

“Literature and Ethics in Business: Narrative Approaches to Corporate Responsibility”

1. **Dr. Subhash J. Deshmukh**

Associate Professor, HOD of Economics and Incharge Faculty of Commerce

2. **Mr. Somnath N. Chandane**

Department of English

Dadapatil Rajale Arts and Science College, Adinathnagar.

Tal. Pathardi, Dist. Ahilyanagar (MS)

• **Abstract:**

Narrative approaches in business ethics leverage literature to light corporate responsibility, transforming abstract ethical principles into relatable stories that engage moral imagination. In a promptly globalizing economy, businesses often rely on management science, legal frameworks and economic rationality to make decisions. Yet, these tools cannot fully address ethical challenges such as environmental degradation, labor exploitation, data privacy violations, and declining public trust. This paper explores how literary narratives, plays, novels, autobiographies and corporate narratives act as a "moral laboratory" where moral dilemmas can be imagined, tested and evaluated. In today's contemporary global marketplace, an over-reliance on rational frameworks and algorithmic rules has created a "dehumanization gap" in business ethics. This paper proposes a "Narrative Forensic" approach to corporate responsibility, positioning literature as a "moral laboratory". Examining the relationship between narrative imagination and corporate responsibility, the paper claims that literature develops empathy, clinical vision and reflective decision-making. The literature, particularly the narrative approach, offers an important approach to exploring how corporate responsibility is conceptualized, communicated and implemented. This paper examines the intersection of literature, ethics, and business, focusing on narrative methods as tools for understanding and promoting corporate responsibility. These qualities enable leaders and organizations to move beyond narrow profit-oriented thinking towards socially responsible practices. This study examines how literary concepts such as Irony, Tragedy and Empathy can be an excellent framework for solving modern corporate problems.

I. Introduction:

Much of today's business landscape is in a constant state of flux due to globalization, technological advancement, and rising income inequality. This has created a growing expectation among consumers for corporations to demonstrate that their many actions are not only profitable but also ethically responsible and beneficial to society as a whole. When profitability is placed above ethical responsibility, it results in the exploitation of workers, harm to the environment, and erosion of public trust. While business ethics literature provides strictly normative frameworks such as utilitarianism and deontology for analyzing ethical dilemmas, business ethics literature also offers insight into how emotions, motivations, and consequences can inform the development of an individual's or organization's ethical decision-making process. While business ethics education often uses case studies and "war stories," literature provides an opportunity to evoke feelings and develop characters while creating moral complexities. As stated by Martha Nussbaum, literature supports the expansion of our moral imagination and affirms our need for an understanding of the fragility of humanity (Nussbaum 27). The emergence of globalized "moral citizens," consisting of communities, governments, and consumers who expect corporations to provide justification for their purpose of existence beyond the production of capital, reinforces the ethical scrutiny being placed upon corporations as they increase in power. The historical trend of corporate malfeasance—ranging from

environmental degradation to systemic labor exploitation—illustrates a significant truth: when income is separated from a moral foundation, it becomes corrosive to society. Literature and narrative have not just been augmentative in business ethics; they are impactful. Literature and narrative cultivate empathy, increase our moral imagination, and make ethics alive by transporting us to an alternate reality where empathy, imagination, and morality intersect.

