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**Virtue Ethics Learning through Movies –  
A Pedagogical Roadmap to MacIntyre’s Virtue Approach Using the *Boiler Room* Movie**

**Abstract.** Virtue ethics is an agent-centred ethical approach that considers actions in the context of an individual’s life as a whole. This addresses shortcomings of deontological approaches including competing norms, of utilitarian approaches including non-desirable outcomes. Nevertheless, virtue ethics is not easy to translate into a learning pedagogy. We address this challenge by outlining Alasdair MacIntyre’s approach to virtue ethics and by offering a conceptual argument for the effectiveness of using movies to develop virtue competence. We construct a pedagogical roadmap for using a specific movie, *Boiler Room*, to nurture virtue competence at the intellectual, behavioural and personal layers. First, our argument contributes to the debate in this journal about movies in management and ethics education: We conceptualise movies as *person-centred*, *context-embedded* and *life-narrating*. As these are characteristics typical of virtue ethics, movies are particularly suitable to build virtue competence. Second, we construct a pedagogical roadmap for educators to develop students’ virtue competence through a specific movie and contribute to the virtue ethics education debate and the challenge to make theoretical whole-person virtue conceptions operational in the classroom. Third, virtue ethics competence developed in our roadmap contributes to taking the debate about the need of non-utilitarian ethical approaches one step further.

**Keywords.** Movie; pedagogy; virtue ethics; virtue as competence framework; MacIntyre.

## **Virtue Ethics Learning through Movies –**

### **A Pedagogical Roadmap to MacIntyre’s Virtue Approach Using the *Boiler Room* Movie**

#### **1. Introduction**

The field of virtue ethics in business has greatly developed over the past decades and can today be understood as an established field of academic inquiry (Ferrero & Sison, 2014; Sison et al., 2017). Virtue ethics asks how to be a good person and live a flourishing life (MacIntyre, 2007), rather than focusing on specific actions and their outcomes. Although deontological and utilitarian approaches have long dominated the ethical discourse (Ramboarisata & Gendron, 2019; Rocchi & Bernacchio, 2023), virtue ethics has regained academic popularity over the past sixty years and is now considered a meaningful framework for contemporary business ethics (e.g., Crane et al., 2019; Ferrell et al., 2019). Nevertheless, virtue ethics is not easy to translate into a learning pedagogy. A core challenge is that virtue ethics is contextual and disappoints learners who expect that ethics provides them with a set of specific values or behaviours. Virtue ethics offers students a guide of how to live a good life by developing virtue. In our argument, we build on the work of Alasdair MacIntyre (2007) who advanced the classical virtue ethics debate toward a positive proposal for living a good life by embedding virtue in people’s active work and private life. Being one of the most prominent contemporary philosophers, MacIntyre’s work has been widely applied to many management contexts and has strong influence on philosophy and business ethics debates (Beadle, 2017; Ferrero & Sison, 2014).

However, when it comes to teaching virtue ethics in business, pedagogical tools are less developed than for teaching other ethical approaches relevant for business (Dean & Beggs, 2006; Hunt & Vitell, 2006). The challenge is that virtue ethics aims to develop students’ moral life, through a reflection on the virtues. This contrasts dominant pedagogy that still

focuses on conveying knowledge through lectures and falls short in personal reflection and development (McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006).

Recent work starts to connect virtue ethics with the competence thinking that guides pedagogy in many business schools (Moosmayer et al., 2025). Competence is built through an integration of characteristics at an intellectual (head), behavioural (hands), and personal (heart) layer, and on each layer combines a static with a dynamic dimension, thus moving from knowing to thinking, from acting to interacting, and from being to becoming (Laasch et al., 2023). This understanding includes an equal importance of personal with intellectual and behavioural characteristics, thus catering to virtue as a person-based concept; the dynamic perspective further enables links to actors' entire lives supporting virtue ethics' life-time perspective. Still, dominant pedagogies emphasise intellectual over personal characteristics (Ruhi, 2016) leaving it more difficult to develop virtue competence than to teach utilitarian, deontological and stakeholder-related concepts and applications. Therefore, innovative virtue pedagogies are needed, and we suggest that movies can be a suitable yet underexplored tool for teaching virtue ethics.

Movies, films and TV have become an established pedagogical tool in business and management (e.g. Billsberry et al., 2012, Kankal et al., 2023). Examples from this journal include the use of films in business schools to convey a realistic sense of strategy, management, and entrepreneurship (Szyliowicz & Green 2019), to engage students around succession in family businesses (Parikh 2014), to learn competitive strategic analyses based on films about the beer industry (Hayward & Jiang, 2016) and to bring foreign life into a cross-cultural management course (Desai et al., 2018). Engaging with the critique of utilitarian mainstream, Ayikoru and Park (2019) argued for using movies to enable critical pedagogy in the management classroom. Movies have also been applied to teaching business ethics (Fisher et al., 2015), and Calabor, Merello and Zorio-Grima (2025) share their

experience of using films to develop accounting students' deontological ethics skills. In our argument, we theoretically connect movies and virtue ethics and construct a pedagogical roadmap for virtue ethics teaching with one specific movie, *Boiler Room* (Younger, 2000). This movie does not serve as ethical role model but includes ample questionable decisions and behaviours that serve to explain and reflect on MacIntyre's approach to virtue.

In doing so, our argument first contributes to the debate in this journal about using movies in management and ethics education: We conceptualise movies as potentially (a) person-centred, (b) context-embedded and (c) life-narrating. These characteristics correspond with virtue approaches and thus make movies particularly suitable to build virtue competence. Second, we present a pedagogy roadmap that educators can use to develop virtue competence through a specific movie, and we thereby contribute to the virtue ethics education debate and the challenge to make theoretical whole-person virtue conceptions operational in the classroom. Third, by equipping learners with virtue ethics competence, our roadmap contributes a positive proposal to the debate about non-utilitarian ethics approaches that have often been accused of focussing on critiquing rather than enabling answers.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of virtue ethics and of the three levels of MacIntyre's definition of virtue. In section 3, we first review the debate about movies as a pedagogical tool and then develop the theoretical connections between movies and virtue ethics, namely being person-centred, context-embedded and life-narrating; finally, we review the *virtue as competence* pedagogical framework that will guide the development of our pedagogical roadmap. In section 4, we introduce the movie *Boiler Room*, and explain how intellectual, behavioural and personal layer of the three levels of MacIntyre's definition of "virtue" can be developed along the movie narrative. We conclude by reviewing the contributions of our argument.

## 2. Virtue Ethics – A MacIntyrean Approach

MacIntyre's approach, like other virtue ethics approaches, takes the perspective of the acting subject, being a first-person approach to ethics (Abbà, 1996) or a person-centred ethics (Annas, 1995). In addition, it understands the life of the acting subject as a narrative unity (Annas, 1995; MacIntyre, 2007) and recognizes that each life understood as a narrative unity has a *telos*, or a purpose, which is the achievement of the good life (Abbà, 1995; Annas, 1995; Aristotle, 2000; MacIntyre, 2007). Each person can achieve the good life through the development of habitual dispositions to do the good, which are called "virtues" (Aristotle, 2000): for this reason, a clear understanding of the concept of "virtue" is key to capture the essence of the ethical approach known as virtue ethics.

