



Need, creed, and greed: Understanding why business leaders focus on issues of peace

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KEYWORDS

Business;
Private sector;
Peacebuilding;
Motivation

Abstract While we know that business is key for stable peacebuilding, less is known about why business actually becomes involved in peace processes and peacebuilding. Based on a review of the academic literature and of case studies at the global level, this article addresses this question from three perspectives: First, business *needs* peace to solve specific problems related to their operations in unstable contexts. Second, some business leaders believe that social change is positive and in their self-interest and are willing to promote transformations (*creed*). Finally, business participation in peacebuilding may be motivated by the anticipation of renewed investment, profit, and growth (*greed*). The article argues that none of these perspectives alone can explain the bulk of business participation in peacebuilding efforts. Rather, depending on actor and context, each business strategy can be traced to multiple combinations of these motivations. The article suggests that simplistic generalizations hurt the development of desperately needed partnerships in mutual learning processes between business and other social actors. We need improved knowledge and understanding of the mechanisms of private sector decision making in transitional processes in order to stem unrealistic expectations or frustrations as to the capability and willingness of the private sector in supporting peace-related activity. This interdisciplinary approach should draw from management sciences, political science, and economics.

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1. Need, creed, and greed¹

Since the publication of Jane Nelson's (2000) *The Business of Peace* and the first UN resolution on

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¹ Arnson and Zartman (2005) use the same concepts to refer to the factors explaining the onset and transformation of armed conflicts in an effort to qualify some of the previous assertions formulated by Berdal and Malone (2000) in relation to the political economy of armed conflicts literature.

cooperation between the UN and the private sector in 2001, the private sector has become the darling of international and domestic organizations seeking strategic partners in building sustainable peace. Since then, private sector actors—including multinational and domestic companies of all sizes and sectors as well as business associations and initiatives representing diverse interests—have become the focus of attention and efforts ranging from

rebuilding economies devastated by war to supporting processes of combatant demobilization, promoting Human Rights, and participating in memory-making efforts. In brief, it has become standard procedure for development and peacebuilding initiatives to design strategies aimed at attracting investors, companies, and other business organizations.

The reasons for the growing popularity of the private sector derive from what Mahon (1996) defined as the ‘structural power of capital,’ or the fact that regardless of business actors’ political intentions, their dominant role in capitalist systems invests them with the ability to shape political processes in greater proportion than, for example, social movements, although these may be larger in number and more visible in terms of their public strategies.² The reliance of capitalist systems on the welfare of business actors is also captured well in the prevailing ‘liberal’ peacebuilding model, which dispenses equal importance to the development of a healthy economy and of a functional democracy in the promotion of stable peace (Lemay-Hébert, 2013). More specifically, private sector actors are a crucial source of resources (e.g., land, capital, job opportunities), know how, and institutional capacity which stable and unstable systems rely on to promote peace and development. It is clear, therefore, why peacebuilding needs business.

Whereas the need for private sector involvement has been widely documented and undergirds multiple states, civil society, and multi-stakeholder peace initiatives, less is known about why business actually becomes involved in peace processes and peacebuilding. This article addresses this question from three perspectives:

1. Armed conflicts tend to affect economic conditions for investment, imposing all kinds of costs on the private sector, including operational and reputational costs. Under these circumstances, private sector actors become involved in the search for durable peace in order to control damage related to conflict and to solve specific problems related to their operations in unstable contexts. Here, I refer to this motivation as the *need* motivation: Business needs peace to resume operations and to become profitable again.
2. Business actors are not solely profit-driven machines, but socially complex organizations. The literature on corporate social responsibility has

emphasized companies’ willingness to prevent harm and do good as a result both of ideology (e.g., religious and philanthropic values) and of consumer-related demands (e.g., not wanting to contribute to child labor or deforestation or the violation of Human Rights; Doane, 2005; Vogel, 2005). Here, I refer to this motivation as the *creed* motivation: Often business leaders and actors believe that social change is positive and in their self-interest and are willing to engage in action to promote transformations leading to durable peace.

3. It is in the essence of business activity to seek opportunities for growth and investment (Friedman, 1970). When engaging in peace-related activity, some business actors are motivated by the classical profit motive or by the so-called peace dividend—that is, the expectation that there is money to be made once a country overcomes its conditions of instability. In this sense, business participation in peacebuilding may be motivated by the anticipation of renewed investment, revenue, and growth. I refer to this motivation as the *greed* motivation.

I argue here that none of the three perspectives alone can explain the bulk of business participation in peacebuilding efforts. Rather, depending on actor and context, each business strategy can be traced to multiple combinations of these motivations at any given moment (see Figure 1).

Furthermore, I suggest several factors that may explain the prevalence of each perspective in shaping actual business activity when faced with the impacts of armed conflict. These factors include aspects such as the nationality of business actors—multinational, international, or domestically-based—the sector of the economy in which companies operate, the size of the companies, whether companies act on their own behalf or as part of a collective endeavor, and the organizational trajectories of the companies. Based on this list of dimensions, I propose several hypotheses regarding the kind of business actors more likely, as well as those less likely, to become involved in peacebuilding.

In this article I first describe the evolution of the relationship between business and peacebuilding over the past 15 years, both in institutional terms and in terms of academic production. Then I analyze each of the proposed perspectives in greater detail with the support of examples that have been discussed in the academic and practitioner literature. Finally, I discuss particular combinations of motivations as they relate to some of the factors mentioned above. I conclude with recommendations for

² In accordance with the classic work of Charles Lindblom (1980), business enjoys a ‘privileged position’ in capitalist systems, due to the system’s dependence on business well-being.

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