

PRESS RELEASE

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Globalising a Business Ethics Programme: a new Good Practice Guide from the IBE

How cultural differences can be a challenge to consistent ethical standards

Corporate ethics programmes can be ineffective on a global scale if they are perceived locally as irrelevant or inappropriate. This Good Practice Guide helps organisations achieve consistent standards of business practice by recognising the cultural attitudes and practical issues they will face when communicating their ethical values to a global workforce.

Some examples given are:

- **Different approaches to conflicts of interest:** In Africa, where family bonds are highly valued nepotism is common and often seen as in the best interest of the business.
- **Different gift giving practices:** In parts of Asia, token cash gifts are routine in business relationships at special occasions like the birth of a child or New Year. Not being able to give a "red envelope" could result in the loss of face. In some African countries, businesses might ask suppliers to sponsor a son or daughter's wedding. Not doing so could be considered insulting.
- **Perceptions of reporting channels:** Negative historical events (such as the Cultural Revolution in China or the Stasi in East Germany) which have fostered cultural fears of retaliation may mean that reporting or speak up lines are better referred to as opportunities to raise concerns or make enquires.
- **Types of ethics training:** In many parts of Africa where story-telling and group discussion is part of the culture, games, case studies and role play are effective, but lecture-style training is not. In contrast, in Asia, where the education system relies on lecture, employees will not be so comfortable discussing ethics matters in an open manner. Training audiences in Europe may not be as open to games which they may see as trivialising the topic.
- **Translation of idioms:** One code of ethics suggested that employees should "take a step back", meaning to reflect, but the code was translated literally as "we need to move backwards"! Translators of fiction rather than technical experts may have a better grasp of idiom and so be more appropriate as translators of ethics materials.

Philippa Foster Back OBE, Director of the IBE, welcomed the publication. *"Many companies launch their ethics programmes from the head office without proper adaptation to international locations where the company does business. This Guide will help them review their programme so that it has relevance wherever they operate and actually makes a difference to business practice."*

Globalising a Business Ethics Programme provides practical advice on:

- Organising an ethics function to best deliver all the elements of a global ethics programme
- Developing organisation-wide values and disseminating standards and guidance in a way that takes account of the varied cultures in which a business operates
- Assessing whether existing ethics programmes are effective and culturally appropriate
- Designing training which is culturally relevant in terms of content and delivery.

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EDITOR'S NOTES

1. IBE Good Practice Guide: GLOBALISING A BUSINESS ETHICS PROGRAMME

The IBE Good Practice Guides offer practical assistance and guidance for making ethics policies and programmes effective.

By Lori Tansey Martens

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2. **The Institute of Business Ethics** (IBE) is a non-profit professional organisation, which encourages high standards of business behaviour based on ethical values. They raise public awareness of the importance of doing business ethically, and collaborate with other UK and international organisations with interests and expertise in business ethics. www.ibe.org.uk

3. The author

Lori Tansey Martens

Lori Tansey Martens is a leading authority on international business ethics.. As founder and chief executive officer of the [International Business Ethics Institute](http://www.ibe.org.uk) in the United States, Lori directs the Institute's research and educational activities designed to promote responsible international business practices. Additionally, she advises corporate CEOs and Ethics and Compliance Officers on policies and management systems to promote improved ethical standards, and oversees organisational assessments and senior level ethics education and training.