Continuing Studies

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

Professionalism and Ethical Behavior in Construction Practice

Jeffrey S. Russell, Ph.D., P.E.

Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering
Vice Provost for Lifelong Learning
Dean of Continuing Studies

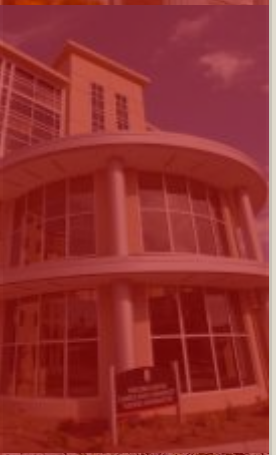
University of Wisconsin–Madison

Today's talk

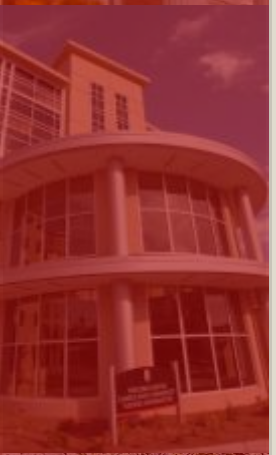
- Definitions
- Data
- Decisions
- Practical applications

Key questions

- Does ethical practice really matter?
- What is the cost and impact of unethical behaviors?
- How does my organi-zation address ethics?
- How is my ethical role modeling?
- Is it my job to make sure my employees are exhibiting ethical behavior?



