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Business Ethics: Perspectives on the Global Supply Chain

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Abstract

This assignment was inspired by a group discussion by faculty who teach the First Year Seminar in Business (BTF101) during the 2018-19 Rebooting the FYS Seminar. BTF101 is a two-credit course that meets for a total of 3 hours. We were tasked with ways to improve course assignments aimed at strengthening students' Global Learning Competency and Digital Communication Ability. The topic of sweatshops abroad is a proven way to introduce a Global Learning assignment with a business related topic. In order to deepen the students' learning on the subject, the assignment tasks students with taking on the role of a Corporate Responsibility Officer (CRO) for Nike. In choosing to put students in this role, they are required to think of multiple perspectives as required by the Global Learning rubric.

The assignment includes several phases and culminates in a student-made video. The first phase of the assignment has students explore sweatshops through video, class discussion and a short writing assignment. The research material provided is intentionally focused on Nike's sweatshops so that students can narrow their focus to a particular instance of sweatshop usage in order to more readily formulate a company-specific response in their roles as CRO for Nike. Once the research phase is complete, students are asked to make a video explaining the issue to Nike in the role of a CRO. The students have to think about Nike's role as a business, the ethical issues of sweatshops and the ways in which they can address the issues. Students work on the assignment during the last third of the semester, and the assignment takes approximately 2 or 3 class hours. To make it manageable, I created an ePortfolio assignment template since students are required to post part of it on ePortfolio. The assignment is used as a final in my classes and worth 20 % of the overall grade. I grade it according to the College's Competency rubric, which is discussed earlier in the semester to ensure that students are familiar with the rubric. Finally, there are a variety of ways to use the existing materials. While the assignment is meant to address the Global Learning Competency and Digital Communication Ability, it also offers opportunities to support the Oral and Written Communication Abilities.

Reflection

This assignment is the first opportunity for many of our students to explore an aspect of business in a meaningful way. Students who enroll in our business disciplines tend to think in terms of starting a business, administrative tasks of a business and how to make a business profitable. In theory, starting with a social responsibility topic in the First Year Seminar should set students up for thinking about social responsibility in other aspects of their business major. Benchmark scores have yet to return on these, but in grading students against the rubric for both the Digital Communication Ability and Global Learning Competency proficiency scores were much higher than in previous assignments. If you plan to try this assignment, I do recommend considering how you want to roll out the video in advance because students tend to have the greatest issues

there and the quality of the videos and the presentations themselves vary greatly without guidelines. Please see the Teaching Notes related to the video portion of the assignment.

Note: Many thanks to Andrea Francis, who is the original author of the essay prompts and further contributed by editing multiple drafts of the entire assignment.

Business Ethics: Perspectives on the Global Supply Chain

BACKGROUND

Now more than ever, business is global. Businesses that once manufactured and sold their products from a single factory now have a supply chain that reaches countries all over the world. As globalization expanded, businesses became concerned for the profits of their shareholders. Becoming global was an expensive endeavor, so they targeted countries that offered the most productivity for the least amount of money. Developing nations welcomed American businesses in hopes that it would benefit their own economy. With very few regulations in the labor policies of these foreign nations, these partnerships seemed mutually beneficial. In the 1990's many of these businesses came under the heat of the public eye for human rights violations, particularly in sweatshops. Sweatshops generally overwork employees for very little pay in unsafe conditions. Today, these exploitative work environments continue to be utilized by many big companies, including Nike. Long-standing debate continues amongst economists about whether sweatshops are needed for the economic development of these impoverished countries. Read more [here](#).

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To have students consider the implications and responsibilities of business ownership and consumerism locally and abroad using Nike as an example
- To introduce students to the Global Learning competency by exploring multiple perspectives on the ethical issues around the global supply chain
- To help students understand Corporate Responsibility Industry objectives and its failings by assuming the role of a Corporate Responsibility Manager
- To build students' Digital and Oral Communication Ability by modeling oral presentations and integrating work into an oral video
- To discuss human rights/workers' rights through the lens of those benefiting from and impacted by sweatshops

LESSON PLAN

*Assuming global competency and digital ability have already been discussed.

Hour 1

https://www.ted.com/talks/auret_van_heerden_making_global_labor_fair (17 minutes)

Have students watch TedTalk about the global supply chain.

