- Faculté des sciences économiques
- www.unine.ch/seco

Business Ethics (5EN1040)

Filières concernées	Nombre d'heures	Validation	Crédits ECTS
Bachelor en sciences économiques, orientation durabilité	**Cours: 2 ph**	**Voir ci-dessous**	3
Bachelor en sciences économiques, orientation économie	**Cours: 2 ph**	**Voir ci-dessous**	3
Bachelor en sciences économiques, orientation management	**Cours: 2 ph**	**Voir ci-dessous**	3

ph=période hebdomadaire, pg=période globale, j=jour, dj=demi-jour, h=heure, min=minute

Période d'enseignement:

- Semestre Printemps

Equipe enseignante

Dr. Bettina Palazzo

Education & Experience:

Dr. Bettina Palazzo is a business ethicist with over 25 years of experience at the intersection of ethics, leadership, and organizational change. She holds a doctorate in business ethics and has taught at leading institutions such as the University of Geneva (GSEM), Bocconi Business School, and the University of Zurich.

Dr. Palazzo is the founder of Palazzo Ethics Advisory, where she supports organizations like the International Olympic Committee, Siemens, and the World Food Program in developing ethical leadership and compliance training. Her work combines academic rigor with real-world application. She is passionate about turning business ethics into a topic that everyone wants to be a part of.

She brings a deeply human, practical, and provocative approach to teaching - challenging students to reflect, engage, and lead with integrity.

https://www.linkedin.com/in/bettina-palazzo/?originalSubdomain=ch

Contenu

Why Are Business and Ethics Stuck in a Love–Hate Relationship?

Business and ethics have always had a complicated relationship.

On the one hand, companies depend on trust, legitimacy, and social acceptance. On the other hand, they operate under pressure to compete, grow, and deliver results. This tension creates what sometimes feels like a permanent love–hate relationship between business success and ethical responsibility.

In this course, we examine that relationship more closely.

We explore how business and society interact and why ethical conflicts repeatedly emerge even in well-intentioned organizations. We analyze how incentives, leadership styles, organizational culture, and external expectations shape decision-making.

You will be introduced to key ethical theories: not as abstract philosophy, but as practical tools for critical thinking. These frameworks help structure difficult decisions and clarify trade-offs in complex situations.

Through case studies, short films, dilemma exercises, and interactive discussions, we examine how ethical and unethical decisions unfold in real organizations. We also analyze what leaders and companies can realistically do to promote responsible behavior and where formal systems such as compliance programs or CSR strategies succeed or fall short.

The course is also designed to prepare you for the realities you may encounter as young professionals. Early career stages can involve moral pressure: unclear expectations, ambitious targets, strong hierarchies, and situations where “this is how we do it here” replaces open discussion. Understanding these dynamics in advance strengthens your ability to navigate them thoughtfully.

Finally, this course equips you with concrete tools and heightened awareness to detect ethical risks early. You will learn how to identify warning signals, structure difficult conversations, and understand what organizations can realistically do to prevent ethical failures.

Forme de l'évaluation

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Students will be evaluated through two components:

1. Final Written Exam (70%)

A closed-book exam during the official examination session.

The exam will consist primarily of multiple-choice questions and applied short scenarios. It is designed to assess:

• Understanding of key concepts and ethical theories
• Ability to identify and analyze ethical tensions in business contexts
• Application of ethical frameworks to managerial situations
• Critical evaluation of leadership and organizational responsibility

The emphasis is on analytical clarity and conceptual understanding. Always one right answer. No negative points.

2. Group Ethics Project and Presentation (30%)

Students will work in small groups (3–5 students per group depending on class size).
Groups will be formed during the first session to ensure sufficient preparation time.

Each group will:

• Select a contemporary ethical issue in business
• Conduct a structured ethical risk analysis
• Apply relevant course frameworks
• Develop realistic and well-argued recommendations
• Deliver a presentation (max. 10 minutes) in one of the final two sessions:

– May 22
– May 29

Presentation slots will be assigned in advance.

Written submission deadline (for all groups): May 19, 18:00.

The written component must be submitted by all groups before any presentations take place. This ensures fairness and allows for coherent evaluation.

Students must include a short AI Use Statement describing whether and how AI tools were used in the preparation of the assignment. All AI use must comply with the University’s academic integrity policy.

Assessment of the group component will consider quality and complexity of the selected topic, analytical depth, appropriate use of course concepts, quality of argumentation, feasibility of recommendations, and clarity of communication and slides.

Active participation throughout the semester is expected as part of the learning process.

Modalités de rattrapage

Students who have a final grade of below 4.0 have to redo all assignments in which their grade was below 4.0.

Documentation

• Freeman, R. E. (2017): The New Story of Business: Towards a More Responsible Capitalism: Business and Society Review 122(3):449-465
• Palazzo, G., Krings, F., & Hoffrage, U. (2012). Ethical blindness. Journal of Business Ethics, 109(3), 323-338.
• Gallo, A. (2015): How to Speak Up About Ethical Issues at Work, Harvard Business Review, June 04, 2015, https://hbr.org/2015/06/how-to-speak-up-about-ethical-issues-at-work
• Paine, L. (1994): Managing for Organizational Integrity, Harvard Business Review (March-April 1994): 106-117

Objectifs d'apprentissage

Au terme de la formation l'étudiant-e doit être capable de :

- Justify reasoned responses to ethical dilemmas in managerial contexts.
- Distinguish between individual responsibility and systemic factors in ethical failures
- Explain major ethical theories and their relevance to business decision-making
- Analyse organizational cases using structured ethical frameworks.

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- Identify ethical risks and tensions in complex business situations
- Describe key elements of ethics management systems

Compétences transférables

- Structure complex problems and communicate arguments clearly in English.
- Defend positions with evidence-based reasoning.
- Work collaboratively to analyze and present complex business cases.