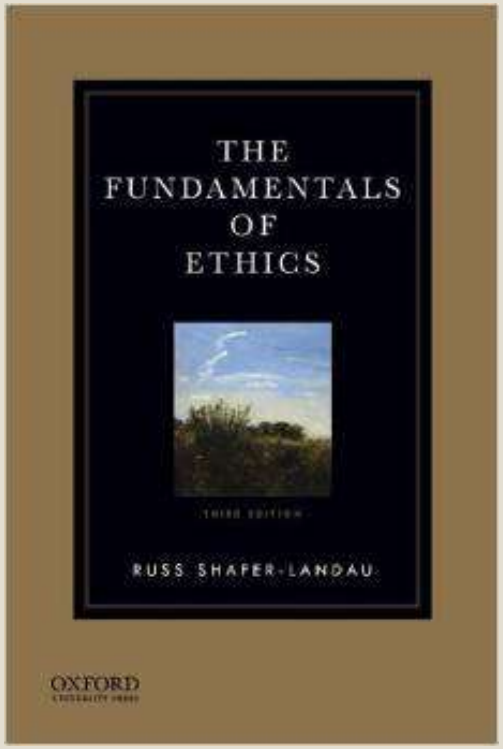
Examples to motivate our topic

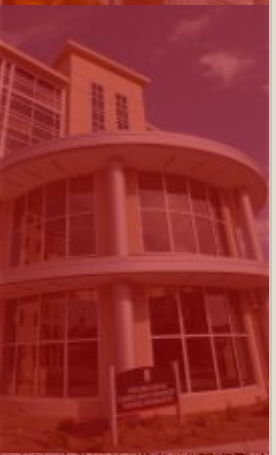


Defining morality

Philosophical perspective

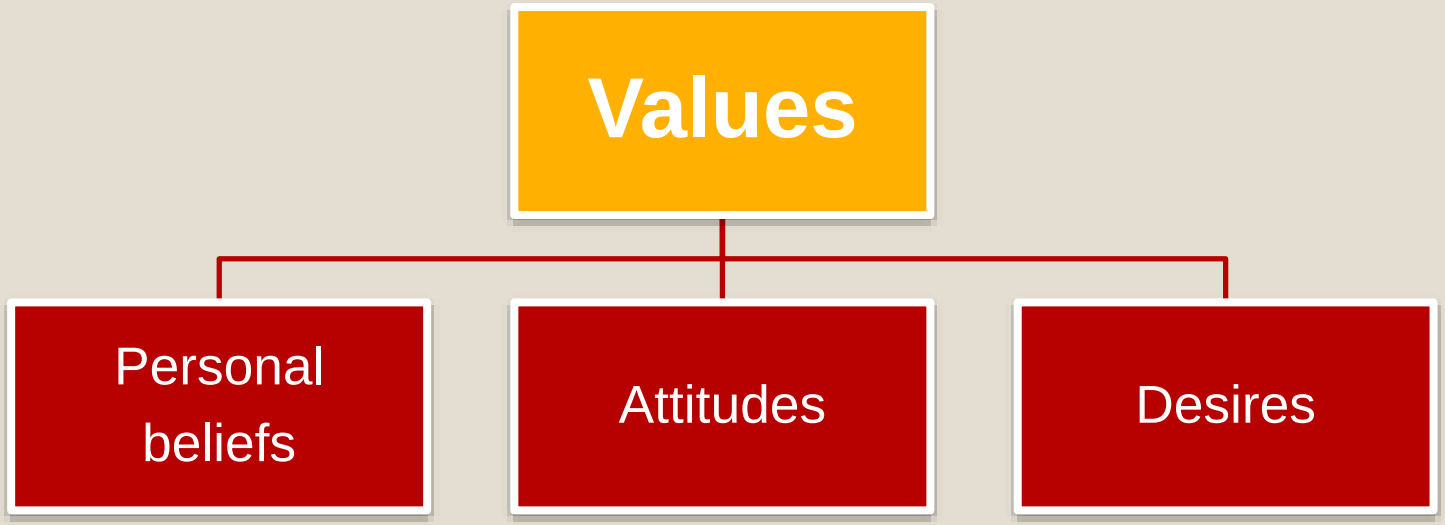
- Defining the nature of our moral duty
- The good life: self interest and desire theory
- Natural law
- Consequentialism
- Religious
- Utilitarian



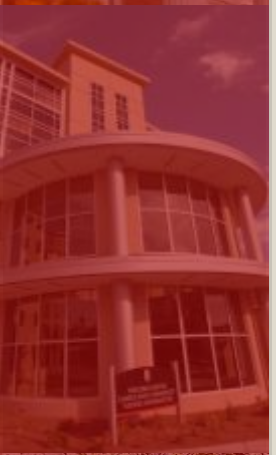


Defining ethics

Values: practical definition



Ethical, preference, stated, and operational



How do *you* define ethics?

Ethics: practical definition

- The process used to make **“value-laden” decisions beyond the law in professional matters.**

- Ethics involves doing the right thing even when it costs more than you want to pay. It is what we **should** do.

