

The business case for integrity



United Nations
Global Compact

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Introduction

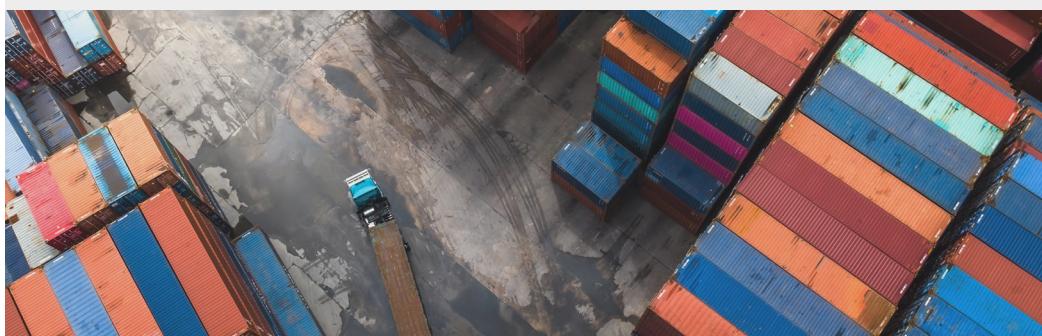
This 2025 update of the original report titled Clean business is good business: The business case against corruption serves as a call to action from the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the United Nations (UN) Global Compact and Transparency International, urging all businesses to keep integrity at the top of the agenda and emphasising that doing the right thing matters now more than ever.

In the nearly two decades since the original publication was issued, the world has changed, and the global operating environment for companies has evolved dramatically.

While fighting corruption remains a central aim to advance sustainable development, it has also become one pillar across integrated business functions for sustainability, supply chain responsibility and human rights.

In today's interconnected world, geopolitical tensions are fragmenting regulatory cooperation, leading to increased complexity and unpredictability for companies operating internationally and SMEs.

Against this backdrop, it is imperative for businesses of any size to reaffirm that, despite these tensions, indeed perhaps even because of them, the case for doing business with integrity is stronger than ever.



1. A strong business case: Benefits of leading with integrity

Integrity, sustainability and human rights: The interlinked agenda

Today, integrity is intrinsically linked with sustainability and human rights. While fighting corruption continues to be an essential priority for businesses, the scope of integrity has broadened to encompass a wider array of responsibilities. This now includes not only anti-corruption strategies but also initiatives aimed at preventing fraud, organised crime and diverse forms of economic misconduct, all while supporting the advancement of environmental, social and governance (ESG) objectives.

Business integrity is the enabler of broader sustainability goals such as climate action, gender equality and human rights, making progress credible and durable.

As this broader understanding of integrity continues to reshape corporate behaviour, it has become a defining element of organisational resilience. In times of regulatory uncertainty, integrity is the catalyst that:

- Enhances **corporate value and brand equity**
- Strengthens and sustains **resilient and responsible supply chains**
- Drives **investor confidence**
- Facilitates **market access and business opportunities**
- Attracts **principled and purpose-driven talent**
- Contributes to long-term **sustainable growth**
- Mitigates the growing risk **of reputational damage**

	Benefits of integrity	Risks of inaction
Individual company action	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Reduction of operational costs and legal risks✓ Competitive advantage through an ethical reputation✓ Improved access to capital and insurance✓ Enhanced ability to attract and retain ethically minded talent✓ Better crisis resilience and long-term value creation✓ Potential mitigation of sanctions in administrative proceedings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exposure to fines, sanctions and exclusion from contracts• Reputational damage and loss of consumer trust• Challenges in attracting ethical investors and in obtaining insurance coverage• Reduced competitiveness and difficulty establishing a strong market presence• Lower employee morale and higher employee turnover rates• Heightened vulnerability to geopolitical instability and regulatory changes
Collective action by business	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Enhanced public trust in business✓ Ability to positively shape and contribute to future laws, regulations, and standards✓ Creation of fairer, more transparent, and sustainable markets✓ Improved trust in governmental business and public contracts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Missed business opportunities in distorted and unfair markets• Exacerbation of systemic corruption and unethical practices• Laws and regulations that may lack practical alignment with business realities

2. New risks in an uncertain enforcement climate

While some jurisdictions are strengthening anti-corruption frameworks, others are rolling them back or applying them inconsistently. This fragmented landscape increases legal and operational uncertainty, particularly for multinational companies operating across different regions.

