

Film List

Chapter 1 – Introducing Business Ethics

Erin Brockovich (2000, Universal): lightly fictionalized telling of the Pacific Gas and Electric Company case, where chemicals entered the water supply and harmed local residents. Covers issues of environmental degradation, threats to human health, sustainable business, and the difficulty of pursuing court cases against large firms.

Michael Clayton (2007, Warner Bros.): a “fixer” for a law firm has to protect his firm and its clients from a partner undergoing a breakdown. Examines issues of individual conscience, organizational culture, professional responsibilities, and how we insulate ourselves from the effects of our unethical decisions.

The Social Network (2010, Columbia): a drama that explores the early days of what came to be Facebook. Explores issues of intellectual property, individual ethics, loyalty, and trust.

Chapter 2 – Framing Business Ethics: Corporate Responsibility, Stakeholders, and Citizenship

The Rainmaker (1997, Paramount): a lawyer pursues a case against an insurance company for issuing policies in bad faith. Examines issues of fraud, misrepresentation, corporate (ir)responsibility, bad faith, and informed consent.

Erin Brockovich (2000, Universal): lightly fictionalized telling of the Pacific Gas and Electric Company case, where chemicals entered the water supply and harmed local residents. Covers issues of environmental degradation, corporate irresponsibility, stakeholders, sustainable business, and the difficulty of pursuing court cases against large firms.

The Corporation (2003, Zeitgeist): an impassioned and controversial documentary film that indicts large corporations as aggressive organizations that exhibit elements of psychopathy. Covers issues of corporate social responsibility, stakeholders, business and human rights, corporate personhood, and the role of states in effective regulation.

Chapter 3 – Evaluating Business Ethics: Normative Ethical Theories

Scrooge (1938, MGM): one of many good retellings of the Dickens Christmas story. Examines social justice, greed, generosity, and individual ethics, as the holidays force the characters (and the reader) to wonder about the meaning of it all.

A Civil Action (1998, Touchstone): a fictionalized account of the real life Anderson v. Cryovac case, where environmental lawyers struggled to hold large firms to account for alleged dumping of industrial solvents. Covers issues of environmental degradation, how environmental abuse can harm human health, sustainable business, and the ethical commitments of professionals to their clients.

There Will be Blood (2007, Paramount): an oil baron pursues a high-stakes claim. Examines issues of ambition, loyalty, business in weak governance contexts, workplace safety and environmental degradation.

Chapter 4 – Making Decisions in Business Ethics: Descriptive Ethical Theories

On the Waterfront (1954, Columbia): classic film that examines the seedy underbelly of the labor movement, and thus organizational culture more generally. Examines social justice, the labor movement, and institutional corruption.

Glengarry Glen Ross (1992, Artisan): a group of salespeople are made to compete to save their jobs. Examines the challenging labour market for older individuals, issues of respectful human resources, dubious sales incentives, moral luck, and workplace theft.

The Devil Wears Prada (1996, 20th Century Fox): an assistant to a top executive deals with unreasonable expectations and casual abuse. Examines issues of workplace bullying, ambition, loyalty, and work/life balance.

Chapter 5 – Managing Business Ethics Tools and Techniques of Business Ethics Management

Serpico (1973, Paramount): classic film, and true story, of the challenges posed to whistle-blowers. Covers issues of individual conscience, organizational culture, whistle-blowing, and corruption.

The Insider (1999, Touchstone): dramatized true story of Jeffrey Wigand, a former tobacco industry executive, who blew a whistle on practices in that industry. Covers issues of individual conscience, organizational culture, industry-wide corruption, and whistle-blowing.

Boiler Room (2000, New Line Cinema): a fictionalized retelling of the Stratton Oakmont “pump and dump” story, this film focuses on how low-level employees turn a blind eye to the unethical practices of their firm. Covers issues of fraud, wilful ignorance, corporate culture, and the intersection of individual and institutional corruption.

Chapter 6 – Shareholders and Business Ethics

Barbarians at the Gate (1993, HBO): a fictionalized take on the famous leveraged buy-out of RJR Nabisco. Examines issues of corporate control, shareholder activism, fiduciary duty, and the principal-agent problem.

Arbitrage (2012, Lionsgate): a financier needs to finalize the sale of his investment firm before his financial misrepresentations are exposed. Covers ethical issues of fraud, misrepresentation, and the regulatory challenges posed by the financial industry.

Chapter 7 – Employees and Business Ethics

How Green Was My Valley (1941, 20th Century Fox): classic film of the challenges that came with industrialization. Examines issues of social justice, sustainability, environmental degradation, labor rights, and organized labour.

