

Ethics in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises

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Editors

Ethics in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises

A Global Commentary

 Springer

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Foreword

This volume, *Ethics in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises: A Global Commentary* is path-breaking in a number of ways. It introduces the reader to the distinctive features of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), it develops new theoretical thinking around SMEs, it presents useful data and case examples from empirical research, *and* it tackles the subject globally with contributions from every inhabited continent. The breadth and depth of the contributions to this book are thus truly amazing.

The fields of business ethics and corporate responsibility have traditionally focused their attention on large, usually multinational, corporations (MNCs) as the primary units for analysis. Some of the theoretical analyses deriving this sort of approach is transferable to SMEs. Still, these smaller companies have different frames of reference. They are usually local, not global companies. They are almost always close to the communities in which they operate, and many, but not all, tend to be family-owned or owned by a small group of investors or entrepreneurs rather than by anonymous shareholders. So the internal and external stakeholder relationships have to be redefined for SMEs. Thus there has long been an unmet need for new theoretical, normative, and empirical studies of small and medium sized enterprises.

One question raised in the volume, “Are SMEs ethical?” as the editors note, is not entirely interesting, since it is obvious that some are and some are not. Rather, the strength of the essays is in their spelling out how to judge whether SMEs are ethical, where again, the unit of analysis differs from that of a MNC. And whether and how SMEs are *socially* responsible to their communities and external constituents is, in part, dependent on the close SME – community ties particular to each SME and overlaps considerably with how they perceive and act on their other normative responsibilities. Thus a more fruitful question might be whether and how SMEs are responsible (rather than merely *socially* responsible) to their external stakeholders, including their cultural, social or governmental relationships in ways that coincide or conflict with their obligations to the other primary stakeholders, e.g., their employees, owners, customers, and suppliers.

This book is the beginning of what shall prove a rich set of research agendas that, to date, had been sadly overlooked. We are grateful to the authors and the editors for this volume, and we look forward to much more in the way of future empirical and theoretical research on SMEs.

ISBEE President

Professor Patricia H. Werhane

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Our sincere thanks are due to the organisers of the 2008 International Society of Business, Economics and Ethics (ISBEE) Congress in South Africa who initiated the project leading to this volume with their inspired and courageous focus on Ethics in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises. We would particularly like to acknowledge Professor Deon Rossouw, President of ISBEE at the time, for his support of the initiative. Some of the articles, namely those in the ‘Global Overview’ section are reprinted from a special issue of the African Journal of Business Ethics with kind permission from the editor of that journal, Professor Leon van Vuuren. Mr Neil Olivier commissioning editor at Springer and Professor Joanne Ciulla, co-editor of the Springer ISBEE book series, have been hugely supportive and practically helpful.

The authors of the chapters have shown dedication and commitment to the topic of study, and patience in the evolution of this global book, for which we are enormously grateful. We must single out one contributor in particular, Professor Henk van Luijk, who was tragically taken ill during the production of this volume and died on 19 January 2010. His chapter with Lobke Vlaming remains in its uncorrected version as a result.

Professor Henk van Luijk was a leader in the European and global business ethics fields since the 1980s when he established, with colleagues, the European Business Ethics Network. He was also a founder member of the International Society of Business, Economics and Ethics in the 1990s. Henk was an inspiration to several generations of business ethicists and will no doubt continue to be so. His scholarly and personal contributions to our field and our community are already keenly missed. We dedicate this volume to him.

Laura J. Spence and Mollie Painter-Morland

Contents

1 Introduction: Global Perspectives on Ethics in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises	1
Laura J. Spence and Mollie Painter-Morland	
Part I Global Overviews	
2 Africa: Ethics and Sustainability Within SMEs in Sub-Saharan Africa: Enabling, Constraining and Contaminating Relationships	13
Mollie Painter-Morland and Kris Dobie	
3 Europe: Practice and Politics: Ethics and Social Responsibility in SMEs in the European Union	35
Laura J. Spence and Francesco Perrini	
4 India: CSR and Ethics in MSMEs in India	55
Vasanthi Srinivasan	
5 Latin America: Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility in Latin American Small and Medium Sized Enterprises: Challenging Development	65
Maria Cecilia Coutinho de Arruda	
6 New Zealand & Australia: A New Zealand and Australian Overview of Ethics and Sustainability in SMEs	85
Eva Collins, Carolyn Dickie, and Paull Weber	
7 USA: An Overview of Empirical Research on Ethics in Entrepreneurial Firms Within the United States	99
Melissa S. Baucus and Philip L. Cochran	
Part II Individual Research: Theory Development	
8 Entrepreneurial Social Responsibility: Scoping the Territory	123
Richard K. Blundel, Laura J. Spence, and Stefania Zerbinati	

9	A Comprehensive Model for SMEs: Measuring the Dynamic Interplay of Morality, Environment and Management Systems – Towards Continuous Improvement	147
	Jörg Bürgi	
10	CSR and SMEs in Portugal: The Strategy of Obligation	173
	Maria João Santos	
Part III Individual Research: Empirical Research		
11	In Search of Sustainability? SMEs in Brittany, France	193
	Sarah Hudson and Julia Roloff	
12	Corporate Social Responsibility and Stakeholder Relations – The Perspective of German Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises	215
	Simone Klein and Kristin Vorbohle	
13	The Alignment Between Social Responsibility and Business Strategy: Implications for Social Responsibility Value Creation in Spanish SMEs	227
	Cristina Iturrioz, Cristina Aragón, Lorea Narvaiza, and Asunción Ibañez	
14	Business Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility Practice in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises: Sampling from Thailand and Hong Kong	255
	David Bevan and Robert Annop Wynne	
Part IV Individual Research: Case Examples		
15	Fostering Corporate Social Responsibility in Small and Medium Size Enterprises. Recent Experiences in The Netherlands	277
	Henk van Luijk and Lobke Vlaming	
16	Small Business Social Responsibility in the Supply Chain: A Literature Review	291
	Francesco Ciliberti, Pierpaolo Pontrandolfo, and Barbara Scozzi	
17	Ethics in Agricultural and Stockbreeding SMEs: An Argentinean Case Study	313
	Norma T. Jáuregui de Pivetta	
	Conclusion: The Road Ahead for Research on Ethics and SMEs	333
	Author Index	339
	Countries Index	341
	Subject Index	343

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