fraud also means informing and communicating

A Personal Perspective

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Members of the United Nations initiative, The Global Compact have decided to fight corruption. The Compact's corporate and civil society organization members – 1200 in all - have agreed to add anti-corruption to their nine existing principles of good corporate citizenship in the areas of human rights, labor and the environment.

Why has it taken them until June 2004, adding corruption as it were as an afterthought? To the outsider it is as if Moses clambered down from the top of Mt Sinai with an armful of tablets and realized he had left one of the Ten Commandment behind.

However tardy their action, in my opinion the Global Compact's decision will come in time to be seen as marking a seismic shift in the war against corruption – not because of any implied intention but because it marked the point at which the market place recognised the legitimacy – and commercial advantage - of embracing anti corruption. Until now its only been the big stick of the law or the carrot of future earthly or heavenly reward.

This reference to religion is deliberate and inevitable. All the world's religions are united in their promotion of ethical behaviour, of a set of principles which should guide every person in making choices. Their choice of words is strikingly similar: "No one of you (truly) believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself"(Islam) ¹; "A state which is not pleasant or enjoyable for me will also not be so for him; and how can I impose on another a state which is not pleasant or enjoyable for me"(Buddhism) ²; or "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Christian) ^{3 4} Even Kant could be interpreted as providing a modernization, rationalization and secularization of this

¹ an-Nawawi, *Forty Hadith*, Ezzedin Ibrahim & Denys Johnson -Davies, Trs., (Beirut: Holy Quran Pub., 1991) No. 13, page 56) .

² *Samyutta Nikaya* V,353.35-342.2

³ *The Holy Bible* Luke 6:31 and Matthew 7:12

⁴ Other formulations are: **Confucious**, *The Analects*, D.C. Lau, tr., (New York: Dorset, 1979), 15.24, page135: "Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire". **Judaism**: Rabbi Hillel, *Shabbat* 31a "Whatever you want people to do to you, do also to them". **Hinduism**: *Mahabharata* XIII 114,8 "One should not behave towards others in a way which is unpleasant for oneself: that is the essence of morality." **Jainism**: *Sutrakritanga* I, II, 33 "Human beings should be indifferent to worldly things and treat all creatures in the world as they would want to be treated themselves". Hans Küng *Global Responsibility*. (New York: Crossroad, 1991), page 59. Toward s a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration (Chicago: Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, 1993)

golden rule. 'Act in such a way that the maxims of your will at any time can be taken at the same time as the principle of a universal legislation. 5

Despite such exhortations no country or culture can claim to be entirely free of corruption. In some countries, corruption is so pervasive it undermines not only the fair and efficient functioning of the state, but even the very fabric of society. Without doubt as a consequence it also contributes to reducing economic growth, hindering international efforts for sustainable development, and, unchecked, can breed poverty. The Global Compact agreement is a result not only of fear of the consequences of corrupt activity but also in response to information about its impact and the wish of those who have put their names to it to communicate their concern.

That corruption in all its forms has to be opposed on principle and for practical reasons is manifestly obvious. But before going on to how information and communication can contribute to this, it is useful to dwell for a moment on that seminal observation for all ethical questions: the distinction between what **is** and what **ought to be**; on the fact that there is a vast abyss between the level of corruption today and the corruption-free world we aspire to.

The gap won't be reduced by investigations, pre-dawn raids, in courtrooms or by throwing people into gaol. Fighting and preventing fraud also requires the use of information and communication.; changing the public's attitude so that the criminal wolf is no longer able to hide beneath the sheep's clothing of being the perpetrator of a victimless crime.

As long ago as 1882 Sir Leslie Stephen in arguing that "(c)onduct may be regarded as a function of character and circumstance..." 6 concluded that is futile to forbid or require certain conduct. His conclusion is that moulding and guiding the character of people is at once effective, simple and exhaustive. Trying to control behaviour is to be always trying to adjust to novelty in violation, thus the rule/law grows ever more complex, and is always a compliance and enforcement problem; it always fails in what it was designed to achieve. 7 The rising sophistication and level of crime – and the tools to fight it - since those words were written are witness to their enduring wisdom.

By "moulding and guiding the character of people" the first step is taken in addressing that second ethical observation, that of the distinction between being and doing, namely that **being is prior to doing**. Zero-tolerance is required before corruption can really be eliminated. . As the Romans said in their time - Actio sequitur esse - action follows being. Changing public attitudes and securing the public's commitment to zero-tolerance is the *sine qua non* of reducing if not actually eliminating corruption.