Handout with discussion prompts:

- What issues does the speaker address?
- Who is harmed by these practices?
- Who is responsible for the harm?
- What does he mean by supply chain?
- What does he suggest needs to get done?
- Do you know the supply chain for a product you are using or wearing?
- How do sweatshops relate to the practices the speaker discusses?
- Do you know any brands who use sweatshops?
- Have any of you lived in a country with a sweatshop?
- If so, what is the general opinion of sweatshops there?

Group discussion – 15 minutes

Class Discussion /Take-aways 5 -10 minutes

Hour 2

Discussion

The purpose of this assignment is for students to research, consider and present the local and global implications of sweatshops from the perspective of a Corporate Responsibility Manager for Nike whose job it is to consider the perspective of all parties impacted by Nike's practices.

- Discuss recent Nike protests and introduce background issues on sweatshops using one of the articles linked below or other resources e.g., videos.
- Explain assignment components and expectations. The assignment is shown in the pages below.

Hour 3 (time permitting)

1. Discuss students' research from the articles. Focus on perspectives and ethics discussion.
2. Discuss Corporate Responsibility industry and role of Corporate Responsibility Officer.
3. Discuss any student questions about the assignment.

ASSIGNMENT

The template to be used for this assignment is located in the assignment library in ePortfolio. The assignment is named Business Ethics: Perspectives on the Global Supply Chain, and you should add it directly to your ePortfolio. The following link provides guidance on how to add a template to your ePortfolio:

<https://spark.adobe.com/page/7j86z17xZUz1b/>

Business Ethics: Perspectives on the Global Supply Chain

Part I – Essay

Your answer should be a minimum of 300 words. Please back up your work and post it to the assignment template on ePortfolio. Focusing on Nike and the [Hansae, Vietnam](#) sweatshops as your main source, write three paragraphs or more addressing the following:

- Discuss your understanding of what is meant by a sweatshop using examples from the articles.
- What are the benefits for Nike to use sweatshops for manufacturing, and what are the potential problems? Please explain.
- What are the potential benefits to an employee working at a sweatshop, and what are the potential problems? Please explain.
- Whose responsibility do you believe it is to ensure the supply chain is free of exploitative practices? Consumers? Businesses? Government?
- What are the implications of your answer?

You must read the resources below and you may add to them. Be sure to cite at least one of the sources below in your assignment.

Resources:

<http://www.therichest.com/rich-list/most-shocking/10-major-clothing-brands-caught-in-shocking-sweatshop-scandals/?view=all>

July, 2014. Short general introduction to the top ten businesses using sweatshops and child labor.

<http://www.labornotes.org/2017/08/nike-old-tricks-students-and-workers-launch-global-protests>

August, 2017. New reports on Nike suggest they continue to violate and avoid labor laws and Corporate Social Responsibility standards, despite its commitment to change.

<http://scienceblogs.com/thepumphandle/2016/12/13/hansae-vietnam-case-study-of-hazardous-working-conditions-and-the-failure-of-corporate-social-responsibility-audits-to-fix-the-hazards/>

December, 2016. Some background on the Hansae sweatshops and the failure of Corporate Social Responsibility efforts to prevent ongoing abuses.

<http://www.globaethicsnetwork.org/profiles/blogs/two-faces-of-economic-development-the-ethical-controversy>

May, 2013. Outlines the ethical issues that come up with sweatshops explaining both business and economic considerations.

Part II - Photos

To develop your [digital ability](#) you must learn to use images that make your messages more powerful. In the assigned articles you saw some examples of how photos can bring more impact and attention to the writer's message. Photos help us to communicate in ways that might be difficult to communicate in words.

In the assignment template there are spaces for two images. Please do the following:

- Find images and/or data graphics that help to communicate the message in your essay to the audience in a more powerful way.
- Below each image you chose, you must add a caption explaining how the picture communicates your message and the citation for the source of your image.

Part III – Digital Communication - Video

You are the Corporate Responsibility Manager (click [here](#) for a job description) reporting at an annual Nike board meeting to which spokespeople for the protesters were invited. You are asked to present your research without bias favoring Nike, meaning you will not be fired for telling Nike something is wrong or something should change. Assume that Nike board members know very little about the recent Nike [protests](#) and about the impact of sweatshops.