A virtue can be defined as a habitual disposition to do the good (Aristotle, 2000), and virtue ethics contextualize this definition within the life of each person. For example, once established that the virtue of courage (as defined above) enables the person to keep pursuing a good end even in the middle of obstacles, we can see that different people have different ways to be courageous. For example, in response to an observed misbehaviour in an organizations, experienced managers with a long history in the company can be considered courageous if they report the issue, taking on the consequences of their actions; for someone just arrived and not in a managerial position, the courageous action can be to identify one person of trust to better size the situation first, or to go to the institutional channels dedicated to support employees in this situations. The practical challenge, for virtue ethics, is to provide guidance in finding what the virtuous response is in a particular context and considering the specific personal and organizational circumstances.

This is where Alasdair MacIntyre offers a possible way forward. In this section, we explore the essential concept of "virtue" in light of MacIntyre's proposal for moral philosophy and explain the concepts that aid business students in their understanding of

ethics and virtue. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre (2007) leads the reader to a specific definition of virtue, articulating his analysis according to three different levels through which he defines what a virtue is: (1) practice, (2) narrative unity of life, and (3) tradition. For MacIntyre, the development of virtues involves a three-step process:

“A first which concerns virtues as qualities necessary to achieve the goods internal to practices; a second which considers them as qualities contributing to the good of a whole life; and a third which relates them to the pursuit of a good for human beings the conception of which can only be elaborated and possessed within an ongoing social tradition” (MacIntyre 2007: 273).

For scholars in virtue ethics, MacIntyre’s words are particularly explicative. However, to make this article a useful tool for those who want (or need) to teach virtue ethics in business, these three levels of analysis of MacIntyre’s definition of virtue will be now explained in detail. In this way, it will be easier below, to understand how to use movies to develop virtue ethics competence in business teaching.

## ***2.1 Practice***

MacIntyre understands practice as:

“Any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended” (MacIntyre, 2007: 187).

This definition contains three different elements:

- i. A *practice* is a human activity which is *coherent, complex, socially established*.

- ii. “Internal goods” are realized through the practice (they are defined in detail below).
- iii. Those who participate in the practice have the opportunity to develop the virtues, which contribute to the person’s path to human flourishing while also making the practice better in terms of excellence.

The internal goods mentioned in the definition of practice are abundantly defined by MacIntyre in different passages of his work, and they are object of study of subsequent literature in business and management. Internal goods are specific to a practice and can be characterized only by those who know and “practice” the practice (MacIntyre, 2007: 188-9). They comprise the excellence of the activity and the excellence of the person who is performing it (MacIntyre, 2007; Moore, 2017).

MacIntyre also characterizes another set of goods, namely external goods. While internal goods are unlimited, easy to share with and for community, external goods are limited, and they cannot be shared. Money, material assets, status, and power are examples of external goods. External goods are still “goods”, and their best use is to serve practices where internal goods are achieved, in a clear hierarchy where external goods are good in so far as they serve the creation of internal goods. In this sense, MacIntyre introduce the concept of institution as necessary structure for the management of external goods. “Institutions are characteristically and necessarily concerned with [. . .] external goods. They are involved in acquiring money and other material goods; they are structured in terms of power and status, and they distribute money, power and status as rewards” (MacIntyre, 2007: 194). Institutions host practices; hence, practices depend on institution to work well. However, agents could seek external goods, either neglecting internal goods altogether or subordinating these to external goods. This leads to the loss of integrity or corruption of practices and institutions (MacIntyre, 2007: 195): practices are distorted, and the external goods of institutions invade,

rather than support them (MacIntyre, 1994). This dynamic is not unusual in business and management and, further on, the movie *Boiler Room* provides evidence of the way this dynamic works.

Having defined what a practice and the internal and external goods are, MacIntyre proceeds to the first definition of virtue: “A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods” (2007: 191). For MacIntyre, a virtuous person is that person who habitually pursues those goods that have just been defined as “internal” to the practice. This is just the first step used by MacIntyre to define what a virtue is. The next subsection highlights how the concept of narrative unity of individual life is another key passage for a complete understanding of “virtue”.

## ***2.2 Narrative Unity of Individual Life***

The narrative unity of individual life is the context for the development of virtues, and it seems best captured in a question posed by MacIntyre:

“Is it rationally justifiable to conceive each human life as a unity, so that we may try to specify each such life as having its good and so that we may understand the virtues as having their function in enabling an individual to make of his or her life one kind of unity rather than another?” (MacIntyre, 2007: 203).

This question helps initiate the inquiry about the context where the virtues develop and can be perceived. Among virtue ethics scholars, it is common to assume that a virtue involves a person instead of a single action, and, additionally, that one virtue is not exercised in isolation, just in one sphere of a person’s life (Annas, 2011: 84).

According to MacIntyre (2007), seeing the self as divided into roles is a product of modernity. This represents an obstacle in the consideration of human life as a narrative unity, and it also gives rise to the vice of “compartmentalization”, which is the habit of applying a different moral character depending on the context and circumstances (MacIntyre, 2006). Building the virtue of integrity, as the habit of showing and applying the same moral character to different contexts, can restore the compartmentalized self. This habit helps looking at a person’s life as a narrative unity, with all the elements of a unified narrative: the person is the protagonist of her unique story. From this consideration, the second definition of virtue emerges:

“The virtues therefore are to be understood as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter, and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good” (MacIntyre, 2007: 219).

This definition contains some very useful characteristics to help students achieve a grounded knowledge closely related to their own lived experience:

- i. The existence of a “quest for good”;
- ii. The virtues as dispositions that keep the individual on the path of this quest for good, even when this is difficult;
- iii. The connection between self-knowledge and knowledge of the good.

### **2.3 Tradition**

The previous section highlighted how the context for the virtue is the narrative unity of individual life. Individual lives have a context as well, and MacIntyre uses the label

“tradition” for this social and historical context. The account of tradition provided in this section, and used throughout the article, is the one described by MacIntyre in his works, especially in *After Virtue* (2007)<sup>1</sup>. MacIntyre describes traditions as the order of preferences of a community, which is the context where different lives (understood as narrative unities) are lived. As MacIntyre affirms:

“Within a tradition the pursuit of goods extends through generations, sometimes through many generations. Hence the individual’s search for his or her good is generally and characteristically conducted within a context defined by those traditions of which the individual’s life is a part, and this is true both of those goods which are internal to practices and of the goods of a single life” (MacIntyre, 2007: 222).

