

CBERN – THE FIRST SIX YEARS

Challenges and Achievements

Vision and Mandate

There are few areas that recent history has demonstrated to be of more importance globally and locally than business ethics. As this overview is being drafted, news casts report the collapse of a garment factory in Bangladesh killing a reported 1000 or more workers, a factory that provides clothing products for some of Canada's most visible and fashionable clothing retailers. Ongoing hearings into municipal corruption have highlighted the role of bribes in the Quebec construction industry. SNC-Lavalin, a global Canadian Engineering firm is reported to have been barred from World Bank contracts worldwide for ten years for corruption. And the world economy is only very slowly emerging from an economic downturn resulting from among other things a loss of ethical perspective and widespread collapse of ethical standards in the financial sector in the United States.

CBERN was created in 2006. Its mandate was to create a network able to address critically, persuasively and visibly the foundational role of ethics in business and economic development. The task facing the network was significant. The field was fractured by suspicion, hostility and lack of communication and trust between and among people and organizations in the private, public, voluntary and academic sectors. Research was siloed in the four different sectors and a variety of academic disciplines and sub disciplines. What is more, the role of business ethics in management education and academic research agendas was modest and relatively insubstantial. The challenge facing CBERN has been to address these challenges and build the foundations for change.

Challenge and Achievement: An overview

The idea of a Canadian Business Ethics Research Network, CBERN, emerged from a national, multi-stakeholder consultation in 2003-4 involving cross-sector meetings with existing local networks of people in five cities across the country. What that consultative process established was country wide agreement that a business ethics network would add value by supporting existing research and promoting and mobilizing research findings. A series of smaller Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and York University and private sector grants allowed experimentation with small-scale collaborative and multidisciplinary research and research mobilization models connecting the private, public, NGO and academic sectors. Initial funding also allowed the construction of a website prototype. The success of these initial steps and interest in the results led to a successful proposal for a \$2.1 million Strategic Knowledge Clusters grant in 2006. The proposal was supported by approximately \$300,000 in private sector financial and in kind commitments.

Since its inception, CBERN has received an additional \$152,000 in SSHRC grants with Dr. Cragg, CBERN's Project Director and Principal Investigator, as the lead applicant; \$125,000 in Schulich School of Business and York cash contributions; modest additional private sector funding, and significant additional in kind contributions from partners: firms, research centres, voluntary sector organizations, and volunteer interns. CBERN has been a partner on an additional \$1,269,000 in SSHRC grants as well as a

\$25 million dollar Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) grant for the Canadian International Institute for Extractive Industries and Development (CIIEID).

Among its achievements and activities is an online presence designed to play the role of a national online agora or gathering place for the discussion of ethics and business in all its various dimensions. CBERN's online presence includes a Twitter account with over 1500 followers, a Facebook group with over 200 members, and a website that generates over 145,000 unique page views per year.

CBERN has built a membership database of over 1100 members comprised of; Aboriginals (3%); academics (faculty and students-41%); business and professional practitioners (25%); public/government civil servants (9%); and not for profit/NGO (23%) leaders. The CBERN website database also includes:

- profiles of over 500 individual researchers and practitioners;
- profiles of over 170 organizations, corporations and research centres actively engaged in research, the creation and implementation of ethics standards, and the integration of ethical values and principles into strategic planning and day to day operations;
- an events calendar of almost 950 business ethics event listings;
- an e-library of over 1000 research publications and reports;
- over 500 news stories and;
- over 70 blog posts.

The initial research themes for the network included:

- The Ethics of Resource Extraction (currently 390 participants);
- Socially Responsible Investment (currently 401 participants);
- Business and Spirituality (currently 120 participants);
- Business and Human Rights (currently 433 participants).

Subsequently, Governance, Law and Public Policy has been added as a cluster (currently 563 participants).

The original proposal called for the creation of a PhD cluster comprised of PhD students exploring themes in business ethics across Canada. That cluster now has 112 participants.