Make a video recording of at least 2 minutes to introduce yourself to viewers as a Corporate Responsibility Manager at Nike and share the topic of your assignment. In your video recording, be sure to discuss the objectives of the paper and highlight the key aspects to demonstrate the issue and the ethical concern.

The point of your presentation to the board is to:

1. Inform Nike of the issues sweatshops will cause the business.
 2. Inform Nike of who the protestors are and what they are asking for
 3. Explain the ethical dilemma (why can't Nike just close its factories?)
 4. Make suggestions to the board about what they can do to improve the situation or solve the problem.
- Please ensure to address all relevant sides of the issue.
 - Please try to minimize any background noise in your recording.
 - Upload your video recording directly to the assignment template in ePortfolio and test it to ensure that the video plays with good audio and visuals. The Student Success Mentor will provide assistance during the Studio Hour should you require it.

Teaching Notes - Video Creation for Global Learning

Justification: Why are you creating a video? Read the article [here](#) to see how highly valued public speaking skills are in business. Today, more office meetings, interviews, classes, sales pitches and presentations are held virtually. And more consumers are looking to video for information every day (think YouTube). The article discusses the kinds of skills you will need to develop in order to be proficient at oral and digital communication.

Further, the next generation is growing up able to create videos in their sleep. They would have a competitive advantage if we don't fill in the gaps of our learning to include digital and oral communication.

Exercise:

- Hand out Written, Oral & Digital Communications Abilities rubric. Have students get into groups and “translate” what they understand from the rubric by highlighting words or phrases that guide what oral delivery should be and what digital communication is.
- Discuss what it means “to advance and enhance the purpose of the communication” under digital learning.
- Discuss why “Voice Command” is important in a business and other settings.
- Watch 3 minute video (note, I did not find captions for this)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxZZyZaannU>
Martin Wolf on Climate Change
- Discuss what works in this video and how the speaker meets the rubric.

Optional: As a class, create a checklist for how faculty should grade the video portion of the assignment.

Video grading rubric – in addition to global learning rubric:

Note: This document should be shared with students

1. Introduction - Say who you are, and mention your role at Nike and your reason for speaking to the Nike Board on this occasion.
2. Dress professionally - You should not wear hats, ear buds, oversized jewelry or other distracting items. You should not chew gum etc. Video can be taken from torso and up so you don't need a full outfit.
3. Make 3 clear points - The points should relate to your role as a Corporate Responsibility Officer but you can add elements from your own experience if relevant. The points should address the global learning rubric guidelines provided.
4. Have a conclusion – Think about the message you want to leave Nike with and include at least one suggestion that helps with the issue of sweatshops. Find a way to express your conclusion so that it is impactful.
5. Video of you seen speaking should be at least 2 minutes long - You may add pictures, data or video clips but I will consider whether they “advance and enhance the purpose of the communication”.
6. Background should not be distracting. Simple backgrounds without distracting clutter are preferred.
7. Choose an appropriate angle - Many tips suggest an angle slightly above you so you have to look up a little to look directly at the camera (not as high as some selfie angles!). However, I will accept other angles as long as they are not distracting.
8. Prepare for the speech - Preparation will be clear from the clarity of your points, your confidence in delivery and following the listed directions.
9. Notes, if used, should not be visible.
10. Lighting should not be too dark - Your face, expressions and attire should be clear in the video. Play with existing lighting in different locations you are considering for this video recording.
11. Audio should be clear – Check what your audio sounds like before you commit to the final product. Background noise should be minimal, close windows, turn off fans or air conditioners etc.

I will be using the Global Learning rubric to grade both the written and digital portion of your assignment. The rubric can be difficult to fully comprehend, so to be clear I am looking for in the overall work:

- A clear articulation of the global issues with an explanation of why the issue exists and the impact it has. Why is this an issue? For who?
- The recognition of the parties involved and perspectives of those parties. Your ability to recognize and communicate ethical issues.
- Clear evidence that you completed research on the topic and have an understanding of the subject, points of view, context, and consequences.
- An understanding of the ethical challenges of the global issue, your attitudes about these ethical issues and how local and global action might impact these issues.