A tradition, in the MacIntyrean sense, helps establishing a hierarchy of goods (Higgins, 2003) within the historical and social context where the person lives. By integrating social relatedness, virtue ethics offers another link to stakeholder thinking. The social and historical hierarchy of goods represents the direction toward which a community moves, the goods that the community finds worth pursuing as a community. These goods are such for a specific community, and it is the community that works toward the definition of what “good” actually means, so that “good” can be made possible and also defended. In this sense, traditions are not fixed or uncritical—they are dynamic arguments over time about what constitutes excellence. As Porter explains (2003), MacIntyre’s concept of tradition “is centrally a kind of open-ended inquiry, rather than offering something fixed and static” (p. 43). Thus, part of the ethical responsibility of practitioners is to reform and improve traditions from within, guided by the virtues. For example, we are currently experiencing a renewed culture of sustainability

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<sup>1</sup> In this sense, the term “tradition” should not be intended in its more negative use, i.e. to indicate the fact there is an uncritical transmission of practices and values over time. Rather, the definition of tradition is the MacIntyrean one, which is explained in this section and consistently applied throughout the article.

across different domains (sustainable consumption, production, sustainable lifestyles and habits): this clearly represents an improvement for human beings and the environment, and it is led by individual and collective efforts to make the world a better place for everyone. A few decades ago, this sensitivity to environmental issues was not on the agenda for people, societies and corporations. However, that tradition with no attention to sustainability had the possibility to improve, retaining some aspects and improving others (e.g. introducing recycling in households, standards for companies, integrating sustainability in the curriculum for education, etc.), and we can now affirm sustainability is considered a “good” as part of the current global tradition, to the point that “it has become so normalized and institutionalized” (Caradonna 2022, p. 2). In this context, we can see the role of the virtues is to not only to sustain, but also to critically evaluate and improve traditions. Taking another example, whistleblowers represent an active (and personally risky) effort to re-establish a hierarchy of goods in corrupted organizations, and they do so by living up the standards of the virtue of courage, which enables a person to keep pursuing the good even when it is hard (Aristotle, 2000). Finally, the definition of virtue at the level of tradition can be presented:

“The virtues find their point and purpose not only in sustaining those relationships necessary if the variety of goods internal to practices are to be achieved and not only in sustaining the form of an individual life in which that individual may seek out his or her good as the good of his or her whole life, but also in sustaining those traditions which provide both practices and individual lives with their necessary historical context” (MacIntyre, 2007: 223).

Therefore, the elements to consider regarding virtue in the context of tradition are the following:

- i. A tradition is always socially and historically embedded;
- ii. A tradition establishes a hierarchy of goods; and

iii. Virtues sustain traditions.

As the movie *Boiler Room* will then bring on the spotlight the financial industry and its embeddedness in a particular historical and social context, a special focus on the tradition that sustains the practice of finance is needed: as long as financial activity contributes to personal flourishing and the good of society, we can consider it authentic financial activity (Rocchi, Ferrero and Beadle, 2021). The movie shows how finance as a practice can be corrupted, and what the agents involved can do to restore its purpose of serving individuals and society. The definition of the virtue described so far according to the three levels of the MacIntyrean enquiry is very effective to make the pedagogical roadmap advanced in this article more granular. At the same time, a more synthetic definition of virtue, completely in line with MacIntyre's elaboration, is provided. A virtue can be defined as "a freely acquired habitual disposition or trait of character that enabled one to perceive, deliberate, decide, act, and experience emotions in a proper way, that is, in accordance with reason (practical wisdom), in particular situations" (Ferrero & Sison, 2014, p. 386). Examples of virtue are courage, moderation, and justice. Each of them can be defined theoretically and also seen in action. For example, courage is the virtue that enables the person, among the obstacles, to firmly keep searching and realizing the good. MacIntyre uses this virtue as example of excellence and blames the financial sector for imposing standards that encourage professionals to cultivate recklessness, which is an excess of this virtue, instead of courage (MacIntyre, 2015).

### **3. Developing Virtue Competence with Movies**

To develop our idea that movies can be an effective tool to bring MacIntyre's virtue approach into the classroom, we first review the debate around movies as management pedagogy in this journal and then explore how movies could support the core aspects of the depicted virtue approach. Specifically, we suggest that movies would need to allow *person-centrism* to

align with virtue ethics being a first-person ethics. Connecting to the narrative unity of life, movies need to have the potential to be *life-narrating*, and to fully capture the embeddedness in social and historical contexts (e.g. tradition), movies would need to be *context-embedded*.

### ***3.1 Using movies in business education***

The debate around movies in business education has supported the effectiveness of movies in business programs (Desai et al., 2018; Kankal et al., 2023) and for ethics contents (Calabor et al., 2025), thus being in line with our argument that movies could be useful to develop virtue ethics competence in management education. Movies would allow to move the control of learning from the teacher centrism via the space in which teacher and student co-act, toward student learning. As our approach suggests that students develop virtue competence through formation of their own character, it can be located in the under-researched layer of student learning within the three-level movies in management education framework that Kankal, Patra and Panda (2023: Fig. 1 on p7) derived from their systematic review of the field.

Calabor, Merello and Zorio-Grima (2025) show that movies are effective to develop auditing students' ethical sensitivity. Using Content and Language Integrated Learning, they foster English language learning and the development of ethical sensitivity. It is important to note that their focus was on rule observance, which is aligned with deontological ethics. This is coherent with the needs of the auditing profession and compared to first person virtue ethics, deontological ethics is generally easier to teach as the compliance of a behaviour with a set of rules has a specific (often correct) answer. Our argument extends the use of movies in management education to virtue ethics, which is person-centred and thus extends the array of ethical theories for which movies can be used.

Movies can be effective to bring context into a classroom where real experiences of such contexts (e.g. in foreign countries or the context of Wall Street during the financial

crisis) are not possible. This was highlighted by Desai, Jabeen, Abdul and Rao (2018) in their work on movies in cross-cultural management courses and supports our assumption that movies can help students to learn about the embeddedness of the virtuous life in its social and historical context.

Szyliowicz and Green (2019) build on seminal work by Kenworthy-U'Ren and Erickson (2009: 420) and highlight the power of reality TV to guide theory-supported applications in management education. They suggest that competitive entrepreneurial reality TV shows such as *The Apprentice* or *The Great Food Truck Race* lend themselves to teach strategy, management, and entrepreneurship in a way that it feels real and fits the needs of management students in introductory courses. They further find that producers' focus on entertainment and attracting viewership may enhance student engagement but also pose a limitation to their educational value. In other words, reality TV, Hollywood movies or featured films are not designed as teaching materials and wise choices regarding the specific movies and shows, and perhaps the specific sequences that we show or discuss in class are important. In addition to the choice of material, the specific use in class has been discussed.

Yesildag and Bostan (2023) explore use of movies in a health management course and find that student interaction with faculty is core to learning. They compared groups watching the movie (1) with no discussion, (2) with peer discussion; and (3) with faculty-guided discussion and find that only the third group performs significantly higher in the post-movie exam than a control group that did not watch the movie at all. Particularly for teaching virtue ethics, which is recognized to be a challenging subject, faculty guidance is crucial. Space and time for such interaction might be created through a distinct workshop around the movie. Parikh (2014) finds value of such a film-based workshop distinct from the regular lectures when using the *Godfather* trilogy to teach family business. Their workshop exposes learners to think about the succession decisions of family firms and about processes of self-

development, thus allowing connections to the engagement with one's self in developing virtue competence.

Hayward and Jiang (2016) used feature films to develop students' skills in competitive industry analysis and found it to be more effective than common lectures and written cases. They further clarify that documentaries with a biased informant like Michael Moore help their students to develop critical thinking skills. They also highlight the distinction between deductive pedagogies aimed at conveying controlled content and inductive pedagogies that stimulate learning around a topic starting discussions from specific learners.