The current regulatory environment of unpredictability and fragmentation extends beyond uneven enforcement of anti-corruption regulations and laws. For instance, shifting trade policies on tariffs increasingly affects companies' broader approaches to risk assessment and responsible supply chain management.

Moreover, selective enforcement can expose businesses to politicised scrutiny, while uncoordinated or overlapping regulations increase the cost and complexity of compliance.

In such an environment, companies must lead by example by building and driving strong internal cultures of integrity, compliance and transparency, regardless of external enforcement pressure.

3. Catalysts for achieving integrity

AI for integrity

Artificial intelligence (AI) can play a transformative role in promoting integrity within business. It can support organisations in multiple ways, including:

- ✓ Implementing risk-based transaction monitoring through machine learning, enabling early detection of suspicious activities and anomalies
- ✓ Automating due diligence processes across complex global supply chains, improving the speed, accuracy and consistency of third-party assessments
- ✓ Enhancing whistleblowing mechanisms and internal investigations through AI-powered analytics, facilitating real-time reporting, analysis and follow-up on potential misconduct

By harnessing the transformative power of AI, businesses can turn technology into a force for good that strengthens integrity across their business operations.

However, the responsible deployment of AI requires robust governance frameworks, commitment to fairness and transparency in model design and decision-making processes, regular independent audits to ensure accountability, and protections around personal data to foster responsible use of technology.

The power of collective action

No company can tackle systemic corruption alone. Business-led coalitions remain essential to addressing market-wide challenges such as:

- Abuse of power by public and private actors
- Widespread use of facilitation payments
- Threats, extortion and other coercive practices by criminal organisations
- Uneven access to information for international business transactions, including disparities in corporate transparency, beneficial ownership disclosure and public record accessibility, among others

By working collectively, companies can help level the playing field, promote fair competition and strengthen integrity across entire markets.

Global anti-corruption initiatives, such as the ICC Global Commission on Business Integrity, the Business Principles of Transparency International and the 10th Principle of the UN Global Compact play a crucial role in advancing integrity worldwide, by fostering:

- ✓ the establishment of common standards and best practices, including for small- and medium-sized enterprises
- ✓ cross-industry initiatives and knowledge sharing
- ✓ the development of shared tools and peer benchmarking mechanisms
- ✓ constructive dialogue with regulators and civil society
- ✓ strengthened data governance and compliance reporting through automated alerts and risk indicators
- ✓ responsible use of AI to identify unusual behaviours and prevent fraudulent practices

4. A call to action: Business as a force for integrity

Integrity is far more than a regulatory checkbox. It is a forward-looking strategy for resilience in an age of ever-growing complexity. It reinforces the foundation of innovation, sustainability, trust and long-term profitability.

In a world where geopolitical tensions and inconsistent regulatory enforcement are testing multilateral norms, the private sector must rise to the occasion – not merely to comply, but to lead.

Continuing to strengthen integrity frameworks during times of global turmoil is an investment in the future. History will remember how businesses upheld responsibility and ethics amid uncertainty. Now is the time to lead with conviction, embed integrity at the core of all decisions, and to set the standard of conduct for the generations to come.



About the International Chamber of Commerce

The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) is the institutional representative of more than 45 million companies in over 170 countries. ICC's core mission is to make business work for everyone, every day, everywhere. Through a unique mix of advocacy, solutions and standard setting, we promote international trade, responsible business conduct and a global approach to regulation, in addition to providing market-leading dispute resolution services. Our members include many of the world's leading companies, SMEs, business associations and local chambers of commerce.

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About Transparency International

Transparency International is a global movement working in over 100 countries to end the injustice of corruption.

We focus on issues with the greatest impact on people's lives and hold the powerful to account for the common good. Through our advocacy, campaigning and research, we work to expose the systems and networks that enable corruption to thrive, demanding greater transparency and integrity in all areas of public life.

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About the United Nations Global Compact

The ambition of the UN Global Compact is to accelerate and scale the global collective impact of business by upholding the Ten Principles and delivering the SDGs through accountable companies and ecosystems that enable change. With more than 20,000 participating companies, 5 Regional Hubs, 66 Country Networks covering 85 countries and 9 Country Managers establishing Networks in 16 other countries, the UN Global Compact is the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative — one Global Compact uniting business for a better world.

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