CBERN's research impact has been substantial. Highlights of research outputs include:

- A special issue of the *Journal of Sustainable Finance and Investment* featuring 4 papers from an SRI and Canadian Extractives event hosted by Dr. Ben Richardson, co-chair of the CBERN SRI cluster and Canada Research Chair in Environmental Finance and Law, UBC Law Journal.
- An edited volume, *Business and Human Rights* with Edward Elgar publisher featuring 11 papers flowing from a SSHRC-funded Business and Human Rights Symposium hosted by Dr. Cragg.
- A special issue of *Business Ethics Quarterly* featuring 6 papers from a SSHRC-funded Business and Human Rights Symposium edited by Wesley Cragg.
- A special issue of the *Journal of Business Ethics* featuring 5 papers from a SSHRC-funded Transatlantic Business Ethics Conference (TABEC) convened by Wesley Cragg on "Ethics, Corporations, and Governance" and co-edited by Wesley Cragg & Dirk Matten.

- A Naskapi Nation mining development knowledge needs report authored by Wesley Cragg and Peter Siebenmorgen, a Guelph University, Geography MA student.
- A curriculum development study and report for the Naskapi Nation Jimmy Sandy Memorial School initiated by Wesley Cragg with Celia Haig-Brown, York Faculty of Education, and Melissa Blimke, a York Faculty of Education PhD student.
- A Naskapi community well being base line study initiated by Ben Bradsaw, Geography, University of Guelph.
- An e-Library of resources developed for the Naskapi Project, including over 100 resources on community engagement, cultural and language protection, impact and benefit agreements, environmental monitoring, mining company information and planning, and mining education.

This list does not include publications resulting from network activities or from grants and projects in which CBERN has played a partnership role, for example, Dr. Kernaghan Webb's multi stakeholder mining case study entitled *Multi-perspective Collaborative Corporate Social Responsibility Pilot Case Study Project* and Dr. Tessa Hebb's Responsible Investment CURA. In these and a number of other projects, CBERN has played and continues to play a key research, networking, knowledge mobilization and public dialogue role.

To date, CBERN has:

- Engaged more than 85 undergraduate and graduate students in the current year alone in CBERN activities;
- Convened four cross sector, multidisciplinary national conferences from coast to coast;
- Organized more than 20 workshops and two think tanks across Canada, all involving active public, private, voluntary sector and academic (student and faculty) participation and dialogue;
- Developed a network and generated new research opportunities and partnerships with 17 grant applications with Dr. Cragg as Principal Investigator or participant and CBERN as a partner, 12 of which were successful.

Achievements: A knowledge creation and knowledge mobilization conceptual framework

In some respects, CBERN's most significant achievement is the success with which it has challenged the dominant, conventional models of research in the humanities and social sciences that compartmentalize knowledge creation and knowledge mobilization as distinct steps in a sequence in which knowledge creation precedes and is followed by knowledge mobilization and finally by public engagement. On this model, knowledge is first created, then it is mobilized and implemented and then as a final distinct step it impacts public discussion and public policy debates. This model finds expression in a number of different venues. One is a view of the academy as a kind of laboratory where ideas are conceived and developed by experts and then conveyed through publications and lectures to users for implementation. Academic conferences are typically organized on this model with presentations consuming 90% of allotted time followed by a few short moments allotted to Q & A, i.e. questions addressed to the presenters who offer answers reflecting their assumed role as experts.

CBERN is grounded on values and principles that challenge the rigid application of this model. CBERN approaches research as an activity in which knowledge creation and knowledge mobilization are dialectically integrated through conversation and structured dialogue. The spirit of this model is captured in the following comment:

“CBERN is based on the understanding that path-finding research related to business ethics is not confined to the academic world, but also takes place in companies, governments and civil society organizations. Therefore, one of CBERN’s objectives has been to facilitate the participation of experts from non-academic institutions in academic conferences and research projects on business ethics. CBERN has consistently used its leverage and convening power to achieve this objective. The many CBERN sponsored conferences and research projects that I have participated in, which have been focused mostly on ethical issues of the extractive sector, or business and human rights or corporate governance, have consistently served to facilitate intellectual exchange and to promote collaboration between scholars based in academic institutions and experts based in corporations, non-governmental organizations, and governments”

- Jim Cooney, former VP of International and Government Affairs for Placer Dome.