As virtue ethics requires an actor's judgement against the backgrounds of their own personal life and their social and historical realities, our argument clearly aims at inductive pedagogies. We are not suggesting that students should learn a set of specific values or of correct ethical behaviours, but we follow MacIntyre in offering students a way forward to develop virtue and ultimately to live a good life. Accordingly, movies with bad behaviors such as gambling or financial fraud do not need to be seen only as bad role models but (when guided productively), can support valuable reflection. Similarly, Ferrero, Rocchi and McNulty (2018) make the case for the use of movies for the education of moral character of business students. They take as example the movie *Margin Call*, and they articulate the potential of the analysis of the thickness of Wall Street agents' moral character as linked to their adherence to existing standards of positive heroism.

### ***3.2 Movie characteristics catering to virtue learning***

Virtue ethics is a person-based ethics and developing virtue ethics competence requires more consideration of one's own context and personal reflective engagement than other ethical approaches such as deontological ethics or utilitarianism (e.g., Ramboarisata & Gendron, 2019). Moosmayer, Rocchi and Ferrero (2025) argue that virtue ethics competence is

developed through reflections of one’s intellectual (head), behavioural (hands), and personal (heart) experiences. In educational realities, this may be challenging, first because undergraduate students lack business experiences to reflect on (Kankal et al., 2023). Second, it is difficult to account for the diversity of experiences in the classroom when teaching students with experience. And third, virtue learning is about the narrative of one’s own life, requiring an engagement with each learner’s individual life (Moosmayer et al., 2025).

We argue that movies may be a tool to address the three challenges. Firstly, choosing a *person-centred* movie allows guiding a discussion along a shared protagonist’s experience even for inexperienced populations (von Weltzien Hoivik, 2009). Secondly, the protagonist’s behaviour is often *context-embedded*, enabling reflection on specific business situations without having experienced them (Desai et al., 2018). Thirdly, movies can be life-narrating by including a ‘mental voice’ that explains a character’s intentions and motivations and connects it to an affective dimension (Ayikoru & Park, 2019), thereby allowing viewers to understand how protagonists’ behaviours link to their past actions and future aspirations. We further deepen these three aspects.

### 3.2.1 *Person-centred*

Different films can be used in management education for achieving different goals. Content can be delivered with a firm representative explaining a certain concept and how they apply it (e.g., Dorle Bahr explaining Life Cycle Analysis, see Beiersdorf, 2015), industry analysis in strategic management has been presented in feature films (Hayward & Jiang, 2016). For developing virtue competence, films need to allow understanding the character of a persona. Films “enable one to experience ... different personality characters” (Desai et al., 2018: 406). In addition, the engagement with movies in class can positively impact student personal competence (O’Doherty, 2020; Calabor, 2025). In this context, biopics (e.g., Brown & Vidal, 2013) and movies with a protagonist who goes through a moral challenge (e.g., Werner,

2014) are suitable. We will choose an example of a feature film as they often provide richer situational context than biopics.

### *3.2.2 Life-narrating*

Virtue ethics builds on the concept of narrative unity of life, that may be difficult to capture in its entirety for students whose one life professional experience is limited to schooling.

“Films can ... make students more engaged, irrespective of their academic and professional experience” (Kankal et al., 2023), because movies can present an agent in professional and private roles and capture their past as well as their future aspirations and thus allow learners to engage with this ‘borrowed’ narrative. Calabor, Merello and Zorio-Grima (2025) further point out that a professional narrative that connects the current decision with past or aspired work experience improves students’ moral and ethical reasoning in decision-making (Craig & Oja, 2012).

### *3.2.3 Context-embedded*

Movies have unique qualities of spatial characterization and visualization and thus an ability to create an understanding of context, and to create meaning from the narrative (O’Doherty, 2020; Alvarez et al., 2004; Bayne, 2008). In their work on movies in cross-cultural management, Desai, Jabeen, Abdul and Rao (2018) argue that films can be a medium of simulation to immerse oneself into the context of a situation, where actual exposure to contexts such as other cultures is not feasible. The use of various audio-visual technologies enhances experiences of context (Fee & Budde-Sung, 2014). “The staging, sound effects, dialogue, and characterizations draw students into the reality of decisions in a more vivid way” (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2001: 81). This is supported by movies’ potential to convey a sense of emotionality and speak to senses which other teaching media do not (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz 2001); as emotions, physical experiencing and sensing do impact how one perceives and judges a situation, these characteristics of movie can lend themselves to make

context more experienceable in the classroom (Ayikoru & Park, 2019). The stimulating emotionality in learning through movies enhances deep learning and enables students' context-specific critical engagement. This is in line with Calabor, Merello and Zorio-Grima (2025) emphasising the importance of practical, *context-based* approaches in promoting ethical awareness and sensitivity among future professionals.

Nevertheless, Fee and Budde-Sung (2014) point out that it may be difficult for learners to immerse in the movie situation when it is far from their own contexts, e.g., in terms of place, race, age, gender or economic context. In this context, two aspects are important to our argument. First, the aim of the movie is not to immerse for the purpose of role modelling and replication, but rather reflective observation and critique. In order to critique, the outside view could limit the understanding of the situation or could enhance the critique due to a wider view on alternative behaviours. Secondly, and more importantly, we argue that to be effective, two stages of reflective engagement with the movie are useful: first, aiming to critique behaviours from within the movie characters; and, secondly, role-playing behaviours within one's own personal role in life (see 4.3 and Table 2). This turns the legacy of foreign context into an asset of a plurality of potential solutions.

### ***3.3 A Virtue as Competence Framework for Directing Our Movie Pedagogy***

We construct our pedagogical roadmap by applying the *Virtue as Competence* framework, which Moosmayer, Rocchi and Ferrero (2025) suggested for the development of virtue ethics competence in education. They connect the MacIntyrean virtue concepts of practice, narrative unity and tradition with the competence framework by Laasch, Moosmayer and Antonacopoulou (2023), which defines competence along an intellectual (knowing / thinking), a behavioural (acting / interacting) and a personal dimension (being / becoming). They emphasise competence as a whole-person concept. An actor *is* competent when *having*

the intellectual *and* behavioural *and* personal characteristics (which they call competences in plural) to fill a certain role. They further highlight an interdependent dynamic dimension: to be competent, actors need to know (ethical theories, climate change facts, discounting cash flow formula) and be capable to dynamically analyse by connecting knowledge and context (calculating the carbon footprints of two investment options and anticipate their social acceptability) – what they label ‘Think’. Ability to *act* (produce, build a factory) needs to come with interdependent *interaction* competence (manage a construction project, engage in stakeholder discourse to establish legitimacy); and personal competence of *being* (ethical leader values, a sustainability mindset) needs to be accompanied with *becoming* (personal development, projecting oneself in the narrative of one’s life).

We chose this framework as its personal component fits well with the person-centred nature of virtue ethics and the three competence dimensions connect well with other established concepts such as the Knowledge-Skills-Attitude framework and work by Benjamin Bloom (1956), as well as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (European Commission, 2005).

*Table 1* provides an overview of the framework: the “Virtues View” specifies competence in each field (Moosmayer et al., 2025); in addition, as applications of the conceptualisation in this section, exemplary descriptions are provided for how a suitable movie would embrace the three characteristics of person-centrism (in practice), life-narrating (in narrative unity), and context-embeddedness (in tradition).