Ethics and the law

Ethical

4

1

Illegal

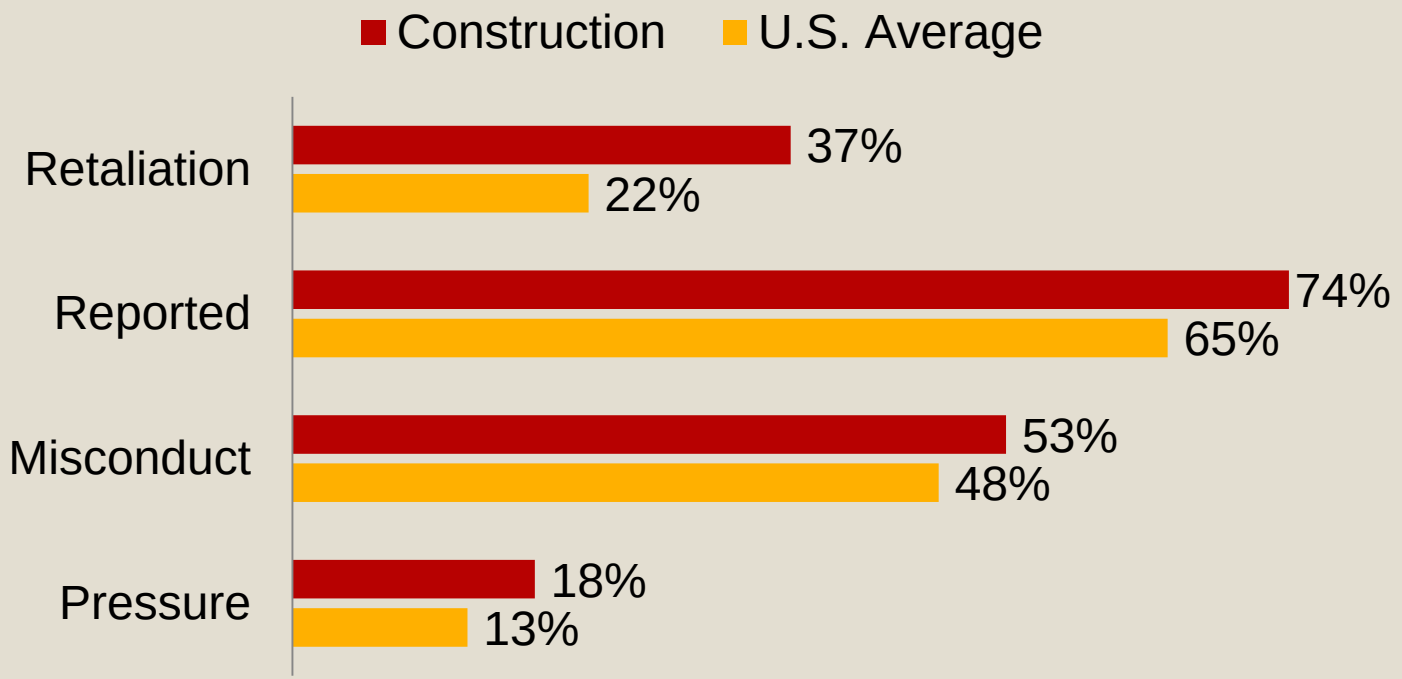
Legal

2

Unethical

Construction Industry

Construction Industry Compared to U.S. Average



National Business Ethics Survey of US Construction Industry, 2013, page 2

Considerations before making a decision

Financial

Political

