

California Wood Harvesting Co. Teaching Notes

What Are the Relevant Facts?

1. The company has been practicing “clear-cutting” for many years and is in compliance with governmental regulations.
2. Environmentalists’ strength and pressure have been increasing to such a degree they cannot be ignored by the company.
3. The company feels it needs to counteract the negative press from the environmentalists.
4. The negative press seems to have reduced sales and may lead to increased governmental regulation.
5. Mr. Thomas feels that the company’s image would be more favorable if land were donated to the government for wilderness areas.
6. The land they intend to donate is not profitable to the company.
7. Mr. Hollis and John question the wisdom of this approach, but the company president insists on this approach.
8. As a Sierra Club member, John may have a personal conflict with the way that the image-building campaign is being approached.

What Are the Ethical Issues?

1. Is clear-cutting an appropriate practice for the company?
2. Should unprofitable land be donated as an appeasement to the environmentalists?
3. Is it appropriate for John to work on the campaign?
4. Should the company use advertising to blot out the effects of negative press?

Who Are the Primary Stakeholders?

- Bob Thomas
- George Hollis
- John Davidson
- Company employees
- Communities supported by logging activities
- Environmentalists
- Government regulators

What Are the Possible Alternatives?

1. Stop or reduce the practice of clear-cutting.
2. Use alternate methods to build the image of company.
3. Continue with the suggested campaign using John.
4. Continue with the suggested campaign without using John.

What Are the Ethics of the Alternatives?

- Ask questions based on a “utilitarian” perspective (costs and benefits). For example:
 1. Which possible alternative would provide the greatest benefit to the greatest number?
 2. How would costs be measured in this vignette? How much value should be placed on (a) the environment and (b) jobs supporting the local communities?
 3. Do the benefits of protecting the environment outweigh the economic impacts of this situation?
- Ask questions based on a “rights” perspective. For example:
 1. What does each stakeholder have the right to expect?
 2. Which alternative(s) would you not want imposed on you if you were John? Mr. Hollis? Mr. Thomas? The environmentalists? The government regulators? A company employee? A member of the surrounding communities?
- Ask questions based on a “justice” perspective (benefits and burdens). For example:
 1. Which alternative distributes the benefits and burdens most fairly among the stakeholders?
 2. Which stakeholders carry the greatest burden if the suggested campaign is carried out?
 3. Which stakeholders carry the greatest burden if the practice of clear-cutting is continued?
 4. Which ethical theories (utilitarian, rights, justice) make the most sense to you as they relate to this situation?

What Are the Practical Constraints?

1. John needs to consider what will happen if he does or does not participate in the suggested campaign.
2. The issue of clear-cutting will probably come up again. Should it be dealt with at the Board level?
3. The environmentalists may pick up the campaign and turn it against the company.

What Actions Should Be Taken?

1. What actions should be taken by John, the company, and the environmentalists?

2. Which alternative would you choose if you were in John's position? Why would you make that choice?
3. Which alternative would you choose if you were in Mr. Hollis's position? If you were a company board member? Why would you make that choice?
4. Which ethical theories (utilitarian, rights, justice) make the most sense to you as they relate to this situation?