Norma Rae (1979, 20th Century Fox): drama that examines labor organizing at an American cotton mill. Examines issues of social justice, safe working conditions, labor rights, and organized labor.

Matewan (1987, Cinecom): dramatized true story of labor struggles in the coal mines of West Virginia. Examines issues of social justice, environmental sustainability, and labor rights.

Philadelphia (1993, TriStar): fictional account of a lawyer with HIV/AIDS who is sabotaged and fired by his firm for his condition. Examines issues of homophobia, workplace discrimination, ethics & human resources, and organizational culture.

Office Space (1999, 20th Century Fox): dark comedy where employees struggle with well-paying but humiliating & alienating workplaces. Examines issues of organizational culture, employee satisfaction, and workplace misconduct.

Chapter 8 – Consumers and Business Ethics

Network (1976, MGM): satire where a news organization exploits an anchor's rage at the injustice of things, and where consumers fuel irresponsibility. Examines issues of exploitation, social justice, organizational culture, consumer ethicality, and individual conscience. Also examines specifically ethics in the media.

Food Inc. (2008, Magnolia): documentary film that examines environmental and ethical challenges in the agri-food industry. Covers issues of environmental degradation, sustainability, ethics of animal treatment, ethics of marketing, and the influence of firms on regulators through lobbying.

Blackfish (2013, Magnolia Films): this documentary examines the conditions under which orcas are held at theme parks, including SeaWorld. Issues of animal cruelty, corporate social responsibility, and workplace safety are examined.

Chapter 9 – Suppliers, Competitors, and Business Ethics

It's a Wonderful Life (1946, RKO): the holiday classic. Examines issues of individual ethics, community, weak governance, moral luck, unethical competition, and alternative financial institutions.

Gung Ho (1986, Paramount): comedy in which a group of American autoworkers adopts Japanese corporate practices and a new corporate culture in order to turn around a failing plant. Examines issues of cross-cultural communication, differing cultural expectations, how norms are embedded in local context, workplace bullying, and xenophobia.

The True Cost (2015): web-distributed documentary that examines the ethical challenges in the garment industry. Examines issues of social justice, corporate social responsibility, workplace safety, ethical challenges in value chains, and ethical certification schemes.

Chapter 10 – Civil Society and Business Ethics

Do the Right Thing (1989, Universal): the American new classic that examines race relations and issues of social justice through the prism of a local pizza parlour in a vibrant but troubled neighbourhood. Examines issues of race, divided workplace loyalties, community, and corporate social responsiveness.

Roger and Me (1989, Warner Bros.): landmark documentary that charted General Motors' decline, its callous treatment of its workforce, and the effect on the city of Flint, Michigan. Examines issues of globalization, the challenging labor market for former-manufacturers, organized labor, the impact of robots on labor markets, responsibility of firms for former employees, and corporate social responsibility more generally.

Fire in the Blood (2013, Sparkwater India): this documentary shows how pharmaceutical firms and developed world state governments intentionally obstructed efforts to provide low cost pharmaceuticals to HIV/AIDS sufferers in the developing world. Covers issues of just pricing, social justice, civil society activism, and intellectual property.

Chapter 11 – Government, Regulation, and Business Ethics

Enron: the Smartest Guys in the Room (2005, Magnolia): this documentary looks at the 2001 Enron scandal and corporate collapse. Issues of fraud, misrepresentation, organizational culture, regulatory failure, and accounting failures are all examined.

Thank You for Smoking (2005, Fox Searchlight): dark comedy looking at a lobbyist for the tobacco industry. Examines issues of lobbying, effective regulation, and individual ethics.

Too Big to Fail (2011, HBO): dramatized version of the non-fiction book. Examines the 2007-2008 Financial Crisis. Examines issues of regulatory capture, difficulties of regulating business, organizational culture, and individual ethical decision-making in crisis situations.

Chapter 12 – Conclusions and Future Perspectives

The Constant Gardener (2005, Focus Features): a diplomat investigates his human rights activist wife's suspicious death, amid charges of unethical pharmaceutical testing. A fictitious story with some similarities to real world drug testing scandals in developing countries. Examines issues of business and human rights, business amid differing state regulatory scandals, business in weak governance contexts, corporate social responsibility, social justice, and the ethics of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC).

Lord of War (2005, Lionsgate): fictionalized account of an arms dealer with some similarities to real-world individuals. Examines issues of social justice, corruption, weak governance, smuggling, and human rights.

Blood Diamond (2006, Warner Brothers): this thriller follows a Sierra Leonean man amid a civil war fuelled by "conflict diamonds". Covers issues of how extractive industries can drive conflict in weak governance situations, ethical challenges of professional private security firms, challenges of sustainable development, and more specifically shows the importance of ethical certification schemes such as the Kimberley Process.