This approach to research can be seen reflected in the examples and illustrations of CBERN at work in what follows.

Impacts and Outcomes – Examples and Illustrations

1. *Changing the research paradigm:* One of CBERN’s earliest experiments was to sponsor and partner in a CSR multi-perspective multi stakeholder research project directed by Kernaghan Webb, a key member of the CBERN team, who had recently moved from Industry Canada to Ryerson University’s Ted Rogers School of Management. The purpose of the project was to pilot three case studies of the CSR profiles of three developing world mines operated by Canadian mining companies. The goal of the project was to link mine stakeholders directly to scholars as case study co-creators on the assumption that the result would be the development of cases that had a greater likelihood of being perceived as balanced and comprehensive. This project has resulted in three collaborative case studies carried out by a NGO/government/business/academic team of Canadian and international researchers of Canadian owned mines in Latin America and Africa. These case studies are available in English and in the local languages of the communities involved.

2. *Economic development, First Nation impact and Responsible Investment:* The importance of ethical economic development has been recently highlighted by the “Idle No More Movement”. One of CBERN’s key objectives has been to draw First Nation leaders and communities into network dialogue around economic development issues. One outcome is an active, working partnership with the Naskapi Nation, a self-governing aboriginal community located in Northern Quebec, whose traditional territory encompasses what is now known as the Labrador trough, a 100 kilometer long iron ore deposit.

At CBERN’s first annual meeting and conference, Phil Einish, then Chief of the Naskapi Nation of Kawawachikamach (NNK), pleaded with CBERN to help the community find answers to the social, economic and environmental challenges it was going to face because of impending mining developments on its traditional territories. Collaboration resulted in a successful SSHRC knowledge dissemination proposal. The result is an ongoing project designed to provide the Naskapi Nation with the knowledge tools they will need in order to ensure: (1) that they benefit from major mining developments now taking place on their traditional territories; and (2) that they avoid the social, environmental and economic costs so often associated with mining developments that impact aboriginal communities. Working with Naskapi leadership, Dr. Cragg and Dr. Bradshaw, Associate Professor of Geography at the University of Guelph, developed a plan to identify community concerns and hopes for mining development, conduct a

community well being base line study, and provide access to the information and knowledge the community would need to engage effectively in economic development planning and negotiate effectively with incoming mining companies and government. This project has received the active financial and practical support of the community itself and of New Millennium, one of the companies engaged in mining iron ore on Naskapi traditional territory.

This ongoing Naskapi “Whole Community Knowledge Mobilization Project” is designed to: (i) identify through interviews and focus groups the knowledge needs of the community as understood by the community itself; (ii) establish a community well-being base line against which the impact of mining operations on the community could be measured; (iii) build an electronic library tailored to meeting the identified knowledge needs of the community; (iv) mobilize the electronic library for community use through radio programs, focus groups, social media and the translation of summaries into Naskapi for community elders, (v) build the capacity the community will require to use the base line study research tools to monitor mining development community impacts; and (v) work with the Jimmy Sandy Memorial School located in the community to make the e-library accessible to school teachers for curriculum development purposes.

