**15. Global Ethics
How can ethical considerations become more routinely incorporated into global decisions?**

Too many greedy and deceitful decisions led to a world recession and demonstrated the international interdependency of economics and ethics. Improved systems to increase integrity, financial transparency, and accountability are being developed by governments and international organizations. The UN Convention against Corruption is being implemented, the World Bank is helping to strengthen national anticorruption units, and Transparency International has created teams to counter corruption. Over 5,000 businesses in 130 countries have joined the UN’s Global Compact to use global ethics in decision making. The International Criminal Court has successfully tried political leaders. News media, blogs, mobile phone cameras, ethics commissions, and NGOs are increasingly exposing unethical decisions and corrupt practices. Collective responsibility for global ethics in decision making is embryonic but growing. Corporate social responsibility programs, ethical marketing, and social investing are increasing. Global ethics also are emerging around the world through the evolution of ISO standards and international treaties that are defining the norms of civilization.

Yet each year over $1 trillion is paid in bribes, organized crime takes in over $2 trillion, most of the annual 50 million tons of e-waste is dumped in developing countries, and 12–27 million people are slaves today. Meanwhile, trivial news and entertainment floods our minds with unneeded products and unethical behavior. The acceleration of technological change seems beyond the ability of most people and institutions to comprehend, leading to ethical uncertainties. Do we have the right to clone ourselves, or to rewrite genetic codes to create thousands of new life forms, or to genetically change ourselves and future generations into new species? Some experts speculate that the world is heading for a “singularity”—a time in which technological change is so fast and significant that we today are incapable of conceiving what life might be like beyond the year 2025.

Global decision making at the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen gives rise to the ethics of allowing one population to pay another for their right to pollute. Similarly, is it right for pharmaceutical trials to move to poorer nations where rules are less strict and costs are lower? About 10% of the world's population lives with disabilities and most (mainly in developing countries) are denied access to education, work, and health care. This highlights the need for all governments to ratify and implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol.

The highest rated future economic element to improve the human condition in an international assessment was: "Ethics becomes a key element in most work relations and economic exchanges." (See Chapter 3 on future economic elements.)

Individuals can experiment with genetics to create new life forms in home labs without safeguards of government and commercial laboratories. Globalization and advanced technology allow fewer people to do more damage and in less time, so that possibly one day a single individual may be able to make and deploy a weapon of mass destruction. Hence the healthy development of anyone should be the concern of everyone. Such observations are not new, but the consequences of failure to realize their importance may be much more serious in the future than in the past. New technologies also allow more people to do more good than ever before, such as single individuals organizing worldwide actions around specific ethical issues via the Internet. The moral will to act in collaboration across national, institutional, religious, and ideological boundaries that is necessary to address today’s global challenges requires global ethics.

Public morality based on religious metaphysics is challenged daily by growing secularism, leaving many unsure about the moral basis for decision making. Unfortunately, religions and ideologies that claim moral superiority give rise to “we-they” splits. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has stimulated more than 60 treaties to protect individual freedom and dignity and continues to shape discussions about global ethics and decisions across religious and ideological divides.

Memes could be promoted, like “make decisions that are good for me, you, and the world.” We need to promote parental guidance to establish a sense of values, encourage respect for legitimate authority, support the identification and success of the influence of role models, implement cost-effective strategies for global education for a more enlightened world, and make behavior match the values people say they believe in. Spiritual education should grow in balance with the new powers given humanity by technological progress.

Challenge 15 will be addressed seriously when corruption decreases by 50% from the World Bank estimates of 2006, when ethical business standards are internationally practiced and regularly audited, when essentially all students receive education in ethics and responsible citizenship, and when there is a general acknowledgment that global ethics transcends religion and nationality.

**Regional Considerations**

**Africa:** New approaches to countering corruption are needed as a former World Bank official says most African government anti-corruption units are embattled and officials are being killed. Meanwhile, the Business Ethics Network of Africa continues to grow with conferences, research, and publications. The South African special unit (the Scorpions) that has been fighting organized crime and corruption since 1999 has been eliminated. In eight African countries surveyed by Transparency International, 20% of those interviewed who had contact with the judicial system reported having paid a bribe. In South Africa and elsewhere on the continent, scholarly and popular articles are focusing on the ethics of health care, patients’ rights, and media ethics.

**Asia and Oceania:** Should Myanmar’s refusal to accept international aid for its people following the cyclone in 2008 cause the international community to define when human rights or needs outweigh sovereignty of governments? The need to make so many decisions so quickly during Asian urbanization apparently leaves little time to consider the ethical implications. Some do not believe there are common global ethics and maintain that the pursuit to create them is a western notion.

**Europe:** Although Russia has just developed its national anti-corruption plan, Transparency International rated the country the worst for bribery among 22 world powers in 2008. The European Ethics Network is linking efforts to improve ethical decision making. The European integration process is helping establish ethical standards, yet increased non-European immigration raises new ethical challenges.

**Latin America:** The Argentine Museum of Memory and Human Rights opened to promote ethics education and ensure that the atrocities of the past shall never be repeated. University courses in business ethics are growing throughout Latin America. The Inter-American Initiative of Social Capital, Ethics and Development of the Inter-American Development Bank works to strengthen ethical values in the region.

**North America:** Unethical financial decisions in the United States have forced the new administration to cooperate with other nations on improving regulations. It has also banned torture, scheduled the closing of the Guantanamo prison, increased transparency, and plans to address the medically uninsured, increasing income gaps, and political campaign financing. The Sloan Foundation has initiated a large study on potential impacts of synthetic biology.

**Correlation between GDP/Capita and Corruption Index**
This figure shows the correlation between GDP per capita and corruption for 30 countries over 12 years for which data are available. The corruption measure is from Transparency International; 10 is low corruption. The GDP/capita data are from World Bank. The fit is a straight line and has an r2 of .61. The graph and fit were prepared using the JP7 software package, provided to the Millennium Project under a grant from SAS.

Source: Transparency International, World Development Indicators, and Millennium Project compilation.

