

BIOETHICALLY RESPONSIBLE COMPANIES

In the mid-20th century, bioethics emerged as a discipline introduced by the American biochemist Van Rensselaer Potter. It made its way by linking humanistic teachings, philosophy, and more specifically ethics, to the sciences. Considering the particular characteristics of the society at that time – following World War II, with new advances, discoveries, and crucial decisions that often involved choosing between the life and death of human beings – this multidisciplinary field remained closely tied to the health or medical sector.

However, as time progressed and society experienced technological and cultural advancements, this initially individual-oriented bioethics expanded into a social bioethics. It now encompasses not only medical ethics and the ethics of scientific research, to which it has always been connected, but also its extension into legal, political, social, environmental, economic, cultural, and human behavior spheres, related to life, health, or human dignity, in what is commonly referred to as global bioethics.

Global bioethics considers both its individual and social dimensions. It extends to all behavior that impacts the life of society, safeguarding the common good and inviting commitment to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. However, these contemporary challenges of bioethics are not solely the responsibility of governments. The ethical and legal responsibility that arises from these challenges applies to each of us as individuals and also to companies, understood as groups of people who establish a series of personal relationships with the common purpose of maximizing not only economic benefits but also social, cultural, and societal transformation.

Every company plays a significant role in the economic life of a society, but its actions should not be limited to merely achieving positive financial results for its shareholders, ignoring its social mission and the people who constitute it. This would represent an ethical deficiency. Alongside the challenge of meeting the expectations of shareholders and

other stakeholders, companies must take a leading role in the cultural and social growth of individuals and the society around them, addressing their basic or fundamental needs and contributing to the construction of a more just and compassionate society concerned for the most vulnerable, including, for example, their own workers.

These needs translate into demands for human dignity, freedom, and equality—fundamental freedoms and rights inherent to every individual simply by virtue of existing, which we refer to as human rights. These are conditions of life that enable humans to live with dignity, health, and respect, in a safe and peaceful environment. However, true rights cannot exist unless the obligation or responsibility to respect, guarantee, and ensure the effective realization of these rights is acknowledged. This is how responsibility arises, understood as the obligation of those tasked with respecting and effectively applying these rights—two facets of the same reality.

In recent years, factors such as globalization, rapid economic growth, increased ecological awareness, and advancements in information technologies have driven the awakening of social and bioethical consciousness. Bioethically responsible companies respect labor rights, ensuring dignified conditions, fair remuneration, and a commitment to the environment. Additionally, they act for the benefit of their employees and vulnerable sectors, demonstrating a consistent commitment to the welfare and dignity of people. This, in turn, justly earns them the designation of being considered bioethically responsible.

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