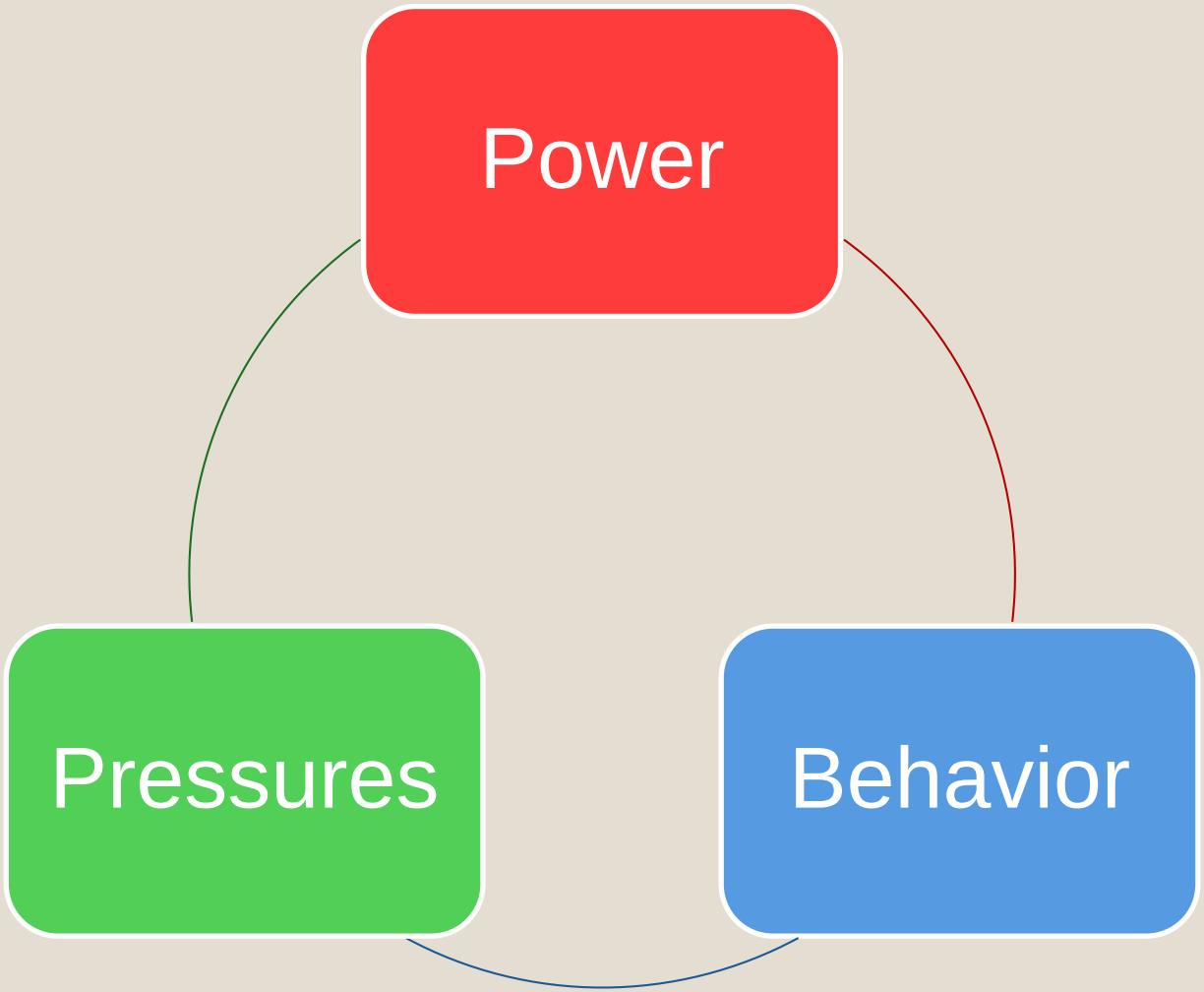
Supervisor, client

Personal, professional

Considerations before making a decision

- Consult professional ethics codes
- Consult mentors and experienced colleagues
- Think proactively, talk through your options with team members & colleagues
- Consider impact on others