II. Meaning of Literature and Ethics in Business:

The concept of literature and ethics in business is the exploration of moral dilemmas faced by organizations, by examining how their characters and the reasons for acting toward the respective organizations result in consequences (or outcomes) on a moral basis, as well as how literature can serve as a framework for learning and understanding the ethical aspects of our moral decision making methods in our corporate structures. Humanity's values of desire, power, greed, loyalty, corruption, and acceptance of responsibility are presented through literature. "Literature and Ethics in Business" represents the melding of storytelling to anchor contemporary ethics into the narratives of real-world ethical dilemmas by demonstrating how confidential responsibilities (such as non-maleficence and fidelity) conflict within the various aspects of a person's life (as illustrated in Arthur Miller's play, *All My Sons*), while creating a compelling reason for why we have certain ethical and social responsibilities to protect others. The narrative ethics model adds to, or builds upon, the existing concept of principle ethics model by creating ethical reasoning embedded into character arcs and story lines that allow a reader to develop empathy for other people (or characters) without relying solely on abstract ethical principles. This combination of ethical and literary perspectives allows us to redirect our attention from how ethical issues are framed from a technical perspective and allows individuals to understand the consequences of accepting responsibility as they relate to a lot of different aspects within a given organization, especially regarding corporate social responsibility and sustainability. This also allows us to view and engage in ethical decision making as, primarily, narrative-based layers of principles and personal experience that continue to disclose what beneficence means on a broader and more conceptual basis.

III. Scope of Literature and Ethics in Business:

The scope of this study covers education, CSR communication, and policy, which are not limited to the classroom, but can also include a company's larger strategy. In education, literature may be used to support an ethics framework (for example, Proportionality by Kenneth Garrett or Justice by John Rawls) to address ethical dilemmas, as literature has been found to generate more moral imagination and empathy than a strictly didactic presentation. Studies have shown that readers of fiction undergo significant changes in their personalities, much like the changes that occur after experiencing a personal interaction. From a corporate standpoint, the scope includes the use of CSR communications that merge quantitative metrics with qualitative human experiences through storytelling to strengthen corporate reputation and stakeholder confidence. Cisco Systems provides a good illustration of this approach through their CSR communications, which pair quantitative metrics with employee testimonial stories, creating a more impactful and truthful CSR communication. The broader scope of narrative ethics includes sustainability partnerships, where ethics such as accountability have been shown to correlate with success, according to the results of systematic literature review of articles published between 2020-2025. Narrative ethics are challenged by multicultural contexts, as there is a risk of imposing cultural bias on so-called "foundational narratives" (i.e., Hippocratic vs. Liberal traditions), although postmodern thinkers value the existence of "little narratives" as a representation of local ethical traditions. The future of narrative ethics research will expand to include artificial intelligence ethics and global supply chains, utilising fiction to facilitate scenario creation. Ultimately, the interdisciplinary scope of narrative ethics provides a unique opportunity to advance the concept of holistic responsibility.

IV. Correlation between Literature and Business:

The relationship between business and literature can be demonstrated via narratives role in ethical justification or character portrayals of ethical behaviour and their efficacy within CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility). Narratives are central to how we reason through ethical principles; e.g. for example, the principle of 'autonomy' can be traced to narrative-based intuitions as evidenced by models of reflective equilibrium. The reading of fictional prose facilitates empathy and readers are likely to have developed more personalities than they would have had by watching a documentary film based on the same subject matter. Businesses gain further benefits through improved stakeholder relationships as a direct result of the development of empathy via fictional literature. A number of examples demonstrate this correlation; e.g. In "Hard Times" Charles Dickens created an allegorical critique of the exploitative nature of 19th century capitalism and its continued relevance to labour ethics today, while "The Grapes of Wrath" by John Steinbeck was used to test the ethical application of the principle of 'difference' under John Rawls' theory of justice with respect to inequality today. With respect to CSR, storytelling translates metrics into valued connections; therefore, the increase in companies reporting ethically (from 20% in 2011 to 90% today) has resulted in increased employee morale and company reputation. Empirical analysis demonstrates that CSR practices consistent with ethical principles (such as transparency and integrity) are positively correlated with success in executing CSR efforts through public-private partnerships. Postmodern ethical theories re-situate ethical storytelling (i.e., reframe and present) within a dialogical context as a means of counteracting hegemony in corporate practices and the business community. Business literature reviews have also revealed that there is an increasing interest in marketing ethics in order to enhance ethical behaviour and raise public awareness; e.g. many companies utilise fiction to help inform how they engage with their customers and stakeholders. Quantitatively, narrative-based CSR strategies create a higher level of engagement with companies; qualitatively, these strategies bridge the gaps between theory and practice. In conclusion, literature showcases the complexity, paradoxes and virtues of business ethics, thereby enhancing the understanding of business ethics through exposure to the lessons learned in fictional literature.

