HCBM Brief

Ethical and Moral HCBM Principles and the major world religions

The HCBM Ethical and Moral Principles are based on the secular common principles adopted by the international community over the last one hundred years in the framework of international institutions through their legal instruments like treaties, agreements, resolutions and declarations. They are also very much in agreement with the common moral and ethical principles established by the major world religions.

The HCBM Research Paper Ethical and Moral HCBM Principles and the major world religions, authored by Pierre Viaud, shows evidence that the principles established by each of the major world religions may, in part, constitute a common platform for moral and ethical conduct among the nations forming the international community. The theological rules developed within the 14 leading faiths, more specifically the rules on corruption, extortion, bribery, and on honesty in business conduct, were examined and the outcomes of the study show that these rules, together with number of universal moral and ethical concepts, are common among the most followed religions in the world:

1. Corruption and the practices of bribery and extortion are universally condemned

The concept of corruption in Judaism, in Christianity, and in Islam is derived from that of the human body’s death and decomposition. The Hindu and Jain religions derive their condemnation of corruption from the the expectation of honesty demanded by their faith. Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Shinto and Bahá’í directly outlaw corruption.

The major world religions expressly prohibit bribery and extortion to their believers. In Christianity, The New Testament affirms the Old Testament’s censure of the variance bribe and adds to the Old Testament’s condemnation of bribe-takers by providing specific instances condemning bribe-givers, bribe-offerors, and the offer of a bribe. In Islam, the Qur’an explicitly prohibits bribery. Prohibition of extortion falls under Ta’azir rules. Confucianism enjoins the nobleman to correct these practices a posteriori in those who have not understood this moral imperative. All other religions condemn these practices a priori.

2. Common interfaith moral and ethical themes and principles applied to business

The sacred texts of the religions that account for three-quarters of the world population do not deal, of course, with contemporary forms of business. The contemporary theology of each of these major religions have developed sets of conclusions that examine ethical issues arising in a business environment.
The business ethics which derive from their sacred texts highlight a series of eleven common themes:

- The most universal prerequisites of the 14 faiths are honesty, trustfulness and justice.
- The second most commonly shared theme is the interdependence between individuals, society, and God.
- The third is caring for the poor, while the fourth is the protection of human dignity.
- The fifth is the legitimacy of business and profit that serves the interests of society.
- The sixth is the clear obligation to avoid fraud.
- The seventh sets an obligation for timely payments. The eight imposes stable and honest prices.
- Furthermore, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism and Baha’i highlight the divine ordination of wealth.
- Judaism, Catholicism, Daoism and Shintoism impose on their believers the need to care for the environment.
- Last, but not least, Judaism, Catholicism and Sikhism preach against discrimination to the stranger or based on gender.

The identified commonalities are a further recognition of the nearly universal value of anticorruption, antibribery and anti-extortion from a religious perspective. The eleven interfaith common themes are linked to the principles outlined in An Interfaith Declaration: A Code of Ethics on International Business for Christians, Muslims and Jews (1994). These common interfaith principles and themes are integral elements of the HCBM Ethical and Moral Principles:

1. Businesses should abide by principles of mutual respect, stewardship, honesty, trustfulness, justice, interdependence, caring for the poor, protection of human dignity, legitimacy of business and profit that serves the interests of society, obligation to avoid fraud, obligation for timely payments and stable and honest prices.

2. Businesses have a responsibility to future generations to improve the quality of goods, not to degrade the environment in which they operate, and seek to enrich the lives of those that work within it.

The inclusion in the Human Centered Business Model (HCBM) of the ethical and moral interfaith principles, widely agreed in the international fora and shared by large religions, is an element of universal sustainability and in line with the applicability of the Model.

The inclusion of the interfaith principles and themes within the Human Centered Business Model core objectives is therefore in line with a universal applicability of the Model.

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1 The common interfaith themes are also summarized by Dalai Lama in his book Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World, 2011