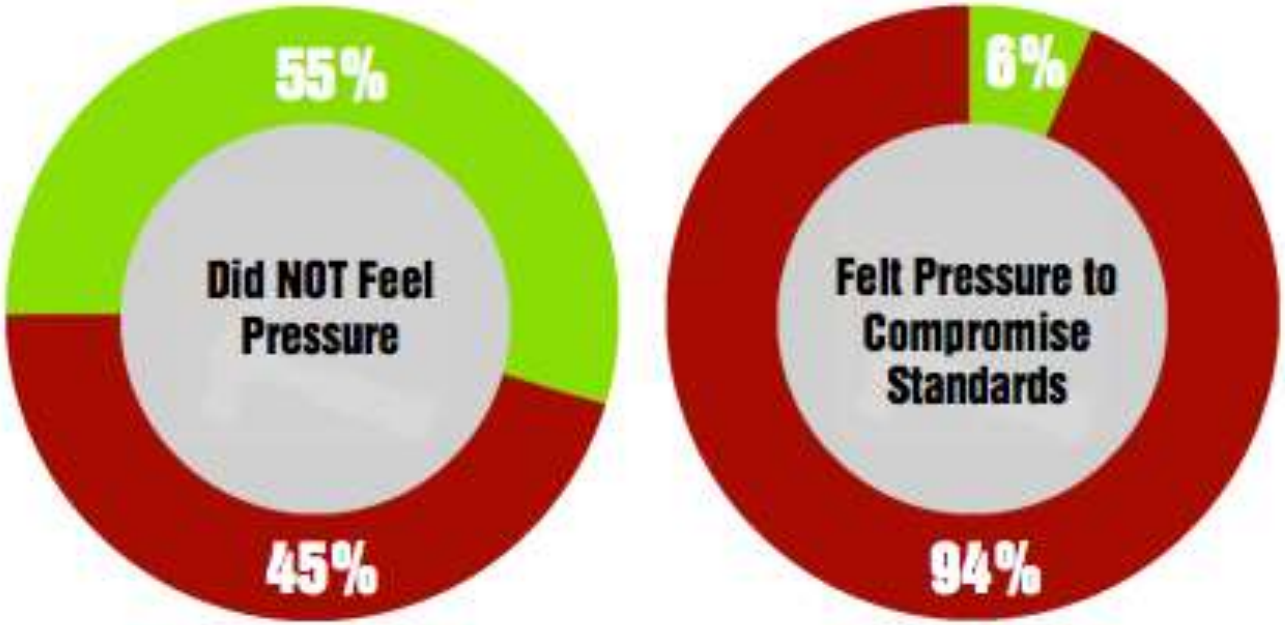
Pressures and decision-making



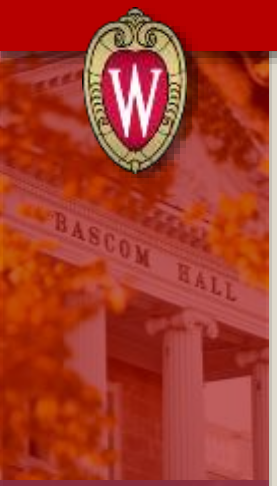
Pressures by intensity

- Adhering to a project timeline
- Trying to keep a project on budget
- Meeting your personal financial obligations
- Ensuring the financial stability and success of your company
- Keeping your job
- Wanting to make your boss look good
- Advancing your career
- Committing safety violations
- Ignoring wrongdoing you witness
- Violating the law

EMPLOYEES WHO FEEL PRESSURE ARE FAR MORE LIKELY TO OBSERVE MISCONDUCT



Context matters



Cognitive blindness

Listen to NPR's Psychology of Fraud: Why Good People Do Bad Things

http://www.npr.org/2012/05/01/151764534/psychology-of-fraud-why-good-people-do-bad-things

Training, experience, practice

"Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then is not an act but a habit." ~Aristotle

Practical applications: leaders, managers and supervisors

- Ambiguity vs. clarity
- Conflicting messages vs. clear leadership
- Ends vs. means

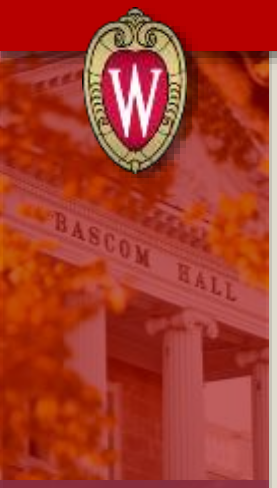
Practical suggestions: leaders, managers & supervisors

Organizational culture

Role-modeling

Talk the talk, walk the walk

Encourage dialogue



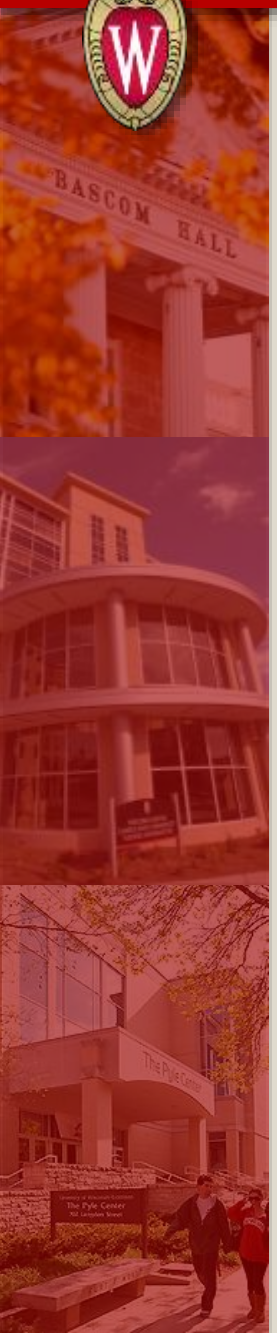
Practical applications: individuals

- Would vs. should
- Want vs. should
- Consider consequences

A practical conclusion

Remember:

- We judge ourselves by our best intentions, most noble acts, most virtuous habits, and we are judged by our worst last act(s).
- Treat people based upon who you are, **not** who they are or how they act.