V. The Ontological Convergence: Literature and Business

The interpersonal connection between literature and the ethical element of business is evident in their interest in the way we behave and resolve moral dilemmas. Business ethics provide the normative standard by which we guide ourselves; literature serves as a phenomenological account of the feelings associated with fulfilling or violating those duties. The imaginary literary canon illustrates how extreme ambition is capable of destroying individuals and the rest of humanity; while modern literary works express a disdain for systemic injustices. Literature presents an emotional honesty that cannot be adequately expressed through statistics, and thus, offers additional insight into the ethics of business than looking only to numerical data. The impact upon the decision-making of business leaders, when they are faced with literature that reflects exploited employees or devastated communities, becomes more of a moral basis for their decision-making than simply being strategic (Solomon 54). Thus, the two disciplines are inherently connected: the first offers a framework for analyzing principles; the second, for adding meaning to those principles.

VI. Case Study: Forensic Reading of the Jungle

In order to comprehend the transformative effects a narrative has on society, it is vital to examine Upton Sinclair's book, *The Jungle* (1906), through the eyes of the "forensic intervention" that Sinclair employs in his writing. Rather than simply listing health violations, Sinclair uses narrative to create a visceral experience for the reader and force a confrontation between the consumer and producer towards the meatpacking industry. As an example, Sinclair describes workers falling into rendering vats, which illustrates the ultimate failure of corporate responsibility by allowing workers to be literally consumed by the corporation. Through this narrative, Sinclair demonstrates that narrative has the ability to effect changes in the regulatory framework of society; in this case, leading to the enactment of the Meat Inspection Act of

1906. For businesses today, the moral of the story is that if the corporation has a script that includes dehumanization as its foundation, this script will be uncovered by outside narrative sources, and ultimately ruin the reputation of the corporation. Therefore, while Sinclair uses the "external victim" to demonstrate how corporate behavior has an effect on external stakeholders, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) serves as a diagnostic tool for the "internal victim".

VII.A cursory overview of the "Narrative Audit" Framework to propel theory into practice through the 'Narrative Audit Model' will entail the following actions by Organizations:

- **Discovery of Scripts:** Documenting the organizational "internal folklore stories" as well as the type of "water cooler stories" shared by employees -- i.e., informal conversations between co-workers at the water cooler after hours.
- **Discrepancy Analysis:** Comparing the organization's mission and vision statements to the actual experiences of employees who process and execute the organization's mission and vision statements.
- **Inquiries of Stakeholders:** Collecting as much "thick data" as possible through interviews with stakeholders that tell stories of their interactions with the brand.
- **The Moral Alignment:** Instead of creating a standard document that just lists financial targets, Organizations need to write strategies as a "Social Contract Story" to better align with the brand's moral commitments.

VIII. Conclusion:

Business ethics and corporate social responsibility have been significantly advanced through the application of narrative techniques from literature in three main ways: they increase vibrancy (i.e., clarity) around principles, help develop empathy for others, and provide an avenue for managing efforts when faced with complexity. The relationship between narrative approaches and business ethics and corporate social responsibility, including the use of narrative as an educational tool, storytelling methodology, or correlation of represented versus lived dilemmas, has been well documented in academic literature. Businesses that adopt narrative in this way--through the analysis of fiction, or through the use of real-life accounts in their business practices--have been shown to attain elevated levels of ethical outcomes and stakeholder relationships. The direction of future practices will require businesses and business leaders to have developed narrative competencies within their curricula and strategy and to be willing to expand beyond structures that encourage localism and foster narrative dialogue. Trained leader literature develops business ethics and builds upon the use of imagination and conscience. It continually reminds businesses and organizations that with every financial decision they make, there will be human consequences. Businesses and organizations that utilize narrative methods of corporate social responsibility are able to nurture reflective leaders and build trusting and transparent organizations. Businesses and organizations that are looking to achieve long-term business sustainability must view narrative as more than just a "soft skill." Narrative foundations represent the future of corporate social responsibility; therefore, the leader who looks at their organization not as a machine to be engineered for maximum efficiency but a narrative to be lived with authenticity and meaning will be the one to achieve that goal.

