

Social Responsibility and the Role of the University in the Training of Students Committed to Sustainability

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Introduction

The global economic, social and environmental crisis has highlighted the urgent need to transform current development models. Problems such as the destruction of ecosystems, climate change, corruption and social inequality require professionals who lead changes towards sustainable development. In this context, social responsibility emerges as a fundamental pillar both for organizations and for the training of future leaders.

History and Evolution of Social Responsibility

- **Origins (19th and early 20th centuries)** : Social responsibility began with philanthropic actions by businessmen such as Andrew Carnegie, who promoted the use of wealth for social benefit through principles such as charity and stewardship.
- **Conceptual Development (1950s and 1960s)** : Howard R. Bowen formalized the concept in his work “Social Responsibilities of the Businessman “ (1953), defining social responsibility as the obligation to make decisions aligned with the objectives and values of society.
- **1970s** : The term “Corporate Social Responsibility” (CSR) was introduced, emphasizing that companies have obligations that encompass ethical and discretionary aspects beyond the economic and legal.
- **Strategic Integration (1980s and 1990s)** : Globalization and environmental disasters raised awareness of business impact. International standards such as the OECD guidelines and the concept of sustainable development in the Brundtland Report (1987) emerged. Freeman introduced stakeholder theory, focusing on the responsibilities of companies towards their stakeholders .
- **Consolidation and Standardisation (2000s onwards)** : CSR was integrated into business strategy. Initiatives such as the United Nations Global Compact (2000) and ISO 26000 (2010)

provided frameworks for implementing responsible practices, covering issues such as human rights, labour practices and the environment.

- **Current Trends :**

- **Sustainability and SDGs :** The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2015) guide companies in aligning their strategies with global goals.
- **Socially Responsible Investment :** Increased focus on environmental, social and governance (ESG) criteria by investors.
- **Technology and Transparency :** Social media and digitalization increase the demand for transparency and corporate responsibility.

Social Responsibility in the Current Context

In Latin America and around the world, many companies have incorporated CSR as an integral part of their business strategy, not only to comply with local regulations but also to align with global trends towards sustainability. According to the Ethos Institute, CSR transcends legal compliance, focusing on sustainable relationships with stakeholders in the short, medium and long term. Socially responsible companies promote sustainable development, respecting human dignity and the natural environment, seeking to balance financial objectives with community well-being and environmental conservation.

The Challenge for Future Professionals

Future professionals must become agents of change within organizations, ensuring that socially responsible companies become the norm. This involves making decisions that have a positive economic, social and environmental impact. Leaders must foster transparency, ethics and sustainability, facing obstacles and adapting to changing scenarios. Strategic planning must consider the comprehensive impact of business actions, promoting practices that drive sustainable and equitable growth, reducing inequalities and promoting community development.

The Role of the Free University in Student Education

The Free University plays a crucial role in training professionals who are aware of their social responsibility. It promotes values such as:

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- **Humanism** : Prioritize respect and human dignity.
- **Honesty** : Act with transparency and sincerity.
- **Tolerance** : Valuing the diversity of opinions and cultures.
- **Justice** : Promote equity and respect for rights.
- **Discretion** : Handle information responsibly.
- **Solidarity** : Showing empathy and support towards others.
- **Creativity** : Encourage innovation and original thinking.
- **Leadership** : Guiding and positively influencing to achieve common goals.
- **Critical Thinking** : Analyze and evaluate information objectively.
- **Ethical Performance** : Maintain behavior in accordance with moral and ethical principles.

Through academic programs, research and extracurricular activities, the university integrates social responsibility into student education, preparing graduates not only to be competent in their professional fields, but also to be citizens committed to collective well-being and sustainable development.

Conclusion

In a constantly changing world full of challenges, it is essential that educational institutions train professionals committed to social responsibility and ethical values. Universidad Libre is positioned as a key player in this process, preparing students to be leaders who drive a more just and sustainable future. Although the future is uncertain and full of obstacles, as demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential to trust that the tools and values acquired will allow us to face and overcome challenges. It is everyone's responsibility, especially the future professionals trained in institutions such as Universidad Libre, to lead the way towards a more equitable and sustainable world.