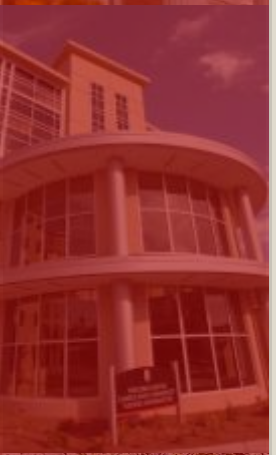
Risk

Questions & Comments?

Contact me:

jeffrey.russell@wisc.edu

Thank you!

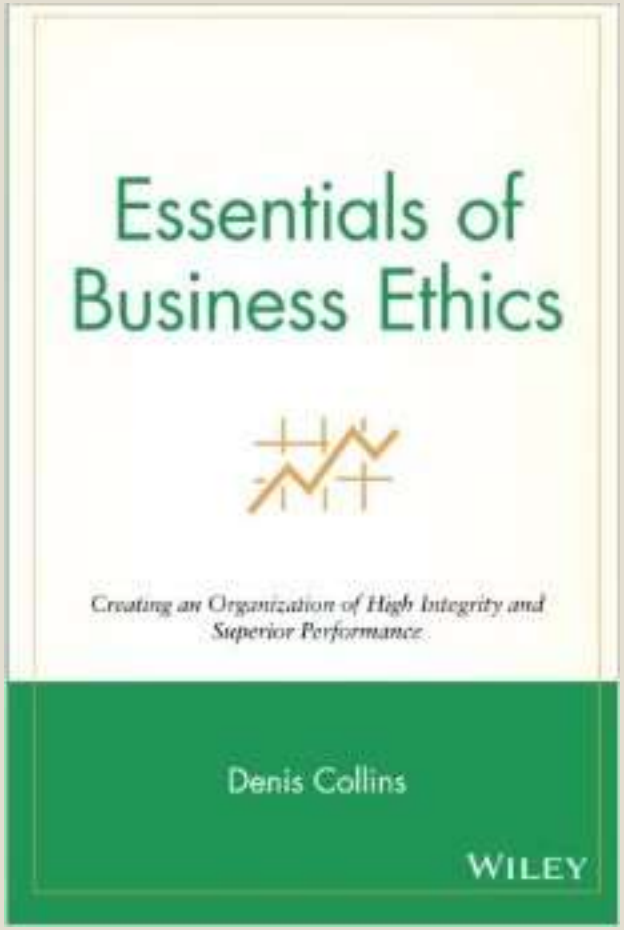


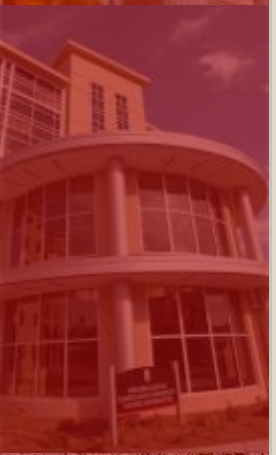
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Ethics Research Center

