

Business and Human Rights

Ethical, Legal, and Managerial Perspectives

The first of its kind, this comprehensive interdisciplinary textbook in Business and Human Rights (BHR) connects and integrates themes, discussions, and issues in BHR from both legal and non-legal perspectives, and provides a solid foundation for cross-disciplinary conversations. It equips students, teachers, and scholars with the necessary knowledge to navigate and advance evolving BHR debates, and fosters a thorough understanding of the academic foundations, evolving policy spaces, and practical approaches in BHR. Short cases throughout translate conceptual insights into practical solutions. Study, reflection, and discussion questions help readers to consolidate and synthesize their understanding of the material and provide stimulating frameworks for debate in the classroom and beyond. The book features a collection of online resources to support students and instructors in their preparation for courses and assignments.

Florian Wettstein is a professor of business ethics and Director of the Institute for Business Ethics at the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland. Florian has published widely on topics at the intersection of corporate responsibility, business ethics, and business and human rights, and has been involved in numerous practical and policy initiatives and projects on those topics. He is the author of *Multinational Corporations and Global Justice: Human Rights Obligations of a Quasi-Governmental Institution* (2009) and editor-in-chief of the *Business and Human Rights Journal (BHRJ)*.

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Ethical, Legal, and Managerial Perspectives

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Preface

Over the course of roughly three decades, business and human rights has evolved from a niche discussion to an interdisciplinary scholarly field studied by a well-connected global community of scholars, featuring its own dedicated journal, its own association, and an annual event – the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights – which gathers some 2,500 business and human rights practitioners, advocates, policy-makers and academics at the UN’s Palais des Nations in Geneva every year. Business and human rights courses have proliferated at law schools, business schools, and in public policy and political science programs across the world. The number of business and human rights courses is increasing rapidly and so are extracurricular summer and winter schools, seminar and lecture series, and training programs. The Teaching Business and Human Rights Forum, a global platform for multidisciplinary collaboration among BHR teachers, unites over 350 individuals teaching business and human rights at more than 200 institutions in 45 countries on all continents (Ewing 2021). While most established courses are still found at institutions in North America and Western Europe, business and human rights is quickly entering the classrooms also in other parts of the world. This trend will continue over the coming years since business and human rights has also been gaining importance and influence in the international policy sphere.

What is still missing in this fast-evolving field of study is a “classic” comprehensive textbook. The book at hand is trying to fill this gap by providing a systematic interdisciplinary introduction to the field of business and human rights. Conversations that draw on insights from various disciplines are still a major challenge in this field. In this regard, business and human rights is no different than other fields of study. When highly technical analyses of human rights litigation meet pragmatic considerations on human rights management, for example, it can feel like two entirely separate and disconnected conversations. This translates seamlessly into business and human rights classrooms. What is being taught at law schools tends to have little in common with how the subject is taught at management schools. As a result, business and human rights students are trained without a common language.

Those of us who have taught interdisciplinary courses on business and human rights have experienced both the challenge of bringing students from different disciplines together in conversation with each other and the extraordinary rewards of successfully doing so. Classroom conversations are richer, more holistic, and cut deeper if students of various disciplinary backgrounds find a common language in

which to talk, work, and collaborate together. The presupposition of such conversations and collaboration is that students understand where their peers from other disciplines are coming from and that they grasp in a basic sense the foundational concepts and ideas that drive the discussion on business and human rights in those disciplines.

This is where this textbook is meant to make its contribution: Its *intention* is to provide a common foundation that allows us to approach business and human rights conversations from a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary angle. It shows the key questions raised from different disciplinary perspectives on business and human rights and connects them to each other across disciplinary boundaries. Its *aim and ambition* is to provide a teaching and learning resource that can be used wherever business and human rights courses are being taught: in business schools, law schools, or schools of public policy. The book is not meant to provide a resource only for interdisciplinary courses; perhaps even more importantly, it offers a comprehensive perspective on business and human rights particularly for courses that are taught *within* the various disciplines, in order to enable students to generate a more holistic understanding of the field. It is clear that such courses need to drill deeper on certain topics; it is impossible for an interdisciplinary introduction to cover all discussions in the various disciplines in detail. Hence, teachers are invited to complement the content of this book and add to it where they deem appropriate with regard to the emphases of their own courses and disciplinary specializations. The underlying *hope* is to contribute to teaching a generation of business and human rights students who will be able to converse across the boundaries of their respective disciplines. Years from now, when those students lead the way in business and human rights practice, policy, and scholarship, their ability to speak different business and human rights “languages” will translate into better solutions for those who matter the most: the people on the ground whose rights are impacted and violated by business operations.

Writing this book has not only served to address a glaring gap in the business and human rights field but has also provided an opportunity for me personally to reflect upon and “consolidate” almost twenty years of scholarship and teaching in this exciting field. Throughout those two decades I have met countless brilliant and exceptionally dedicated scholars, practitioners, civil servants, and advocates who have put their work at the service of human rights protection and invested much of their time and energy in building this field. Many of the conversations I have had over the years are reflected in this book. Knowledge is always generated collectively and so I collectively thank all those people who have shared their insights and expertise and who continue to impress me with their wisdom, work, and dedication, for being the source of inspiration and knowledge that any such book project depends and thrives on.

Special recognition is due to some of the junior and senior researchers at the Institute for Business Ethics at the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland, which has been my intellectual home base for much of my academic life. Laura Neufeldt-Schoeller provided outstanding research assistance during earlier phases of the writing process. When the submission drew closer and pressure was rising, I was fortunate to be able to rely on the truly exceptional work and help of Catherine McDonald and Stefania Marasco. Their heavy lifting enabled me to bring the project across the finish line. I am also grateful to Wangui Kimotho and Kebene Wodajo for their concise commenting on some of the more legalistic parts of the book.

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