⁵ *Critique of Practical Reason*, A 54.

⁶ *The Science of Ethics*, by Sir Leslie Stephen. London, 1882. Books for Libraries Press, Freeport, N. Y., 1972 (Reprint of the 1882 edition).

⁷ John H. Bryant *A Guided Conversation on Global Ethics* International Institute for Public Ethics "Ethics in the New Millennium" Ottawa, Canada September 2000

Societies and individuals alike learn either by shock or by anticipation. The costs of learning by shock would be much higher than those needed to nurture an anticipatory attitude.⁸

The noted historian Arnold Toynbee⁹ might have been referring to corruption rather than nuclear war when he wrote “When it has come to be a choice between our abolishing it or its abolishing us, we realize that we can no longer afford to take the line that it is incurable. We have to make attempts to cure it, without letting ourselves be paralysed by our previous conviction that a cure was impossible.”

How difficult will it be to administer the necessary medicine? Easier obviously if there is a proper informed debate in a receptive social context. An advisor to the British Prime Minister, Anthony Giddens has claimed ‘that corruption is no more common in democratic countries than it used to be - rather, in an information society it is more visible than it used to be.’¹⁰ Giddens may be right, but unfortunately objective public discussion is nigh on impossible because the debate increasingly resembles what the author David Miller has described as “the dystopian vision encapsulated in the film *The Matrix*. Here the reality ... is disguised by a sophisticated virtual reality – the matrix – from which it is difficult to break free.”¹¹

To illustrate his point, in Miller’s “matrix world” Iraq had and may still have Weapons of Mass Destruction. In the real world it did not. In matrix world there were links between Iraq and Al- Qaeda. In the real world there were not ... In matrix world Katherine Gun (an intelligence analyst) and Clare Short (a government minister) are deeply irresponsible for breaching trust and revealing secret information. In the real world they blew the whistle on illegal and immoral official behavior.”¹² In Miller’s matrix world any government is fair game and financial crimes involving public funds are “victimless crimes”. Yet the truth is that everyone is a victim, directly or indirectly as a consequence.

Not so long ago the world business community regarded corruption as a necessary evil, with some top executives openly defending the practice of bribing foreign firms with a shrug of the shoulder and an offhand remark: "I hate to do it...and I hate all the problems it will cause down the line...but I have to." ¹³

On the other hand the Anticorruption Assistance Centre of Transparency International Romania in the report of its first three-month counselling programme concluded that few of those who came through its doors were able to correctly identify corruption. Only ten

⁸ Mircea Malitza *The Conflicts of the 21st Century Millennium III* published by the Black Sea University Foundation Bucharest 2002

⁹ quoted in Mircea Malitza *The Conflicts of the 21st Century Millennium III* published by the Black Sea University Foundation Bucharest 2002

¹⁰ Anthony Giddens, 'The Runaway World Debate: Democracy and Third Way politics'
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/Giddens/RWDdemocracyandthirdway.htm>

¹¹ David Miller *Editor of Tell me Lies: Propaganda and media distortion in the attack on Iraq, Pluto, 2004*
<http://staff.stir.ac.uk/david.miller/publications/Tellmelies.html>

¹² **Caught In The Matrix** David Miller www.eurozine.com/article/2004-05-03-miller2-en.html

¹³ Peter Eigen, Chairman of Transparency International New York 24 June 2004

per cent of the 428 cases presented clear cases of fraud and only seven were brought to the attention of the National Prosecutor's Office. 14

International efforts to unearth and eliminate corruption and encourage transparency and accountability are undoubtedly gaining momentum, thanks to an increased understanding of corruption's social and economic costs. The World Bank for example now estimates that 11 per cent of the income of a poor family is paid out in corruption -related costs. Wide-scale endorsement of the 2003 UN Convention Against Corruption and the recent inclusion of anti-corruption in the principles of the United Nations Global Compact confirms that "There was now a solid consensus behind the need to fight corruption." 15

Clearly there is still a lot of moulding and guiding the character of people to bridge the abyss between what is – endorsement - and what ought to be – implementation..

Here I have to declare an interest as a public relations practitioner who knows something about communication (and a former civil engineer who knows something about building bridges).

In my opinion a wave of anti -corruption enthusiasm is about to break, and if we manage to catch the cresting wave then it will give popular momentum to the anti corruption message.