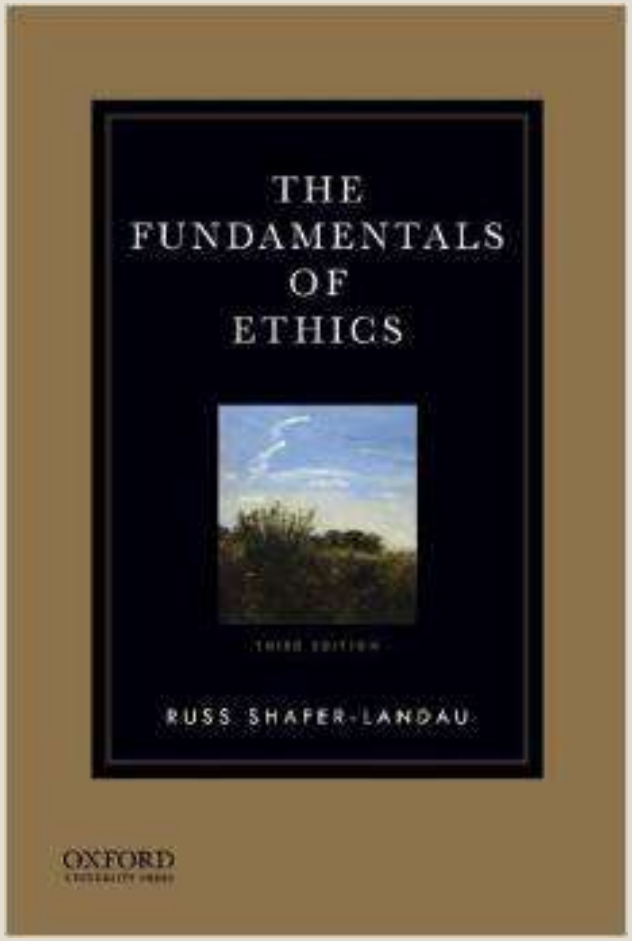
www.ethics.org

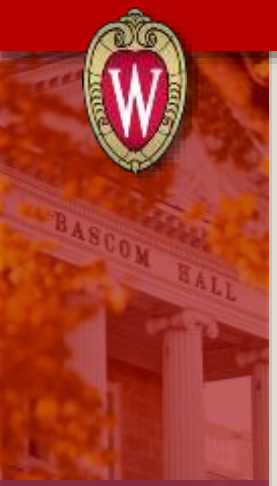
Essentials of Business Ethics





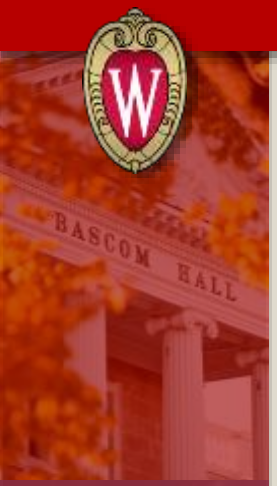
The Fundamentals of Ethics





The (Honest) Truth About Dishonesty

RSA Animate - The Truth About Dishonesty, feat. Dan Ariely
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBmJay_qdNc