Project outcomes to date include: (i) a [report identifying community knowledge needs](#) based on research carried out by Naskapi research assistants, the first research project for this community in which the community was a controlling partner and where the results of the study were presented first to the community and then released publicly with their consent; (ii) a survey instrument with indicators tied to community values and a completed base line study; (iii) the beginnings of a community specific electronic library targeted to meeting community knowledge needs identified in the needs survey; (iv) first steps in mobilizing the library for use by the community through the use of: the Naskapi radio for interviews; discussions and reports (http://www.cbern.ca/research/projects/workspaces/cura_project/library/) translation of snapshots and summaries of library material into Naskapi; social media engagement (e.g. Facebook) directed primarily at community youth; and focus groups; (v) first steps in extending the project to include the community’s Jimmy Sandy Memorial School (<http://www.cqsb.qc.ca/jsms/>); (vi) expansion of the e-library to include curriculum development materials related to the knowledge needs identified in the knowledge needs study and; (vii) professional development workshops for school teachers. The extension to include the school in the project is being guided by Dr. Celia Haig-Brown, a York University Faculty of Education specialist in aboriginal education, with the assistance of two CBERN funded PhD students (one of whom is aboriginal) and with the financial and in kind assistance of New Millennium, one of the several mining companies with mining operations in the area.

This First Nation partnership and knowledge mobilization project has now been integrated into a Carleton University led, SSHRC funded Community University Research Alliance project. Among other things, the CBERN/Naskapi/CURA partnership will result in three academic papers setting out principles of responsible investment in the Canadian North. CBERN’s contribution to this project involves the coordinated research activities of researchers at the Universities of Guelph, York and Carleton.

As the project developed, Phil Einish, the chair of the project advisory committee wrote:

“I want to thank all who are involved in this CBERN network, to have us involved in this research community. Our young people are now realizing that there are opportunities for us to do research work through projects such as the Naskapi Nation Public Dissemination Project, for our young

Post-Secondary educated Students to be engaged in the research work developing case studies on the impacts on our communities where mining activities are now a big issue, such as in the case of Kawawachikamach.”

3. PhD Cluster: An example of CBERN’s Research Model: The structure and work of CBERN’s PhD Cluster illustrates most clearly CBERN’s research model in application. The PhD Cluster includes 112 PhD students from across Canada whose research focus is business ethics broadly defined. Cluster participants are integrated into all network activities and projects. In addition, twice a year, members of the cluster are invited to share their research in a workshop setting. Costs of participation are covered by CBERN. The most recent 2013 PhD Research Workshop took place over three days at York University and engaged 48 participants including 16 PhD students, 9 senior academics, and 21 business, government, and NGO practitioners and leaders. For a detailed description of the methodology that guides PhD cluster workshops, go to http://www.cbern.ca/research/clusters/phd_cluster/winter2013/.

As a sequel to the workshop, a webinar series was hosted in June 2013 in partnership with Canadian Business for Social Responsibility (CBSR). Three presentations were selected for the webinar series. Research summaries or “Snapshots” of the presentations were made available to webinar participants. The goal is to create an online program designed to mobilize workshop research, profile the research of young scholars, engage members of the business community (CBSR members) in a discussion of emerging issues, and build the knowledge mobilization skills of emerging scholars.

Sareh Pouryousefi, a recent University of Toronto philosophy PhD graduate and now Postdoctoral Fellow at Nottingham University in the UK, commented recently on the impact the PhD cluster has had on her education:

“CBERN has played an essential role in my academic and professional development, and helped me to acquire the skills necessary to be a successful researcher and a publicly engaged academic. CBERN’s research support and funding have helped me attend stimulating semi-annual research meetings in my field, meet new researchers working in business ethics and in other disciplines, and develop my cross-disciplinary research skills. I have had the opportunity to workshop my works-in-progress, and receive feedback and mentorship from leading scholars in an intimate, friendly environment. I have received valuable advice about the academic job market, and built relationships with international figures in business ethics. Furthermore, I have developed event planning and conference organization skills, and networked with key practitioners and industry representatives working in the field of business ethics.”

In summary: A cursory encounter with the daily news is all that is required to establish the importance of the values that guide business conduct. There can be few areas where dialogue is more central to effective, critical and scholarly understanding of those values and their social, environmental and economic impacts. CBERN’s unique approach to knowledge creation and knowledge mobilization is designed to contribute in innovative and creative ways to that dialogue. This brief overview illustrates the vision, significance and the impact of that contribution.