

Discussion activity 2.4

What are the arguments for saying that knowledge that is medically beneficial to humanity should not be private property?

Case study 2.5 raises similar issues to those discussed in Case study 2.3 as it reviews why a company acted more responsibly than was required by law.

Case study 2.5

Child labour in developing countries

The use of child labour by multinational companies in their factories in the Third World to produce cheaply the products they sell in western markets became an international issue in the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium. The United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Labour Organisation's Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (United Nations, 1989) condemn the use of child labour. NIKE in particular has been the subject of public campaigns against its labour practices in South East Asia.

Although the issue has been high on the agenda for many years problems still occasionally emerge. In 2007 a 10-year-old boy was filmed in India by *The Observer* newspaper making clothes for the fashion chain Gap. The newspaper was told that the boy had been sold to the factory owner by his family in payment of a debt; that he had worked without pay for four months and would not be allowed to leave the job until his family's debt had been paid off. Gap has a code of Vendor Conduct (Gap Inc., 2007), which states in relation to child labour, that factories which supply goods for Gap:

- will employ only workers who meet the applicable minimum legal age requirement or are at least 14 years old, whichever is greater; and
- must maintain official records that verify the workers' dates of birth.

The code also encourages factories to provide apprenticeships and educational programmes for its younger workers. Once the company became aware of the problem it investigated and discovered that the vendor had subcontracted the production of one particular garment to an unauthorised subcontractor (contrary to the Vendor Code). The order for the garment, a smock blouse, was withdrawn and the product was withdrawn from sale and destroyed. The company also said that it would hold meetings with its suppliers in Asia to reinforce its policies (BBC News Online, 2007a).

Discussion activity 2.5

What action do you think companies should take when they find their suppliers use child labour contrary to their company policy? Why do you think Gap destroyed the garments made by the unofficial subcontractor?

The next case introduces a new aspect of social responsibility, which considers when it is proper for a person to break their duty of confidentiality to their employer if they know that their employer is acting irresponsibly.