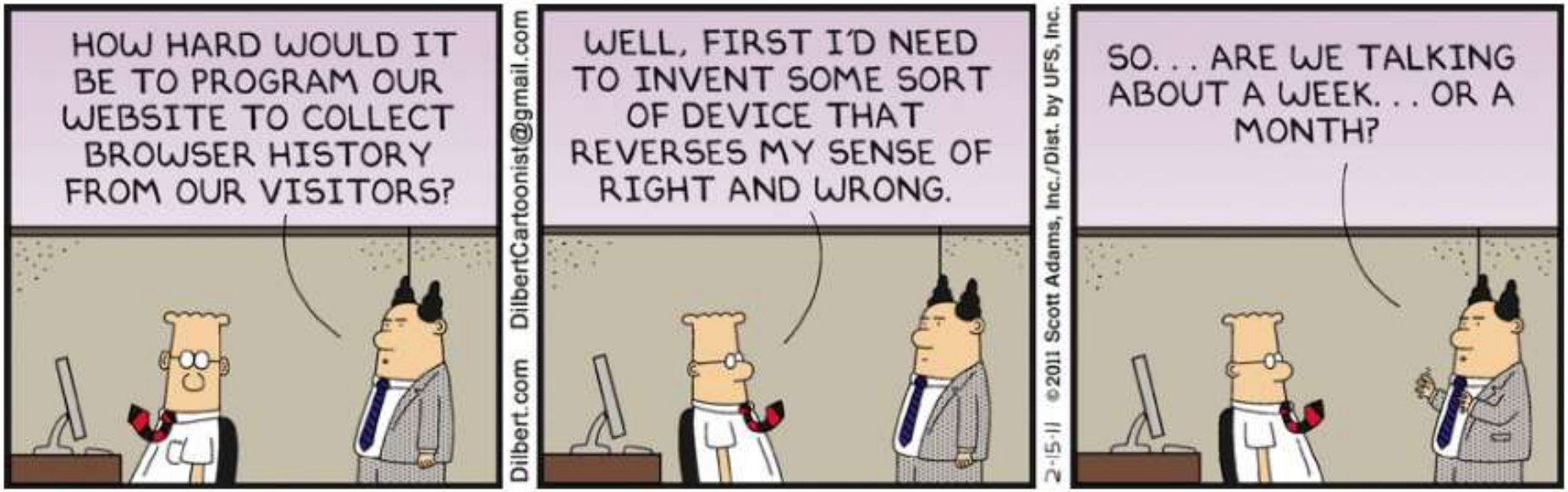


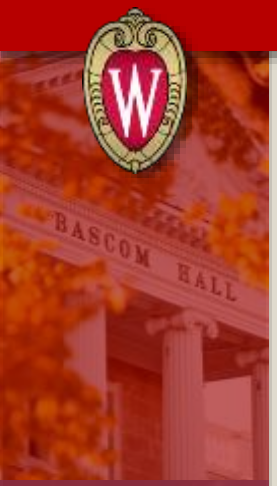
Cognitive blindness

Listen to NPR's Psychology of Fraud: Why Good People Do Bad Things

http://www.npr.org/2012/05/01/151764534/psychology-of-fraud-why-good-people-do-bad-things

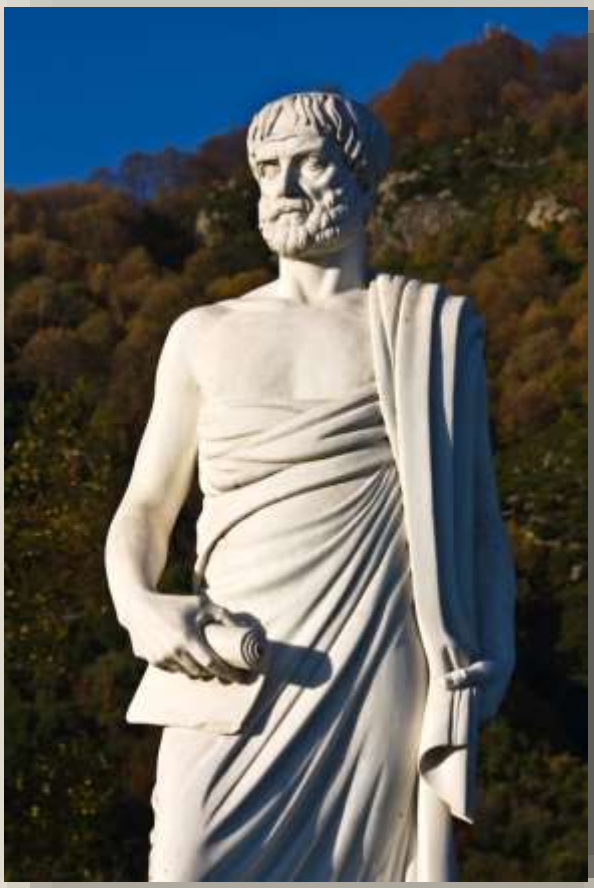
A practical consideration





Ethics: theoretical definitions

- "Theory or system of moral values; guiding philosophy"
- "Ethical conduct is…behavior desired by society which is above and beyond the minimum standards established by law"
- "The study of moral decisions that must be made by engineers in the course of engineering practice"



Statue of Aristotle