Invisible beneath the waves licking the tip of the iceberg represented by the 2003 United Nations Convention Against Corruption, which celebrates its first anniversary in December 2004, and the marketing muscle of the signatories to The Global Compact, certain to promote their good governance practices, are alert entrepreneurs and marketers who will soon send a tidal wave of commercialised anti -corruption messages washing over popular culture.

The tsunami has already arrived in China where a media "genre" on the specific theme of "campaigns against corruption and mismanagement" has become the favourite of Chinese publishing houses and TV stations. They all thrive on the fact that "officials who accept kickbacks or bribes have become one of the most maligned groups of social pests in China".16

The "genre" is not only emerging elsewhere. The global marketing power of the film industry will shortly be promoting Shattered Glass, the gripping and frightening story of (journalist) Stephen Glass' stories about computer hackers and drunken Young Republican orgies - all fabricated – which are as legendary as the fictional notes, phoney corporate Websites and bogus business cards he created to cover his fraud. 17

¹⁴ Simona Fodor TI releases anti corruption guide Bucharest Business Review 24/30 May 2004

¹⁵ Peter Eigen, Chairman of Transparency International New York 24 June 2004

¹⁶ Campaigns against corruption and mismanagement China Daily 7 January 2004

¹⁷ Timothy W. Maier The Crumbling of the Fourth Estate www.insightmag.com/news/2004/05/11/National/The-Crumbling.Of.The.Fourth.Estate-673861.shtml

Marketing power on this scale sets the media agenda. One just has to recall the public controversy, debate and airtime and column inches that anticipated and followed the film *The Passion of Christ*. The democratic media does not dictate to people what they should think, but what they should think about.

One of the reasons the market sees a commercial opportunity in anti-corruption now is that people as a whole are fed up with living in an age of fakery; spin and PR manipulation. In Miller's Matrix world.

Examples? In Johannesburg the third world farmers demonstrating at the UN Summit on Sustainable Development in favor of GM foods were 'fake'. Bussed in, marshaled, press released and given T shirts with English slogans, a language they didn't speak. 18 In the US, the Bush administration paid actors to produce fake news reports in favor of its policy on Medicare 19 In Turkey BP's consultation on the Baku, Tbilisi Ceyhan pipeline included a telephone survey of a Turkish village of Hacibayram that, 'had been deserted for many years, its houses having fallen into ruins. There were neither telephones nor anyone to answer them.' 20 21

Even my fellow public relations practitioners – notorious for offering bribes in cash and kind for media coverage – are saying enough is enough. The Campaign for Media Transparency 22 launched by the International Public Relations Association aims to restore the credibility of the media which can only be based on its independent objectivity. Organizations ranging from the Global Alliance for Communication Management, International Press Institute to the International Federation of Journalists have already endorsed the campaign.

International good intentions are fine but what matters most is what happens on the ground. The European Union's agreements to protect Community funds implicitly accept that this will differ from country to country; they refer to effective and equivalent protection of the financial interests of the EU. 23

All public relations is local. But the same tactics for information dissemination will not get everyone in every country onto the communication escalator, moving from awareness through understanding to favorability, involvement and finally commitment or action. The principles however will be the same. Public relations messages unlike mass advertising are addressed to specific groups of people or special sections of the general

¹⁸ Jonathan Matthews 'The Fake Parade' Freezerbox, 12.3.2002
<http://www.freezerbox.com/archive/article.asp?id=254>

¹⁹ Robert Pear 'U.S. Videos, for TV News, Come Under Scrutiny', New York Times March 15, 2004
<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/15/politics/15VIDE.html?th>

²⁰ International Fact-Finding Mission, Preliminary Report Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey Pipeline Project, Turkey Section Campagna per la Riforma della Banca Mondiale, Kurdish Human Rights Project, The Corner House, Ilisu Dam Campaign, PLATFORM, August 2002

²¹ Ibid Miller

²² www.instituteforpr.com/international.phtml?article_id=bribery_index

²³ para 3.b Romanian Law 172 (XVI) - No 266 25 March 2004

public. Information flows through communication. The benefit of the cresting wave of market support for the anti-corruption message is that everyone is heading in the same direction. Each country, each culture will have to determine for itself how best to capitalize on that.

As a former engineer I know that no abyss is so wide or so deep that it cannot be bridged; as a public relations practitioner I know information and communication can bring what is and what ought to be closer together. As one now engaged in the anti-corruption campaign I can see a rising tide of business and public support, and that catching the cresting wave is a once in a lifetime opportunity not to be missed.

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