

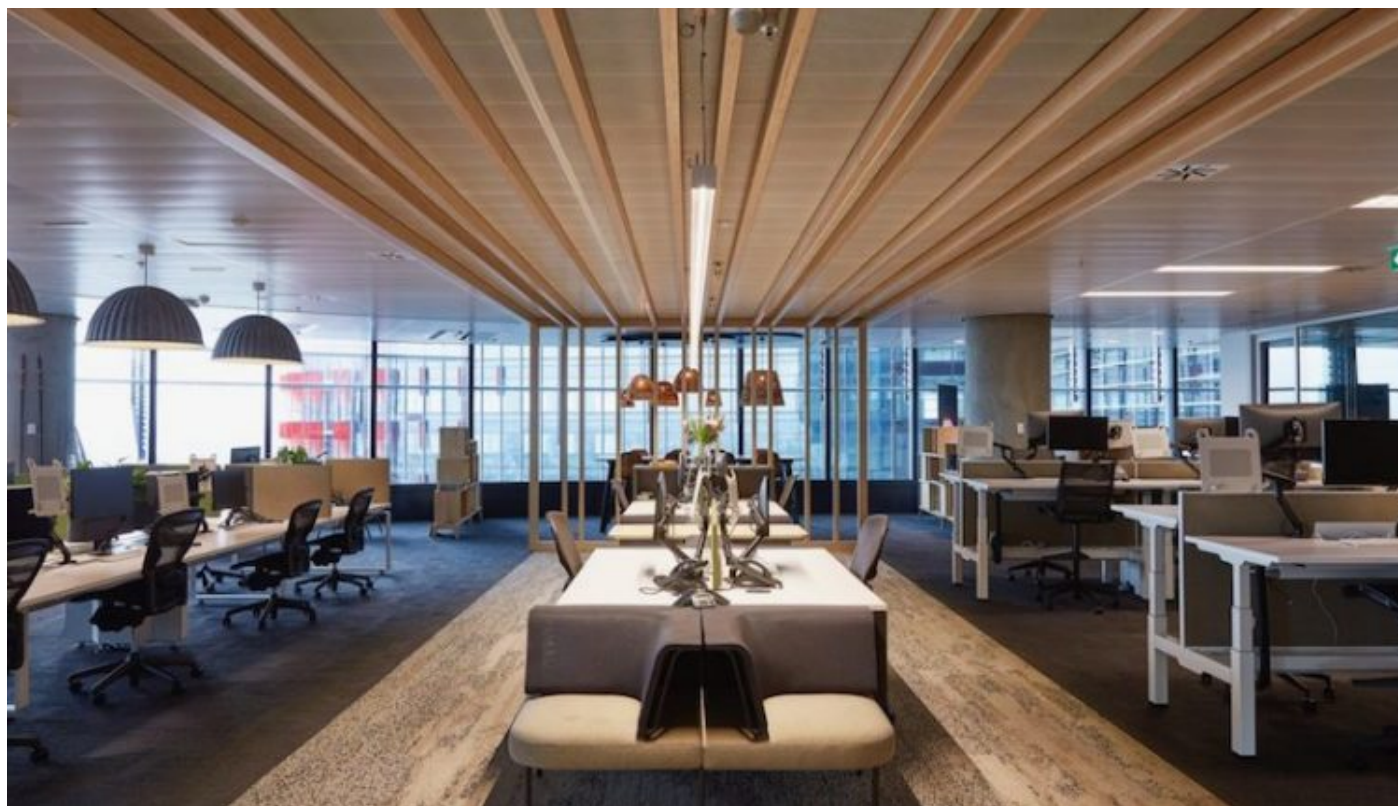


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OPINION

Ethics and Sustainability in Businesses and Workplaces

by Zainab Dere On Jun 27, 2019



Workplaces

The inculcation of ethics and sustainable practices in any organisation is crucial to its overall success. This is because ethical values create a foundation for a successful business in the long term. This was the focus of the discourse at the recently held Humanistic Management Network (Nigerian Chapter) business meeting, which was anchored by the Christopher Kolade Centre for Research in Leadership and Ethics (CKCRLE) at Lagos Business School (LBS). The theme of the business meeting titled “Ethics and Sustainability in Businesses and Workplaces” was aimed at deliberating on ethical business practices, which focuses on the long-term sustainability of businesses and workplaces.

Ethics have been defined as a branch of philosophy that involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct. It is based on well-founded standards of right and wrong that define what humans ought to do, in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues. Hence, Business ethics is about knowing what is right or wrong in the workplace and doing it.

The World Commission on Environment and Development proposed the concept of sustainability in 1987. It is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Hence, sustainability would foster organisational longevity. It is concerned about the continued existence of the business or organisation.

Scholars have noted that ethics is an issue of growing concern and of great importance to the business. They emphasized that running businesses ethically provide a potential analytical framework for evaluating the employee, management practice and the overall survival of the business. These practices are evaluated using a four-quadrant framework which evaluates them as good or bad, legal or illegal. Generally, a strong foundation in ethical reasoning is the best preparation for business success and its continued existence.

A number of practices which drive the ethics and sustainability of an organization were highlighted from both the employee and the employer’s perspective. They include a number of instances of ethical practices that affect sustainability, including short-changing of consumers by businesses, short-changing of the business by employees, product adulteration, over pricing, dangerous/inhumane work environments which expose employees to work hazards, shareholders manipulation, tax evasion, bribery, product misinformation, sales of expired goods etc. These sharp practices have been directly/indirectly encouraged when an organisation is lacking in standards of morals and ethics that should steer the running of the organisation. Employees who fear the possibilities of losing their jobs will remain and follow suit, while those with personal ethical standards will eventually leave when the system is morally bankrupt.

Most Nigerian businesses are founded on principles lacking strong ethical direction; with this representing a major disincentive to the growth and sustainability of existing and potential businesses. They seem to be guided by narrow selfish interests without consideration for the ethical implications of their actions on critical stakeholders, including, consumers, society and general

environment. Hence, the absence of core ethical principles tends to expose Nigerian existing businesses to growth retardation and further discourages honest potential investors who might want to invest in Nigerian businesses.

It is imperative, therefore, for businesses to have ethical principles enshrined in the organisational culture. It provides a moral compass in times of complexities about what is right or wrong. It guides employees to act diligently in the course of their job function. In general, behaving ethically is germane to business growth and sustainability. Hence, to achieve sustainable growth in business, there must be a deliberate attempt to incorporate ethical principles into business practices as a way of enhancing sustainable business growth and development in Nigeria. Some recommendations to curb unethical business practices include a change/improvement of the organisation's value system, compliance with regulations as regards the laws, as well as commitment from the government and its agencies to fight unethical practices, amongst others.

- *This article written by Zainab Dere is an excerpt of the Humanistic Management Network (Nigerian Chapter) Business Meeting anchored by the Christopher Kolade Centre for Research in Leadership and Ethics (CKCRLE) at Lagos Business School (LBS), titled "Ethics and Sustainability in Businesses and Workplaces". You can contact CRLE at crle@lbs.edu.ng.*

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