

MBA 617: SOCIO-POLITICAL AND ETHICAL ASPECTS OF BUSINESS

Semester II, 2022-2023, Tue, Thu: 5.10 – 6.25 pm
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Purpose

Business and corporations have gained the centre stage of economic activity almost all over the world. Even political life and cultural practices of increasingly larger numbers are influenced by the actions of corporations and business practices in general. Hence, there is a need to look beyond the immediate, to understand the deeper structures and issues involved in the conduct of business. *The purpose of this course is to situate business in its larger context and develop an appreciation for the interrelationship of business and society.* It also aims to contextualise institutions through which business is conducted, like corporations, nation state and markets. Further, concepts like morality of profit, private property, free trade, etc. are of relatively recent origin and their significance has varied over different periods in world commercial history. Therefore there is a need to understand the historical context in which these institutions and values have originated and evolved.

Classes

The class discussions will primarily be based on real life cases, readings or interactions with guest faculty. This will require that the student analyses the assigned readings, preferably in small groups, and comes prepared with his/ her analysis for presentation in the class. Group/s should volunteer to initiate class discussion and make a presentation of their analysis for a particular class.

Learning in the class will largely happen through discussions and NOT through 'lecture' by the instructor. Thus, it becomes everybody's responsibility to get into a constructive dialogue and not just look at an individual as 'provider' of answers. A constructive dialogue means not only to speak, but also listen carefully and draw out some of the relatively quieter colleagues. This is not a course on oratory and hence what matters is QUALITY of your participation - in speaking, listening, explaining and critiquing. *If you are not able to express your point in the class, you are welcome to share it over email (or a write-up) with the instructor and/ or the class.*

If you are coming to a class it is expected that you have prepared assigned readings and are ready with your analysis; at times you may be expected to do readings after the class discussion. Hence in normal circumstances I expect you to be present in *all* the classes. If for special reasons you are not able to attend a particular class, I expect you to explain it in writing, as it is not only that you are not attending the class as an individual but you are also depriving the rest of the class from your views and analyses.

I expect you to do whole lot of activities and preparations in groups. So please make **groups of 4** right after the first class as per your choice.

Evaluation

Class Participation & Presentations (25%)

As already explained class participation is a fundamental part of learning in the course. The purpose of class presentations is to initiate the discussion on the reading/case. The presentation may be done by a group. Please come prepared with your presentation and only present your analysis in not more than 15 minutes. I would prefer if you inform me in advance in case you want to make a presentation in a particular session. *Opportunities for presentations are going to be limited; hence I recommend written submissions of your analysis on some aspect of the class discussion or the cases/ readings, either individually or in groups.*

Midsems (20%)

Project Report (25%)

It will be a group project, midterm presentation: 5%, final report: 20%; see the note on projects.

Endsems (30%)

Readings

Reference Text

1. Korten, David 1998. *When Corporations Rule the World*. Goa: Other India Press.
2. Marglin, Stephen 2008. *The Dismal Science. How Thinking Like an Economist Undermines Community*, Harvard UP.
3. Chang, Ha-Joon 2010. *23 Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism*, Penguin.

Students are expected to make their own copies of the cases and readings given as hand-outs.

Outline

Session	Topic
I-IV.	Introduction: Why and what of socio-political-ethical aspects Thinking beyond profits – business and society linkages Ethics, Morality & Business
V-X.	Historical Perspective Evolution of capitalism and capitalist institutions Socio-political context of industrialisation in colonial India Late industrialisation and the role of state
XI-XVIII.	India: State, markets & welfare Natural resources and business Economic reforms and agrarian economy in India Political economy of growth in India Markets and the welfare state Interim project presentations
XIX-XIV.	Global Governance Evolving regime of property rights and business Finance & Business Environment & Business
XXV- XXVI.	Business and Society: Putting together Alternatives Summing up

On Projects

The idea of the project is to attempt to apply some of the classroom discussions and frameworks onto a real life business-society problem. The purpose of the project is to bring out the larger issues beyond short-term profit making on any business-society problem. It can be based on stakeholder analysis of a project or industry, an analysis of contentious policy issue, a legal tangle, regulatory problem, corporate governance, and so on. Here are a few ideas:

1. Pandemic and the related business-society issues, like IP protection or supply chain issues for the pharma industry
2. Farm laws and debate around corporatisation of agriculture sector
3. Govt policies like PLI, privatisation, asset monetisation, etc.
4. Manufacturing sector and debate around *Make in India* and SEZ policies
5. PPP model of infrastructure development
6. Land acquisition issues
7. Conflict around natural resources
8. Issues around climate change, externalities due to specific economic activities and 'green' alternatives
9. Financial issues, like corporate debt restructuring, IBC, NCLT, fintech, etc.
10. News making issues like, IL&FS, Telecom, corporate 'bad debts', etc.
11. Start ups, e-commerce, edtech and their regulatory and financial problems
12. Industry specific studies
13. Socio-political issues around digitisation of activities like education and health

In the past groups have tried to study such issues either through specific cases or secondary data.

In order to narrow the scope of what you study, you can choose part of a sector/industry and only a few key stakeholders rather than all of them.

Guidelines

1. This is a group project.
2. The idea is to frame a problem not only from the point of business and profits but from a business-society frame; identify the stakeholders and examine the problem from their respective points of view.
3. The objective of the project is to examine a real life phenomenon in the light of the on-going debate and then come up with your own analysis and not merely repeat what others have said.
4. You are encouraged to go to the field and collect first hand information wherever necessary.