Ethical Management Systems for Not-for-profit Organizations

ANTONIO ARGANDOÑA

Ethische Management Systeme für Not-for-profit-Organisationen

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have proven to be excellent instruments for promoting a wide range of causes. But they need to adhere to strict ethical principles, that they usually embody in voluntary codes and standards. This paper analyzes one standard, the “Ethics. NGO management system” standard, published by Aenor, a private Spanish organization committed to the development of standardization and certification. The analysis and comments are centered mainly on issues of accountability of NGOs.

Keywords: Accountability, Codes of Ethics, Ethical Standards, Non-governmental Organizations, Not-for-profit Organizations

1. Introduction

Non-governmental or ‘third sector’ organizations (NGOs) have grown rapidly in number, size and influence in recent decades. The third sector is made up of “not-for-profit organizations governed by private law and with independent legal status, pursuing programs of general interest for the improvement of society in the fields of social welfare and sustainability: community action, education, healthcare, environmental protection, development cooperation and sustainable development” (Aenor 2004: 1).

NGOs have proven to be excellent instruments for promoting a wide range of causes and contribute to the achievement of important objectives; they have shown themselves to be disinterested and effective; and their organizational flexibility has enabled them to address new tasks. As a result, they are generally held in high public esteem.

But recently they have faced a number of challenges. Under the influence of globalization and technological change, the framework in which NGOs operate has changed. People have become more sensitive to the problems (hunger, disease, inequalities, etc.); they also realize that many of these problems could be overcome or alleviated, and their values have evolved. All this has given a new dimension to aid, which is the basis for both the demand and the supply of NGO services.

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* Antonio Argandoña, Professor of Economics, IESE Business School, University of Navarra, Av. Pearson 21, E-08034 Barcelona, Spain, phone: +34-(0)93-2534-200. fax: +34(0)-93-2534-343, e-mail: argandona@iese.edu, fields of expertise: business ethics, corporate social responsibility, economic ethics, international economics, macroeconomics.

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