

ENLIGHTENED INQUIRY

New Thinking, Trends, Ideas And Practices In Management And Leadership

GOOD GOVERNANCE

IMPORTANT WEAPONS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST BRIBERY AND CORRUPTION

We believe that we now live in a world of instant communication: by mobile telephone, pagers, e-mail, the internet, and the instant transmission of news as it happens, wherever it happens. Really, do we? Well, the facilities are certainly available, but what about the information? You cannot communicate information which is not freely available, or is prohibited for whatever reason, justly as in situations of on-going court cases or unjustly because it is not in the interest of various authorities or other parties for it to come into the public domain. Governments often hide behind the mask of "national security" or "not in the public interest" to deny access to information. Commercial organisations will use the mask of "proprietary information" or "market confidently". In the majority of instances, these may be true and valid reasons. However, in a minority of cases – although not that small a minority of cases – these are mere sinister reasons, namely that disclosure would reveal illegalities and point the finger at those responsible.

Undoubtedly, among the foremost issues, are those of the abuse of human rights and bribery and corruption. Bribery and corruption are among the most insidious practices of private, political, business, and public life. These issues thrive on secrecy; their biggest enemy is transparency. An open society with the freedom of communication, information, and free and independent media, makes it much more difficult for bribery and corruption to survive. But survive it does, even in the most advanced and democratic societies such as European Community, the United States, India and Japan. Consider the corruption charges against the International Olympic Committee, the police forces in England and Wales for having a sizeable number of officers facing corruption or dishonesty

allegations, and the recent fracas between the European Parliament and the European Commission. Other examples are the IMF 'conflict of interest' saga involving its immediate past president. Back home in Ghana, consider the ongoing cocaine trial involving police officials and the print media's reports of alleged bribery involving former key government officials.

Closed societies, principally military rulers, traditional authorities, or dictatorships, are fertile ground for liberty: there is no freedom of information or information distribution rights. There is often a chain of participants leading from the top down, or the bottom up. Protection of "whistle blowing" does not exist. There are still many democracies in Africa, South-East Asia, and Latin America, and elsewhere of course, where though strictly illegal, corruption is a tolerated culture. There are two principal participants to bribery: those who demand and accept the bribe and those who pay, or even offer it in the first instance. Most attention or condemnation however centres only on the recipients; but the donors, given the context, may be just as guilty. Transparency International is a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization to counter corruption, both in international business transactions and, through its National Chapters (of which there are over 70), at national levels. Among other activities, it publishes an annual Corruption Perception Index (CPI), which currently ranks the "perception" of corruption in 87 countries. This disclosure has gained world-wide recognition and acceptance. It is a powerful demonstration of the use of communication to expose and deter corruption.

Another weapon in the fight against corruption came into force in the shape of the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery in international business transactions. It deals with the bribery of foreign public officials. Under the convention, it becomes a criminal offence in each country bound by the convention, to bribe foreign public officials.

It does not, however, cover bribes to private sector companies. Nevertheless, it should act as a very real deterrent leading to the identification of both the one who demands or receives and the one who pays a bribe.

There is surely a case to be made for all significant commissions to be fully disclosed, either in the official annual report and accounts of a company, or through the growing practice of Social and Ethical Accounting, Auditing, and Reporting (SEAAR). This would attract the attention of all stakeholders including the media. It would become an invaluable deterrent. ■

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WHO GOVERNS THE NET?

Internet users who register their addresses and passwords, so called domain names, in the World Wide Web (www), are looking possibly for snappy, easy to remember names. Many internet users who search for suitable domain names suffer unexpected set backs. Nearly all the words in a regular-sized English dictionary have already been reserved. An attempt to create an economically viable identity on the web might well be frustrated even before it has begun.

Who Determines how Domain Names are Distributed any Way?

Possible answers to this question may be an internet regulation authority, perhaps a government. In most cases, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), based in USA, has a hand in the matter. One thing is certain: the internet is by no means as anarchic and uncontrollable as it is often made out to be. In 1998, the US Department of Commerce undertook a decisive step to create a little order in this innovative Information and Communication System, which is undergoing constant change and was also threatening to become increasingly

chaotic.

In the five years prior to that date, thanks to its exponential growth rate, the internet had not only become a household word but had also created a whole range of conflicts involving such issues as:

- (1) Who determines the technical infrastructure of the internet and the way it functions,
- (2) Who has the right to assign domain names, and
- (3) Who should decide the growing number of legal disputes between brand name owners in the real world and domain name owners in the virtual world.

As the internet has grown into a mass medium, the need for regulation has increased. Historically, as the internet continued to develop, the American government, that played such a decisive role in the creation of the internet in the fifties, assumed the role of a de facto internet government.

However, as the internet evolved from a government-financed scientific experiment to an international market place and a global information forum, other groups (for instance other sovereign states, private businesses and individual internet users throughout the world) began to express varied interest in the network's stability and in the process of assigning domain names. At the same time, the role of the American government as the real power behind the internet was increasingly resisted by other governments around the world.

In the autumn of 1998, at the latest, it was clear from the large number of disputes over brand name, copyrights, and the assigning of domain names that changes would have to take place in the way the internet was being managed or not managed. Clearly, it was unacceptable for one government alone to regulate the global use of the internet on its own.

The internet's dynamics seem to preclude its being regulated by conventional supranational