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With a position on the international stage as an organization fostering sustainable and socially responsible business practices, the university's **Business as an Agent of World Benefit** transforms the talk of social responsibility and helps businesses walk the talk.

REDEFINED

By Kristin Ohlson

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Set aside all the books and movies and even the news reports about rapacious businesses that will do anything for a profit. There's a new paradigm in town. Not just in Cleveland, but around the world.

According to a 2006 survey by McKinsey and Company, of 4,238 executives in 116 countries, 84 percent believed that business should contribute to the public good while also making a profit. Only three percent thought that their own companies were doing a good job of being socially responsible. This survey and other indicators show that there is a growing desire in the business community to do good while doing well—and a gap between that desire and the wherewithal for change.

“That's the gap we're trying to fill. Companies want to go down the sustainable and socially responsible path, but they don't know how. We're helping them on the 'how,'" says Ante Glavas, executive director of the Center for Business as an Agent of World Benefit (BAWB), a center of the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University.

The Center for Business as an Agent of World Benefit was officially launched in 2004, when former U.N. Secretary-

General Kofi Annan convened a summit to focus on a new kind of corporate citizenship for the 21st century. He wanted businesses to factor the United Nation's millennial goals, like environmental sustainability, into their strategic planning. Annan had a guest list of 400 global leaders, including CEOs from corporations like British Petroleum and Hewlett Packard, as well as civic, labor, and U.N. agency leaders.

And since he didn't want a repeat of the frequently contentious conversations between these groups, Annan tapped David Cooperrider, Fairmount Minerals Professor of Social Entrepreneurship, to design and facilitate the event. It was the first-ever gathering of business leaders at the United Nations, and a great success. Among its tangible results: financial organizations pledged \$10 trillion for socially responsible investing.

Roots of BAWB

Since then, the number of businesses involved in the U.N. Global Compact has grown to 5,000. BAWB became the Compact's North American headquarters and convened another summit in Cleveland in 2006, sponsored jointly by Weatherhead School of Management, the Academy of

Management, and the Compact. This summit again brought disparate voices together and helped them focus on doing business—and teaching others how to do business—in ways that are both profitable and accountable.

Cooperrider, BAWB's founder and now its chairman, had been bringing people together to seek common and positive purpose for years. This work had its roots in the early 1980s, while he was working on his doctorate at Case Western Reserve and researching the radical reorganization of the Cleveland Clinic into a physician-run institution. He realized that traditional methods of inquiry that focused on solving problems weren't constructive. Rather, he thought it was more important to concentrate on the organization's strengths. Out of this experience, he co-created an approach called Appreciative Inquiry (AI) with Ron Fry, associate professor of organizational behavior and department chair. Fry is also BAWB's faculty advisor and chief editor of the BAWB Innovation Bank.

“‘Appreciate’ means to value and see the best in the world, as well as to increase in value,” Cooperrider explains. “The whole field of social science has had the false idea

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that a system will improve if we recognize its weaknesses and try to fix them. Appreciative Inquiry takes the opposite approach: we look at everything that's most alive and effective in an organization. We look at the high points and study the root causes of success. We find that the more you study the good, the more it is magnified. The seeds of change are implicit in the first questions you ask.”

The Genesis of Change

Even before the U.N. summit and BAWB's founding, Cooperrider and Fry had been taking AI to the world. In the 1990s, the U.S. Agency for International Development gave them \$6.5 million in grants to study non-profits working on social issues like poverty. The two become more and more interested in the ways that business and society interacted.

“People often saw business as the evil, greedy hand that was creating or, at least, not helping to alleviate problems,” Fry says. “On the business side, it was a mixed bag. Some said that government should take care of society, and that business should create wealth that could be distributed through philanthropy.”

However, Cooperrider, Fry, and their colleagues were also unearthing stories

around the world about businesses that were making a profit as well as consciously addressing social and environmental needs through innovation.

Today, one of BAWB's main roles is to collect and popularize those stories through its World Inquiry project. Stories like that of Unilever, which has relieved poverty and reduced disease in India by creating an army of "empowered mothers"—formerly the poorest village women—who have become successful entrepreneurs selling soap. Stories like that of Interface, the world's largest manufacturer of carpeting, which has created a new carpet line that reduces installation waste and extends the lifecycle of an installation, among many other initiatives, to lighten the company's carbon footprint.

Sustainable Business Plans

BAWB also works with many companies to create their own sustainability and social responsibility success stories. The center has developed several vehicles for companies seeking a path to implement sustainable practices. One is the Sustainable Value Institute, a multi-day, multi-company session where companies develop targeted strategies and action plans. Cooperrider and Fry and their colleagues bring a toolkit of

concepts and techniques into sessions with hundreds of people, including top corporate officers, line workers, and often suppliers and customers. Ideas and innovations flow; buy-in is generally assured.


For instance, BAWB sessions have helped Wal-Mart work with the magazine industry to cut global waste by 50 percent—the equivalent of a belt of magazines circling the world 13 times.

Chuck Fowler, one of Cooperrider's former MBA students, is now the CEO of Ohio-based Fairmount Minerals, a mining company that produces industrial sand and one of BAWB's most enthusiastic supporters. By now, 70 percent of Fowler's workforce has been engaged in AI, and they've helped the company work sustainability and social responsibility into every part of its operations. In addition, the company is now partnering with the non-profit Aqua Clara Foundation to create water purification systems in developing countries, contributing money, financial assistance, and filtration materials that are a byproduct of its own operations.

Like many other companies, Fairmount Minerals found that they can do very well by doing good. "There are lots of ways to measure the impact of this work," says Fowler, who has donated \$2.6 million

to Weatherhead for an endowed chair in social entrepreneurship and financial backing for BAWB. "We can measure it in the attitudes of our people, in absenteeism and turnover, in the kind of people we attract. We can measure it in our communities. The mining business is very dependent on good relationships with our communities, and we have that. We've had phenomenal growth."

Various surveys demonstrate that employees who believe their company is socially responsible are more motivated and productive. A BAWB survey also showed that 80 percent of MBA students want to work for a company dedicated to more than making money. For business people who look longingly at the bottom-line value of sustainability and social responsibility but don't know how to get there, BAWB offers hope.

"A lot of these people are good people," says Glavas. "They have good families, and they're active in their community. They're just used to putting on a different hat when they go into work. But if they can find ways to do something good for the environment and the world and also make a profit, they'll embrace it." 

LEARN FROM *EXPERIENCE*

In an effort to gather success stories from around the world, BAWB created the Innovation Bank, an online resource that collects short case studies from the profit and non-profit business world – creating a reference that maps successful efforts by these businesses to implement sustainable and ethical practices in key operational areas. The site features examples for nearly every business sector

and provides a synopsis of targeted business practices, including restorative redevelopment, responsible forestry, new generation recycling, company wellness programs, and community development partnerships. From non-profit businesses like Newman's Own to for-profit organizations like Worthington Industries, the site showcases what works for the global community and the bottom line.