Table 1: *Virtue as Competence* (Moosmayer et al. 2025, p.6; simplified and amended by the authors)

	<b>Intellectual Layer of Competence</b>	<b>Behavioural Layer of Competence</b>	<b>Personal Layer of Competence</b>
<b>Practice</b>	<p><i>Virtues View:</i> Identifying professional practices by distinguish external from internal goods and assess if there is a corrupted focus on external good.</p> <p><i>Practitioner in movie:</i> Movie would show how protagonist relates their work to purpose and money.</p>	<p><i>Virtues View:</i> Contribute to a practice by pursuing excellence.</p> <p><i>Practitioner in movie:</i> Protagonist does work that creates good to society (or not).</p>	<p><i>Virtues View:</i> Self-awareness; self-development as virtue development through participation in a practice.</p> <p><i>Practitioner in movie:</i> Protagonist reflects on the compatibility of their activity with their own values.</p>
<b>Narrative Unity of Individual Life</b>	<p><i>Virtues View:</i> Ability to explain narrative unity vs compartmentalisation of an individual life and to recognize them in a specific example.</p> <p><i>Narrative in movie:</i> To allow assessing integrity, a movie would display the protagonist in different contexts or provide details on past life and future aspirations.</p>	<p><i>Virtues View:</i> Competence to describe and undertake activities that lead to one's own coherent life.</p> <p><i>Narrative in movie:</i> Protagonist behaves in line with their past life and aims to enact future aspirations in line with a coherent narrative (or not).</p>	<p><i>Virtues View:</i> Awareness of the temporal interdependencies of one's past, present and future life.</p> <p><i>Narrative in movie:</i> Protagonist engages with their life trajectory, or movie provides details on how protagonist relates to their past, i.e. compatibility with their values becomes clear.</p>
<b>Tradition</b>	<p><i>Virtues View:</i> Ability to explain how a practice contributes to traditions and to the common good.</p> <p><i>Social embeddedness in movie:</i> Movie displays protagonist in an industry context that allows understanding social norms.</p>	<p><i>Virtues View:</i> Learners become part of traditions by acting aligned with a tradition and by engaging in its institutions.</p> <p><i>Social embeddedness in movie:</i> The relation between protagonist and industry becomes clear; they are in sync (or not).</p>	<p><i>Virtues View:</i> Learners make their social and historical context part of their personal and professional life and thus co-shape their context.</p> <p><i>Social embeddedness in movie:</i> Protagonist engages with industry norms and own values and how the two relate.</p>

#### **4. A Pedagogical Roadmap to Developing Virtue Competence Using *Boiler Room***

We construct the pedagogical roadmap to virtue ethics using the movie *Boiler Room* (Younger, 2000). We follow the recommendation by Calabor, Merello and Zorio-Grima (2025) who chose movies dating to the early 2000s as exemplars of contemporary films. They further summarised previous research, which advises that films should reflect plausible situations, have some aesthetic appeal, and should relate to the educational objectives of the course. While Desai, Jabeen, Abdul and Rao (2018) offer an overview of 101 movies that can be used in management classrooms, we focus on an in-depth exploration of one movie to explain how nuances of virtue ethics can be brought into the classroom through the movie. We do so by constructing a pedagogical roadmap for developing virtue competence using the *Boiler Room* movie. We firstly introduce the specific movie, secondly explain how the three components of virtue are reflected in the movie and thirdly construct the pedagogical roadmap in detail by showing how intellectual, behavioural and personal competence for each aspect of virtue can be developed along the use of the *Boiler Room* movie in the classroom.

##### **4.1 Introducing the Movie “*Boiler Room*” as *Virtue Ethics Teaching Intervention***

*Boiler Room* presents a stereotypical image of Wall Street at the intersection of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Boiler Room* was produced as the dotcom bubble was bursting, and “provides insightful testimonies as barometer of cultural financialization” (Parvulescu, 2018: 106). It has been located between two other popular movies on the financial industry, *Wall Street* (Stone, 1987) and *Margin Call* (Chandor, 2011) and been described as a “midpoint scaling of US neoliberalism” (Wagner, 2016: 48). In a pedagogical/educational context, *Boiler Room* is used as an example of “pump-and-dump” scheme by Hurt (2005), and as a useful tool to explain financial markets, government regulation, and asymmetric information in Leet and

Houser's (2003) article, *Economics Goes to Hollywood. Boiler Room* can be considered a *Bildungsroman* - coming-of-age novel -, in which Seth, the protagonist, traces a path of self-knowledge and exploration of adult life and is called to take a stand. The main character is a "conflicted hero" (Morgenstern, 2000), who inhabits both the justice-oriented world of his father and the money hungry one of his colleagues, struggling to emancipate himself from both and find who he really is. We next detail the plot as foundation for our teaching example.

The reason why *Boiler Room* was chosen to apply the virtue as competence framework lies in many aspects, linked to the fact that the movie is person-centred, context-embedded and life-narrating, as we will show. In addition, but not as a secondary consideration, the choice of this movie is motivated by the age of the protagonist, who is as young as the majority of undergraduate students that business school lecturers encounter: even if Seth is not representative of a diverse group of students in terms of gender or ethnicity, he shares the choices and dilemmas of their age and the same existential and professional questions. Seth and undergraduate business students are confronted with similar stakeholders: family, friends, managers, professional peers, a romantic relationship, a side-hobby crew.

Seth Davis (played by Giovanni Ribisi), an intelligent 21-year-old raised in a Jewish family in New York, is the protagonist of *Boiler Room* (Younger, 2000). Seth's father Marty Davis (played by Ron Rifkin) is a judge with strong moral principles. Seth struggles in college, and he drops out opening an illegal casino, where he works until he receives the visit of Greg Weinstein (Nicholas Katt), who invites Seth for a job interview at a financial brokerage company in Long Island. Seth goes to his interview at JT Marlin, which turns out to be a group interview during which Jim Young (Ben Affleck) explains JT Marlin's operations and what the new recruits are expected to do. They will be on the phone,

pressuring clients to buy stocks of companies promoted by JT Marlin’s management, with the explicit and exclusive purpose of becoming rich.

At work, Seth also meets Abbie Halpert (Nia Long), and they start a romantic relationship which will help shedding light into Seth’s personal life. One night Seth, having left his bag in the office, returns after hours and sees someone busy destroying documents: this event triggers Seth’s suspicious reflections about how JT Marlin actually operates. Seth keeps working for JT Marlin anyway, and successfully. The movie closely follows the deal Seth makes with a client, Harry. Seth manages to convince Harry to buy stock using the savings for a new family house. The consequences of this decision are disastrous: on the one hand, Seth is a talented salesman; on the other hand, the viewer experiences Harry’s desperation as his wife leaves him (because of his unilateral decision to invest), taking their children. Seth was so convincing that Harry made the deal on the phone without consulting his wife.

Seth’s suspicions in the meanwhile increase, as he decides to visit MED patent, a company that JT Marlin strongly promotes, and at the firm’s address he finds only a closed office. Seth finally concludes that JT Marlin is actually selling their clients stocks of non-existent companies. The FBI tries to convince Seth to be an internal informant in the investigation against JT Marlin, and he finally decides to collaborate.

#### **4.2 Boiler Room’s Value in Teaching Virtue Ethics**

There is a specific value in using *Boiler Room* for teaching virtue ethics in the business classroom. Specifically, the movie draws logical connections to the three domains of the MacIntyrean inquiry on virtue as follows.

