

Book review: Klaus M. Leisinger, Integrity in Business and Society



Klaus M. Leisinger, *Integrity in Business and Society*, CRT publications Minneapolis: December 2021

This book is a "summa" of business and corporate ethics. It presents the condensed practical experience and reflected theoretical processing of the theoretical and practical discussions of the last three decades in this field of knowledge and action. Klaus M. Leisinger has been involved from the very beginning - as Professor of Sociology at the University of Basel, as Director of the Ciba-Geigy Group for East and Central Africa, as a shaper and leader of the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development, as a high-level player in the Global Compact Initiative and on the Leadership Council of the UNSDSN Network, as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of DNWE, as founder and President of the Global Values Alliance Foundation - to name just a few stages of his involvement. He has always been able and willing to "carry on both shoulders." The communication of practical ethical commitment of companies and their leaders and its theoretical classification in the scientific discourse are still important to him today. His new book "Integrity in Business" once again proves that he can do this like no other.

The perspective from which the book is written is that of enlightened "principle-based pragmatism". On the one hand, there is the individual motivation of ethical action, i.e., one's own conscience, the call to one's own dignity, and good will, which are prerequisites for successful business ethics practice. On the other hand, there is the specific situation, i.e., the business realities, the social and cultural regulatory structures and the resulting possibilities for shaping them, against which the individual motivation must prove itself. In this constellation, success for the ethical cause is possible, but so is failure. For Klaus M. Leisinger, ethical action is always voluntary, a "marathon race with many ascending slopes" that demands "idealism without illusion and realism without resignation". For this, especially in the executive suites of companies, specialist knowledge, expertise and character are needed, coupled with "ethical musicality and moral imagination". That, in a nutshell, is the basso continuo of the book.

It begins with a concise contemporary analysis of the ethical challenges, which diagnoses a trust deficit in the relationship between business and society. Trust, however, is the prerequisite for both economic success and social peace. For Klaus M. Leisinger, trust,

its acquisition and loss, is the decisive value from which modern business and corporate ethics can be developed. Its most important concepts and the competing possibilities of their philosophical justification are then introduced informatively, competently, and vividly in their divergent practical consequences. The tone of the book here, as in all other parts, is not "reasoning," but striving for clarity and intelligibility for readers from all sectors of society. The following chapters use this as a basis for raising questions about the attribution of ethical and social responsibility in these areas. The necessity and legitimacy of the division of labor between the actors in the moral arena - the state, the corporation, and the individual - are developed in a reasoned manner and illustrated with practical examples. In particular, the management of stakeholder relationships and the demands on character and leadership, in the spirit of Erich Fromm, are discussed.

Is there a "business case" for ethical corporate conduct? For Klaus M. Leisinger, there is no simple short-term causality in the sense of "good ethics is good business," but orientation toward ethical values is necessarily a systematic component of good, i.e. economically successful and socially responsible, corporate management.

The book is written in a clear and descriptive manner, without sacrificing the solidity of the transfer of theoretical knowledge. It is instructive for theorists and practitioners, for students and managers, as an introduction and consolidation. The language aims at the comprehensibility of complex practical contexts and the arousal of theoretical interest. Last but not least, it is an orientation for people who bear responsibility in our society, aiming at a successful human way of life and the creation of meaning.

Click [here](#) for the German [book review](#) of Klaus M. Leisinger, *Integrität im geschäftlichen Handeln*. Friedrich Reinhard Verlag: 2020: <https://www.forum-wirtschaftsethik.de/buchbesprechung-klaus-m-leisinger-integritaet-im-geschaefentlichen-handeln/>

About Prof. Wieland



Prof. Dr. Josef Wieland

Prof. Dr. Josef Wieland is Professor of Institutional Economics, Organizational Governance, Integrity Management & Transcultural Leadership at the Zeppelin University in Friedrichshafen, Director of the Leadership Excellence Institute Zeppelin (LEIZ), and Chairman of the German Network Business Ethics (DNWE).