IX. Works Cited:

1. Fontaine, Michael. "Integrating Narrative Fiction with Business Ethics to Enhance Moral Reasoning." *Review of Contemporary Business Research*, vol. 1, no. 1, Dec. 2012, pp. 1-14, rcbr.thebrpi.org/journals/rcbr/Vol_1_No_1_December_2012/1.pdf.academic.oup
2. Crane, Andrew, et al. *The Oxford Handbook of Corporate Social Responsibility*. Oxford University Press, 2008.
3. Dickens, Charles. *Hard Times*. Bradbury & Evans, 1854.
4. Freeman, R. Edward. *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

5. White, Hayden. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987
 6. Sinclair, Upton. *The Jungle*. Doubleday, Page & Company, 1906.
 7. Nussbaum, Martha C. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. Oxford University Press, 1990.
 8. "Nice Story, but So What? Narrative and Justification in Ethics." *Methods in Bioethics: The Way We Reason Now*, Oxford UP, 2017, academic.oup.com/book/4156/chapter/145932699. Accessed 3 Jan. 2026.[academic.oup](http://academic.oup.com)
 9. Solomon, Robert C. *Ethics and Excellence: Cooperation and Integrity in Business*. Oxford University Press, 1992.
 10. "Analysis of the Relationship between Business Ethics and Sustainability Business." *International Journal of Humanities, Arts and Business Studies*, Malaqbi Publisher, 2025, malaqbipublisher.com/index.php/IJHABS/article/view/506.[malaqbipublisher](http://malaqbipublisher.com)
 11. Sergeeva, N. "Corporate Social Responsibility as a Strategic Narrative." *International Journal of Project Management*, 2022, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666721522000333.[\[12\]](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666721522000333)
1. <https://academic.oup.com/book/4156/chapter/145932699>
 2. https://rcbr.thebrpi.org/journals/rcbr/Vol_1_No_1_December_2012/1.pdf
 3. <https://malaqbipublisher.com/index.php/IJHABS/article/view/506>
 4. https://davidboje.com/vita/paper_pdfs/RESITUATING%20STORY%20IN%20BUSINESS%20ETHICS.pdf
 5. <https://fashion.sustainability-directory.com/term/corporate-social-responsibility-narrative/>
 6. <https://benevity.com/blog/how-to-engage-stakeholders-with-csr-storytelling>
 7. <https://guides.lib.byu.edu/businessethicsguide>
 8. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/org/science/article/abs/pii/S1746526518000171>
 9. <https://councils.forbes.com/blog/corporate-social-responsibility-to-shape-the-narrative>
 10. https://www.academia.edu/3434639/Business_ethics_A_literature_review_with_a_focus_on_marketi
[ng_ethics](https://www.academia.edu/3434639/Business_ethics_A_literature_review_with_a_focus_on_marketi)
 11. <https://www.igi-global.com/viewtitle.aspx?TitleId=369905&isxn=9798337301495>
 12. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666721522000333>
 13. <https://www.timbremedia.in/documenting-impact-csr-work-narratives/>
 14. https://books.google.com/books/about/Business_Ethics_and_Corporate_Social_Res.html?id=llPyqtvJ1D8C
 15. <https://library.bu.edu/busetics/citing-business-sources>
 16. <https://www.diligent.com/resources/blog/csr-books-and-resources>
 17. https://guides.library.uwa.edu.au/mla/reference_formats

Copyright & License:

© Authors retain the copyright of this article. This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), permitting unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.