What You Need to Know about Connections

With this issue of Connections, the Kettering Foundation introduces three significant initiatives for the newsletter.

The first is a decision to change Connections from a biannual publication to an annual. This new schedule corresponds with Kettering’s review cycle, which goes like this: each year, Kettering focuses its research through a particular point of view, or, as we say at the foundation, lens. The foundation’s research has three fundamental foci: citizens, communities, and democratic institutions. This reflects Kettering’s hypothesis that democracy requires the following:

• citizens who can make sound decisions about their future;
• communities of citizens acting together to address common problems;
• institutions that are legitimate in the eyes of citizens and that support a democratic society.

By publishing Connections once a year, it will serve as a record of the foundation’s research focus over the previous 12 months. Therefore, as you’ll find throughout the following pages, this issue of Connections reflects the foundation’s research over the last year—through the lens of citizens.

The second initiative is the addition of a new section, the “Readers’ Forum.” As its name implies, the new section features reactions and comments by Connections readers, who were invited to review drafts of many of the articles that appear in this newsletter. With the help of our colleagues Connie Crockett and Alice Diebel, we interviewed 13 people from around the country about how their experiences relate to these articles. This feedback is organized into three articles related to the foundation’s hypothesis about democracy, as noted above. The “Forum” is described in more detail on page 33.

To make the new section a true “Readers’ Forum,” the foundation has devised a new way for readers to react to—and even to read—Connections. This is the third initiative: the creation of a new discussion area on the foundation’s Web site, www.kettering.org. On the Web site you’ll find a new section devoted to this issue of Connections and comment areas where readers can participate in a forum around the ideas expressed in the articles published in this issue.

The addition of both the print and online “Readers’ Forum” is an attempt to help readers better connect to Connections—and the Kettering Foundation. But remember: the online forum will only be as good as you, our readers make it.

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Perhaps even more troubling than recent questionable business practices and corporate scandals, says Dan Yankelovich in Profit with Honor, are the ways governments are trying to hold businesses accountable and rectify their wrongdoings. Increased laws and regulations seem to be the primary method, but fall very short of their noble purposes because they do not have a normative climate to support them. Yankelovich advocates for a combination of regulations and norms that mutually support each other in encouraging companies to do the right things, not the wrong ones. He offers a timely plea for the business community to turn the scandals of recent years to good use, both for business itself and for the larger society.

He contends that the main cause of recent scandals is “an extraordinary convergence of three trends, the sort of rare phenomenon that generates what people like to call ‘a perfect storm.’” (3) The three trends are deregulation, linking the richest part of CEO compensation to the vagaries of the stock market, and the steady importation of social norms from the larger culture into corporate life. The combination of these forces, Yankelovich says, “invents a machine for scandal.” (4)

Coupled with increased corporate scandals and unethical behavior, Yankelovich points to the wider context of the American public. He contends that we have become “absorbed in, and distracted by, a struggle to rediscover our own ethical bearings.” (16) In essence, Americans want firmer ethical ground on which to stand, but are not exactly sure how to obtain it. They know something is terribly wrong, but do not have a clear sense of what it is, much less how to fix it. Most Americans, Yankelovich says, believe businesses should play a pivotal role in restoring ethical behavior. He contends that Americans now expect a higher standard from businesses: Americans want car manufacturers to lessen our nation’s energy dependence, BP and Shell to research alternative fuels, and Citigroup and other financial institutions to address the capital needs of developing nations.

Yankelovich introduces “stewardship ethics” to convey the commitment to care for one’s institution and those it serves in a manner that responds to a higher level of expectations. Furthermore, stewardship ethics is an idea that reconciles long-term profitability with the greater public good, concepts that some may see as mutually exclusive. This vision is surely needed, as sweeping change is already happening in the business world, and people have higher expectations of how businesses should operate.

— Matthew Johnson

**Profit with Honor: The New Stage of Market Capitalism**

by Daniel Yankelovich

New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006

Matthew Johnson is a research assistant with the Kettering Foundation. He can be reached at mjohnson@kettering.org.
The Kettering Foundation, chartered in 1927, is a research foundation rooted in the American tradition of inventive research. Its founder, Charles F. Kettering, holder of more than 200 patents, is best known for his invention of the automobile self-starter. He was interested, above all, in seeking practical answers to “the problems behind the problems.”

The foundation today continues in that tradition. The objective of the research now is to study what helps democracy work as it should. Seven major Kettering programs are designed to shed light on what is required to strengthen public life.

Kettering is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) research organization supported by an endowment. For more information about KF research and publications, see the Kettering Foundation’s Web site at www.kettering.org.

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