

Issue-Driven Progress in Business Ethics: When the Responsibility to Protect Values Requires Companies to Introduce New Norms

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Abstract

This article is about when a company should introduce a new ethical norm. By using the Value–Belief–Norm theory, I argue that the more an ethical issue threatens an ethical value and the more a company has an ethical responsibility to protect such value against such threat, then the more desirable it is for a company to establish ethical norms to protect that particular value. The introduction of a new ethical norm then becomes more desirable when the threat from such an ethical issue increases and/or the ethical responsibility of the company increases. Distinguishing seven characteristics of an ethical issue and four conditions of a company’s ethical responsibility helps in identifying the situation in which a company should introduce a new ethical norm. The resulting framework, with corresponding guidelines, explains why and when progress in business ethics is needed.

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