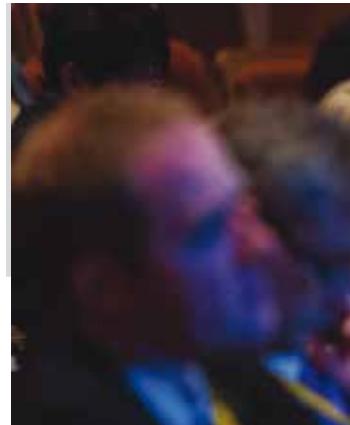


Danielle Steele and **Liane Weitert** describe how six business schools from around the world have joined forces to make the idea of applied interaction a reality

How many business schools does it take to change the world?



Because we are training the leaders of tomorrow, we have a responsibility to ensure that our students recognise the important role they will play in developing socially responsible business practices





In 2010, Dr Pierre Tapie, former Dean of ESSEC Business School in Paris, France, questioned what role business schools were playing in solving some of the world's pressing societal issues.

He recognised the enormous potential schools can have in finding or creating relevant, sustainable solutions to these global issues and determined to turn the theory of interaction between business and society into a reality.

Dr Tapie set out to create a global think-tank, an international network of leading business schools, which could contribute to problem solving from different, country-specific perspectives.

The idea was to have each of the partner schools involve their networks – from researchers and students to corporate, political and non-governmental collaborators – to form a global alliance. In the end, six business schools came on board, with a common belief in the power of academic excellence, global outlook, innovation, social responsibility, humanism and transformational leadership, to form the Council on Business & Society.

"Because we are training the leaders of tomorrow, we have a responsibility to ensure that our students recognise the important role they will play in developing socially responsible business practices," says Jean-Michel Blanquer, Dean of ESSEC Business School.

And Xiongwen Lu, Dean of the School of Management Fudan University in China, a member school of the Council, adds that "society is a big platform for any enterprise involved in higher education. As a leading institution of higher learning in China, we have a responsibility to proactively contribute our thoughts, insights, research and findings to benefit not only the international academic community but also the global economy". A series of conferences, known as International Forums, is one of the key elements of the Council's work. Although the six partnering schools are located on different continents, they mutually set the agenda for researchers, students, politicians, and representatives of corporations and NGOs.

Many months of preparation, co-ordinated via countless emails and video conferences, precede the forums, which bring together all involved for a rewarding and motivating experience. The personal exchange during the forums also gives an enormous boost to the joint research that flanks the conference preparations on a long-term basis.

"Motivation and mutual trust are essential when it comes to the Council's organisation," explains Christian Koenig, Associate Dean of Strategic Partnerships and International Relations at ESSEC and the Executive Director of the Council. "Communicating with the faculty and staff of six business schools in different countries has its challenges."

It all starts with organising video conferences, which take into account the time differences for each of our partners. When, for those of us in Paris and Mannheim, the call starts at 12pm. (lunchtime), it is already 7pm (dinnertime) for the Council team at Keio Business School in Tokyo and a mere 6am (coffee time) for our colleagues at Tuck School of Business in Hanover in the US.

Also, in addition to any technical difficulties that might hinder communication, video conferencing means we also have to keep in mind country-specific characteristics and methods of communication as well as different accents. During our calls, the different communication styles, cultural preferences and different decision-making processes become a lesson in cultural diversity and UN-style diplomacy.

During the run-up to the International Forum, Council members, headed by the Board of Deans, are in constant contact. Although the forums are hosted by each of the partner schools on a rotating basis, all decisions related to the event have to be agreed by each school.

All stages of the process from the conception of the forum's theme to the implementation and logistical organisation are based on group consensus and the various responsibilities are subsequently distributed among the schools.

Communication between the faculty and staff of the member schools is vital and as a result of our continued efforts the partnership between our institutions has strengthened significantly.

Council Executive Director Koenig adds: "The Council network has opened doors for joint projects in line with the mission of the Council. Our students collaborate on long-term projects such as the international student survey that examines a different topic each conference year.

They also bring life to the Council's social media channels by contributing to the Council Community blog and tweeting about the conference topics as well as topical issues related to business and society. Of course, as a reward for their engagement, these students are invited to attend the conferences and make presentations".

"We share the feeling that there should be an equilibrium of power and respect for both sides: social well-being and economic progress. Of course, it is a constant struggle. Our job is to give our students the tools to manage the balance," adds Dean Juergen M. Schneider of University of Mannheim Business School in Germany, another member school.

The first International Forum, organised by ESSEC, was held in Paris in November 2012 and focused on the theme of "Corporate Governance and Leadership". This year's conference, hosted by Keio Business School on March 6-7, 2014 in Tokyo, was the second the Council has organised.



This is what the Council on Business & Society, and particularly the International Forum, is about: global understanding, intercultural exchange, learning from each other, and sharing research results and business expertise that promote innovative approaches to problem solving





More than 230 participants came together to discuss "Health and Healthcare: At the Crossroads of Business and Society". Discussions revolved around questions such as why corporate health management is important; what are the challenges for the health care industry in ageing societies; and what are the latest innovations and technologies in health care.

"With the aging societies that you have in the developed world, health care is a huge and important issue. But it's also an important issue in emerging countries. It must be addressed not only from a public perspective but a private one," says Dean Maria Tereza Fleury of member school Fundação Getulio Vargas EAESP in Brazil.

For two days, healthcare experts and researchers shared their unique views – which differed due to their cultural as well as professional backgrounds – about diverse issues related to health and what role businesses can play in helping to solve some of the pressing healthcare issues.

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"We need to tell people in different countries about the benefits of the Japanese way of thinking. Partially because of the language barrier and partially because of a commonly held mentality to not aggressively self-promote, important messages are not delivered. This is a big challenge for Japanese business leaders," says Hirokazu Kono, Dean of Keio Business School in Japan, a member school.

Where is the Council on Business & Society heading?

Certainly, we will continue to disseminate the results and key takeaways from the forums and with this strive to make an impact on society in general. Extending the partner network and including more business schools from different regions are also on the long-term agenda.

For the near future, the alliance has launched its Annual Dean's Paris Seminar series, the first of which will take place in September this year. This seminar series will reflect on how business schools can affect business and society and on joint projects such as shared courses and research projects.

Our alliance is also looking forward to the next forum, which will be hosted by Tuck School of Business in autumn 2015. The forum will focus on the theme of Energy and Environment.

"The globalisation of business schools has followed the globalisation of business in the world. By now, it is pretty complete. No one thinks of a pure American point of view the way we used to. It's no longer an American-centric world," concludes Paul Danos, long-standing Dean of Tuck School of Business, who is retiring this year.



ABOUT THE COUNCIL

The Council on Business & Society is a collaboration between ESSEC Business School (France), Fundação Getulio Vargas EAESP (Brazil), Keio Business School (Japan), School of Management, Fudan University (China), Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth (US) and the University of Mannheim Business School (Germany), who together endeavour to implement a multicultural, multi-school process to study the critical issues facing business and society, organise a series of international forums and develop and disseminate educational materials designed to foster continued debate on these themes.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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