*Practice.* The movie explores financial activity not in general, but rather in specific and detailed practices such as buying and selling stocks. The level of detail that the viewer has

about the transaction of sales and the many references to the motivations for JT Marlin's employees to keep on selling are valuable material for evaluating a specific activity in the financial sector.

*Narrative unity of life.* Seth is presented in multiple contexts, showing various dimensions of his personal and professional life. Seth is portrayed with his family, at work, in his relationship with Harry the client, with Chris his supervisor, with Abbie his girlfriend, and even with his employees at his illegal casino. There is a complexity and comprehensiveness in the presentation of his character that is particularly suitable for analysing his *life as a narrative unity*, understanding the meaning of his actions and choices in light of who he is and aspires to be, not simply of what he does.

*Tradition.* Boiler Room offers a portrait of financial industry, its operations, and the habits of those who work in finance. It is the description of how an entire sector could (fail to) work which provides insights about the interaction of the law, personal choices, and financial crime. It speaks for a particular (anti-) *tradition*. In addition to this portrait of the finance sector, *Boiler Room* is a panorama of the lives of people who interact with financial services, their choices and their preferences: they represent the variety of stakeholders that a financial company encounters (managers, employees, regulators, clients to name some of those represented in the movie). How people use their money makes their preferences and priorities explicit (see the case of Henry, Seth's client). Overall, this offers space to discuss the concept of professional and cultural *traditions* in *Boiler Room* in light of virtue ethics.

Next, we exemplify our framework implementation based on *Boiler Room*. It is noteworthy that a similar approach can be applied to any other movie that takes a personal perspective within a specific industry and thus allows exploring an individual's narrative unity of life together with an industry's practice and tradition.

### ***4.3 A pedagogical roadmap for virtue competence applying the Boiler Room movie***

We apply the conceptual framework presented in Section 3 to suggest an example of how competence around the three MacIntyrean concepts of practice, narrative unity of life, and tradition could be developed using the *Boiler Room* movie. We discuss how intellectual, personal and behavioural layers of competence can be developed for each of the three concepts with the movie. Particularly for the intellectual layer, the contents presented in the ‘Virtue Ethics – A MacIntyrean Approach’ section of this article could be delivered in a lecture, and our exemplifications show how the movie could be integrated in such delivery.

#### ***4.3.1 Practice***

***Intellectual.*** The intellectual domain aims to introduce the concepts of practice and internal and external goods. The financial industry as the movie’s context could be used to explain the elements of the definition of practice and clarify how the financial industry is a complex and socially established industry. The realization of product excellence could be taught through an exploration of the good that banking products offer to society; and practitioner excellence by exploring the distinguishing characteristics of a good banker, thus conveying the notions of internal goods (operational excellence; helping clients) and external goods (money, status). Throughout these themes, references can be made to the movie, particularly questioning for each point, if JT Marlin’s conduct gets anywhere close to these criteria of practice. There is abundant literature on finance as a practice that can be used as additional reading for the lecturer preparing this content; for example, it can be explained how the way finance positively contribute to the moral development of financial agents and to the good of society is through making projects contributing to the common good possible (see Rocchi, Ferrero & Beadle, 2021). Lectures to convey this intellectual layer of practice could be combined with interactive tools (e.g., kahoots) for in-class votes.

**Behavioural.** The behavioural dimension can be investigated through analysing the context of the movie. This could be done by identifying and analysing the *practice* of the financial trading carried out by Seth in his professional relationship with his client Harry and exploring whether it is coherent, complex and socially established. An appropriate exercise could be to ask the students to analyse the way Seth convinces Harry to buy the stocks, complemented with the discussion about how the senior traders (Greg and Chris) teach Seth how to sell shares. It is very significant that shares are sold by phone. The anonymous character of this kind of conversation allows one to pretend being someone else, impersonate a fake character, or simulate whatever you need to sell the stocks. In short, salesmen can lie. It is meaningful that the motto of JT Marlin is “act as if”, without caring about the truth. An understanding of the behavioural competence layer can be developed through in-class discussions. We offer further guiding questions together with three scenes from the movie in *Table 2*.

**Personal.** At this layer, students should reflect on the contribution of activities to actors’ personal understanding of excellence. Discussions could lead to a clarification of which activities lack the possibility of personal enhancement and flourishing. On this point, the speech that Jim Young gives in the group interview about what is expected of traders is very insightful. In this speech, external goods receive disproportionate attention: there are constant references to status, owning expensive cars, earning a million dollar in three years, and all kinds of luxuries. External goods dominate over internal ones, which are not even mentioned, making it possible for the firm to corrupt the process and the lives of the agents. In-class, discussions help identify the personal perspective on competence in the movie, and votes and questionnaires allow connecting these to students’ views on their own lives. Students are also invited to notice that the company where Seth works does not offer the usual whistleblowing channels, it is actually the opposite: it encourages vicious behaviour.

Students are invited to reflect on potential ways out that keep the person moral integrity within a corrupt work environment.

#### 4.3.2 *Narrative Unity of Individual Life*

***Intellectual.*** Knowledge comprises the understanding that a virtuous life by MacIntyre is consistent across various roles in life. Rocchi and Thunder (2019) highlight the role of narrative unity of life when discussing whether a good person can be a good financial trader. The teacher could start from asking if students perceive a narrative unity in Seth's life; and then introduce the concept of compartmentalization and the virtue of integrity to guide the students' reflection. This analysis can be done within the context of Seth's life presented in the movie, thus not requiring students' to be 20-year-old white Jewish males. Nevertheless, in line with Fee and Budde-Sung (2014), a comparison of Seth's life with their own lives in terms of narrative unity and the search for their place in society can be particularly fruitful for undergraduate populations from similar contexts as Seth; in contrast, different populations in class may allow generating a wider range of opinions in class. Pedagogical tools fostering an understanding of narrative unity of life include analyses of biographies and practitioner talks, and self-reflective exercises can help learners to make links to their own lives.

***Behavioural.*** In this part, it is important to analyse Seth's life in relation to other characters with whom Seth's life is intertwined, for instance: Seth's father, Abbie, Chris, or Greg. Before entering into discussion about the narrative unity of Seth's life, the students are required to analyse these characters as deeply as possible, especially Seth. At the beginning, Seth strives to keep different parts of his life separate and compartmentalized. Then he physically separates himself from his family, and he keeps his new job at JT Marlin secret. Then, his suspicions about JT Marlin create a dilemma for Seth: what should he do? Should he collaborate with the FBI and provide evidence against JT Marlin? In the meantime, should he continue doing his job? These inner movements of Seth's decision-making process are

well captured by the movie, especially in the conversation with Abbie during the riverside date (a clip worth showing during the class). The more Seth gains self-confidence and the more he discovers who he really wants to be, the more he defines his position toward JT Marlin. However, he is not “virtuous” enough to keep pursuing the good that he sees even in adverse situations (lack of courage and constancy). For this reason, he is forced to collaborate with the FBI in the end.

These struggles in Seth’s relationships (father, Abbie, Greg, Casino, FBI) can be used to guide students’ analyses of unity and the consequences of compartmentalisation. Roleplays lend themselves to explore behavioural aspect, and students can be asked to re-play a scene first strictly staying in the movie characters and then, integrating themselves within the movie narrative.

