

**Summary of The Erb Institute/World Environment Center Roundtable on
“Managing Human Rights Issues in Global Companies:
What Are Best Practices and How Are They Implemented?”
Ann Arbor, Michigan March 30-31, 2016**

Objectives: The Roundtable had three major objectives: 1) identify human rights expectations for global companies at a time of rapid change in the human rights agenda; 2) advance understanding of how leading global companies are implementing human rights issues into their business strategies and operations; and 3) review specific assessment methods and tools that aid companies’ management of human rights challenges.

Background: Twenty-six professionals participated in the Roundtable, including senior company executives, external thought leaders, Erb Institute faculty and students. The companies represented the automotive, chemical manufacturing, hospitality and lodging and professional services sectors.

Speakers:

Marianna Kerppola, Erb Institute student
Theresa Loar, CH2M
Roger McElrath, Business for Social Responsibility
Denise Miller, Erb Institute student
Terry Nelidov, The Erb Institute
Thomas Niemann, Ford Motor Company
Cazzie Palacios-Brown, Erb Institute student
Michael H. Posner, New York University
Kristine Schantz, Erb Institute student
Mari L. Snyder, Marriott International
Mark Weick, The Dow Chemical Company
Terry F. Yosie, World Environment Center

Dr. Michael H. Posner, New York University professor and Chair of the World Economic Forum initiative that published the report *Shared Responsibility: A New Paradigm for Supply Chains*, made a number of important observations in his keynote remarks, including:

- Business and human rights is a relatively new field whose rules are still undergoing definition.
- Human rights standards should be tailored to each industry.
- The connection of human rights to a company’s business model is an important relationship that lacks sufficient clarity.
- Endorsement of human rights principles do not carry the same authority as implementation of standards.
- The C-suite should own a company’s human rights policies and commitments.
- Human rights issues must connect to how a company makes money.

Human Rights Assessment Tools: Four Erb students presented two human rights tools for impact assessment and implementation. Roundtable participants provided comments on the tools, and they will be distributed when finalized by the students.

Major Roundtable Conclusions: Roundtable participants developed a number of shared conclusions:

1. Company human rights policies must account for a rapidly changing agenda for inclusion and diversity (including LGBT rights), the disabled community, privacy and security, human trafficking, inclusion of human rights with materiality assessments and sustainability reporting, and expectations for greater transparency.

2. Companies need to leverage their own support for human rights protections at market scale through collaboration with other business partners and peers, through stakeholder and government partnerships and alignment with goals set by the UN and other global bodies.
3. Human rights are expected to become more prominent in talent recruitment and retention and are important in achieving a more diverse work force. Progressive companies are applying their commitments to high ethical standards as a recruiting tool.
4. Regulatory standards and enforcement of human rights will likely be applied to supply chains, human trafficking and other challenges. However, business will be expected to manage human rights issues more aggressively where governments have not acted. Moreover, site-level ownership of these processes will be key, as opposed to periodic visits from external auditors or stakeholders.
5. The confluence of hyper-transparency and technology can aid human rights as it is increasingly possible to identify human rights abuses. For example, 70% of migrant workers in Qatar now possess mobile phones, thus increasing knowledge of working and living conditions.
6. The UN Guiding Principles are an excellent starting point but there is a real need to hone the definitions and metrics behind them to fit specific business operations.