English version
Universities’ critical view on ethics in the business context

There was a time when the one obligation of companies was to generate profit for their owners and shareholders, to employ people and to pay their due taxes. Companies that acted like this were considered good examples to society and therefore worthy of credit and recognition. Concerns beyond these were few and small, with few exceptions, and revealed certain myopia – now quite evident – on their social role and even on their part in the business context.

Times have changed. The world has changed. Society has changed. Consumers have changed. And universities have opened new critical perspectives in the debate about the business world and its relationship with society and the environment. New scenarios are followed by even newer ones, at an increasing speed and intensity, demanding different postures from social, educational, and corporate institutions and also from citizens. Such postures reach especially the ethical dimension.

At the corporate level, the challenge is to manage businesses based on such dimension. And it reaches an even greater expression when, on the one hand, concepts such as social and global responsibility, sustainability, environmental protection and consumer awareness are (or should be) part of the agenda of organizations, and, on the other hand, when the access to information and the constant trade of knowledge – especially facilitated by the new communication and information technologies – make people more and more critical and demanding as to the behavior of companies and large economical groups.

In most countries, we have yet to achieve a level of consciousness that leads to honoring or punishing companies according to their commitment or respect to the environment, to labor relations or to the present and future generations. However, such concern is already in the agenda of social movements, schools, universities, political groups and others, which means that there may come a time when companies that are not aware of this need may become unsustainable and disappear.

The whole set of perceptions makes the topic of corporate social responsibility relevant to being discussed in the context of education, especially within universities. This motivation leads the COGEIME Journal of Education to bring back the reflection on ethics in business.
The subject deserved attention two years ago, when the special bilingual edition gathered contributions from thinkers, scholars, theologians and activists linked to Methodist universities around the world who participated in a meeting called iBIZ 2008, in Honolulu, Hawaii (USA). Under the theme “Global technology, ethics and social responsibility: an agenda for interdisciplinary and international research on business network without borders”, the meeting was promoted by the International Association of Methodist Schools, Colleges and Universities (IAMSCU).

Stimulated by the Open Research Center from the School of International Management at the Aoyama Gakuin University (Tokyo, Japan), by IAMSCU, and by the United Methodist Church’s General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM - USA), researchers and people interested in the subject met in Washington, DC, in 2011, for a seminar discussing “Corporate Ethics and Social Responsibility.” In this context, the Journal once again provides important analysis and reports with different views, different cultures, produced by professors and researchers linked to Methodist universities and educational organizations from around the world.

One of the approaches presents the social responsibility practices adopted by retail and service companies in Brazil, and draws attention, among other issues, to how concepts such as social enterprise, sustainability, social networks, consumption, and others, are inter-related, and to the challenges faced by these segments. Another reflection seeks to show Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in emerging countries, and advocates that the debate on the democratization in Latin America offers arguments in favor of a reassessment of the common political definition of democracy and therefore of its very concept. Experiences coming from Angola – that makes efforts to prepare students and build institutions of higher education committed to ethical principles – and from South Korea – that assesses the evolution of the social responsibility scenario – complete this issue.

It is our with that COGEIME Journal of Education, imbued with the task of sharing different views, knowledge and perspectives on subjects related to education – its main focus – may contribute with readers by showing that educational projects cannot do without the zeal for ethical conduct, under any circumstances.

Good reading!

Paulo Roberto Salles Garcia
Editor-in-Chief