***Personal.*** The analysis of the unity and coherence of Seth’s life is the most important element for educating the students’ character or at least helping them to think about their characters. Analysing Seth’s character and life allows students to understand the narrative unity of life, the danger of compartmentalization, the disruption of prioritizing external goods, the consequences of the lack of integrity and coherence, and so on; *Table 2* offers questions to stimulate this reflection. While practice and tradition are very much about the organization and industry in which one works, the narrative unity is about oneself. The movie offers a persona, a scripted oneself to undertake this reflection on a shared ‘objective’ movie reality.

Moving beyond the movie, students can reflect and discuss where do “I”, the student, want to go with my life, how do I do this consistently? How do I behave when I enter a context where I always aspired to be, and then I find out that it is not as good as I imagined? These are the most important questions to suggest to students in a reflective review of *Boiler Room*, when entering into the “personal” competence layer of the narrative unity of

individual life. Considering the external orientation of practice and tradition, the internal direction of the reflection on the narrative unity of life gives it a certain primacy in the personal layer of virtue development.

In this context, lecturers can invite students to a guided journey of character development through the virtues. In particular, given the specific content and context of the movie, students can focus their attention on the virtues of integrity (as the virtue enabling a person to show the same moral character in different life contexts), practical wisdom (as the virtue that enable us to choose the best means to achieve a good end), and justice (as the virtue of giving each person what is due to her). There are many contributions that detail the students' journey to character development through the virtues (e.g. resources in the *Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtue* or the *Oxford Character Project*). The use of these resources can complement and be integrated in the current pedagogical proposal.

The pedagogical use of reflective exercises such as diaries first for the movie character Seth and then for students' individual own lives highlights an important aspect of virtue ethics. Deontological and utilitarian-based exercises often lead to one correct answer that students should learn to generate, and we might expect a virtue ethics analysis that stays *within* the movie to lead to similar conclusions between students. However, as their individual lives differ vastly, an analysis within their individual lives narrative unity leads to very different conclusions. This is one core aspect of virtue approaches: they are person-centred and context-embedded and do not generate the same outcome for different people or different contexts.

#### 4.3.3 Tradition

**Intellectual.** Teachers could start from asking students what hierarchy of goods they perceive in the banking industry and how dimensions developed over generations in order to discuss what the value of such *traditions* is. Alternatively, one could start from family traditions,

connecting to Seth's family. This allows to help students learn that virtues grow from traditions and help sustain traditions; and that traditions are a source for defining a hierarchy of goods. Moore (2017) can be a source for the lecturer preparing content on tradition. This can be brought in class by combining lectures with video sequences to contrast textbook definitions with the realities of banking, brokering or running a casino.

***Behavioural.*** It is interesting to analyse how JT Marlin operates and how it undermines the industry's established traditions and hierarchies of goods, the internal good of trust as the essential component of positive financial activity. Students should be able to analyse the influence of what JT Marlin does in the Wall Street culture and in the financial culture. A very useful exercise is to ask the students to locate the behaviours the traders have that can ruin the financial culture. For instance, brokers defrauded investors by lying about the firm's reputation and expertise, claiming it had a "research department" that analysed stocks when it did not; they refused to say anything negative about the stocks they pushed, including the "risk factors" discussed in the prospectus; they made baseless price predictions, promising that certain stocks would double in price within a short time period; they impersonated other salespeople at the firm; and they discouraged and even impeded customers from selling the stocks they had previously recommended without regard to the customers' best interests. Once students have completed this exercise, they can be asked to identify personal values that are compatible or in conflict across different social contexts of their own lives.

***Personal.*** To explore the personal layer of tradition, students can analyse if Seth's move from casino to banking is well-intended and potentially virtuous. When would Seth need to realise that JT Marlin conflicts with investment banking traditions? Would there have been better ways out for Seth? Moving from the film to their own lives, students can be invited to reflect on what kind of history they want to contribute to. They can do so by thinking about the sector/company where they work (or where they would like to work) and

how this sector/company contributes to the common good of society at large. It is very important to reflect on conflicts of tradition: is there any clash of values among the different contexts in which I live? A useful exercise can be done by asking student to compare family traditions (students are asked to form pairs and compare the three most important values in their respective families), and then to compare workplace/university values (students are asked to form pairs and compare the three most important values in their workplace/university); they reflect on the similarities and differences and the discussion is shared with the class. Pedagogically, traditions and their conflicts can first be identified in the movie. From there, students can compare family traditions (values) in small group discussions and can realise that they may find competing traditions which can still all be virtuous. They can then contrast these family traditions against school traditions and aim to develop individual implications for their lives.

*Table 2* presents our roadmap to develop virtue competence through the *Boiler Room* movie. It depicts the teaching strategy for the three levels through which MacIntyre builds the definition of virtue according to the dimensions of the Virtue as Competence framework. The table offers a clear approach to developing virtue ethics competence through the *Boiler Room* movie. It shows how the movie can be integrated in each cell to make the learning experience more concrete for students. In addition, the table offers guiding questions that can be used to facilitate in-class discussion. In addition, pedagogical approaches are highlighted to show how a range of teaching and learning resources could be used in conjunction with the movie to bring the conceptual framework to life.

Table 2: A pedagogical roadmap using the Boiler Room movie to develop virtue competence

	<b>Intellectual Layer of Competence</b>	<b>Behavioural Layer of Competence</b>	<b>Personal Layer of Competence</b>
<b>Practice</b>	<p>The financial industry could be used to explain the elements of the definition of practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The financial industry as complex and socially established industry.</li> <li>- The realization of product excellence taught through an exploration of the good that banking products offer to society.</li> <li>- The realization of excellence of the practitioner taught along the excellence that our <i>Finance</i> programs develop.</li> <li>- Teaching the difference between external goods (status and money) and internal goods (operational excellence, satisfaction from helping a client to financially realize a community project).</li> </ul> <p>In applying the movie, each of the points could be questioned for JT Marlin.</p> <p>Pedagogical approaches: Typically lecture-based. Can be combined with questionnaire and in-class votes.</p>	<p>Identify the “practice” in Boiler Room.</p> <p>The activity (buying-selling stocks) is coherent, complex, socially established.</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does it contribute to development of excellent products? Reflection on selling fake stocks.</li> <li>- Does it make the seller a better person? Reflection on the difference between excellence and success.</li> </ul> <p>These questions can be answered in light of three clips of the movie:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relationship Seth-Harry.</li> <li>- Greg and Chris training session on how to sell.</li> <li>- Activity of selling on the phone (anonymous, fake identity, lies, etc.).</li> </ul> <p>Pedagogical approaches: Discussion along the movie starting from guiding questions that students should first consider individually before group discussion in class.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does success in JT Marlin reflect a notion of excellence?</li> <li>- Seth is running a Casino because he is good at it. What elements of practice do you find in Seth’s casino business, what is missing?</li> <li>- Discussion could lead to activities lacking the possibility of personal enhancement and flourishing.</li> <li>- Does JT Marlin offer any good to its customers; and can activities inconsistent with others’ good be virtuous?</li> </ul> <p>On this point, the speech that Jim Young gives in the group interview about what is expected of traders is very insightful.</p> <p>Pedagogical approaches: Discussion along movie scenes can be combined with questionnaire and in-class votes</p>
<b>Narrative Unity of Individual Life</b>	<p>Concepts of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Compartmentalization</li> <li>- Integrity</li> </ul> <p>Is there narrative unity in Seth’s life? Conversation leading to the importance of internal goods and thus the connection of all three dimensions.</p> <p>Connect Seth aged around 20 with lives of students seeking for orientation: Discuss the consequences both on a</p>	<p>To see the struggle between integrity and compartmentalization, the students are invited to notice how Seth changes (if he does) along different relationships/contexts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seth-his father</li> <li>- Seth-Abbie</li> <li>- Seth-Greg (or Chris)</li> <li>- Seth in the illegal casino</li> <li>- Seth and the FBI</li> </ul>	<p>What kind of life does Seth want to live? What do you think are Seth’s values and beliefs?</p> <p>Are Seth’s behaviours consistent across his relationships?</p> <p>Is it a consequence of compartmentalization that Seth got into the bad practices of JT Marlin? Did he have to realize the scam earlier? Is his ‘way out’ part of a consistent</p>

	<p>practical and existential level of living up to the standards of a divided self.</p> <p>Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of living with integrity.</p> <p>Pedagogical approaches: Interactive lecture, biographies, self-reflective exercises.</p>	<p>Students are invited to explore the issues related to a compartmentalized life. What is the personal price to pay for a young person who wants to gain one million dollars in three years?</p> <p>Pedagogical approaches: Role play based on movie sequences.</p>	<p>narrative, a change in life, or just random?</p> <p>Class could move to ‘What kind of life do <i>you</i> want to live?’</p> <p>Pedagogical approaches: self-reflective exercises, writing a diary (if this session is part of an extended course).</p>
<b>Tradition</b>	<p>Starting from the banking industry: What is a tradition?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hierarchy of goods</li> <li>- Intergenerational dimension</li> </ul> <p>Alternative: What family traditions exist in Seth’s family? How do these connect to traditions in Seth’s fields of activity.</p> <p>Depending on the country and the students’ backgrounds, a reference to differences in commercial banking vs investment banking could be made to guide the clarification of the internal good each claims to make.</p> <p>Pedagogical approaches: Lecture; could contrast movie sequences with textbook definitions of how banking creates value to customers.</p>	<p>Students are invited to reflect and express perspectives on JT Marlin and its <i>modus operandi</i>. They could find that JT Marlin undermines the industry’s tradition and its hierarchy of goods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Defrauding investors;</li> <li>- Selling stocks which have no value;</li> <li>- Ignoring risk;</li> <li>- Promoting a culture where the success corresponds to possession of external goods only.</li> </ul> <p>Pedagogical approaches: Along the movie: Asking students to identify how JT Marlin violates traditions. Personally: Exercise (list the three values that you think sustain two different social contexts of your life; are they compatible? Do they clash?)</p>	<p>Is Seth’s move from casino to banking well-intended and potentially virtuous? When would Seth need to identify that JT Marlin conflicts with banking traditions? Would there have been a better way out for Seth?</p> <p>What kind of history do you want to contribute to?</p> <p>Compare:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In which sector/company I would like to work / how is this sector/company contributing to the common good of society at large?</li> <li>- Conflicts of tradition: is there any clash of values among the different contexts where I live in?</li> </ul> <p>Pedagogical approaches: Along the movie: Discuss when conflict with tradition can be identified and how to respond. Personally: compare family traditions (in student pairs, compare the three most important values your families). Then contrast against workplace / university values.</p>

## 5. Conclusion

We started from the observation that virtue ethics as person-centred ethics gains popularity but remains challenging to teach in business school classrooms. We conceptualised movies as

potentially person-centred, context-embedded and life-narrating. We argued that these characteristics make movies a useful tool to address the pedagogical challenges of virtue ethics and to use movies in virtue ethics education. We then introduced the *Boiler Room* movie and applied the *Virtue as Competence* framework to it.

In doing so, we contributed to the debate about using movies in management and ethics education that is ongoing in this journal. We pushed the boundaries of the movies in business (Desai et al., 2018; Kankal et al., 2023) and business ethics education (Calabor et al., 2025) debates, to include considerations of virtue ethics, and we theoretically advanced this discourse by conceptualising the characteristics that movies need to be suitable for virtue education (being person-centred, context-embedded and life-narrating). In considering these characteristics, in our argument we addressed the challenges of virtue ethics education, namely that students lack business experiences to reflect on (e.g. Kankal et al., 2023), that the diversity of student experiences is difficult to channel in business education (Desai et al., 2018), and that learning consistent with one's own life narrative requires an engagement with each learner as individual (Moosmayer et al., 2025).

As the effectiveness of learning from movies depends on student interaction with faculty (Yesildag & Bostan, 2023), we constructed a pedagogical roadmap that educators can use to deliver an interactive reflective intervention for developing virtue competence through a specific movie, and we thereby contribute to the virtue ethics education debate (e.g., Ferrero & Sison, 2014) and the challenge to make theoretical lifespan-oriented virtue conceptions operational in the classroom (Sison et al., 2017). We take the recent discourse on virtue as competence (Moosmayer et al., 2025) further by connecting it to teaching through movies and by applying the *Virtue as Competence* framework to the *Boiler Room* movie. Our theoretical considerations also allowed us to construct a ready-to-use pedagogical roadmap to

implement in the context of a standalone session or a course in ethics and business, or as a workshop to accompany a lecture (as in Parikh, 2014).

While qualitative student feedback that we received in response to addressing virtue with the *Boiler Room* movie in our classes was positive and highlighted the perceived learning improvement through the possibility to reflect on and discuss an immersive but non-personal experience, our work will benefit from further research that empirically validates our approach and explores the nuances that make virtue education through movies most effective. In addition, theoretically comparing MacIntyre's approach to virtue with stakeholder theory and developing a more thorough integration of the stakeholder concept can be beneficial to both debates.

While philosophy distinguishes three principal ethical theories, rule-based deontology, outcome-centred utilitarianism and person-focused virtue ethics (Rocchi & Bernacchio, 2023) and stakeholder approaches are popular in business studies (Freeman, 2010), debates around ethical competence in business tend to neglect virtue ethics (Ferrero and Sison, 2014). Calabor, Merello and Zorio-Grima (2025) explored movies' influence on auditing students' rule observance attitudes (deontology), and Ramboarisata and Gendron (2019: 1) find ethics stuck in a utilitarian practice: "Such a practice represents, nonetheless, an impediment to the development of competencies, which future managers will need in order to understand societal grand challenges and to contribute to the fulfilling of contemporary collective objectives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)." They develop a critical proposal by building on the meaning of non-utilitarian ethics teaching and by identifying barriers to change. We built on the virtue approach, as proposed by MacIntyre (2007), who developed a positive framework for a good life today that addresses the shortcomings of contemporary work and management practices. We advance the ethics education debate by complementing the deontological and utilitarian approaches and their

critique from a critical pedagogy view, by offering a positive, person-focused ethics approach. In a world in which established normative references are increasingly in question and some of the aspects of dominant business systems prove to have the potential to undermine personal flourishing and the good of society, our roadmap promotes an ethics approach that offers learners a positive proposal that locates the root of good in their own life.

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