Duplicity

Ethical Issues in the Movie Duplicity

Business World

In Duplicity, the business world was portrayed in a negative light. The movie was about two competing companies and a secret that one supposedly had and the other wanted to have to beat them to market with it. Both of the companies involved had spies working in the other company’s counter-intelligence department trying to hand off anything that might be useful to their respective company. As it turns out, the company that supposedly has the big secret is making up everything. They are able to get the CEO of the other company to announce something at a stockholders meeting that turns out to be false. That issue and many other ethical issues come up during the movie.

To give some background, the two companies are Equikrom and Burkett Randle. The big secret is a shampoo that will re-grow hair where it once was, being a cure for baldness.
Major Ethical Issues

The most appalling ethical issue that comes up in this movie was that both companies had spies working in the other company, and spies working to get information from employees of the other company. We see early on that Equikrom has a spy department that the CEO is very involved in. They are researching information gained from a variety of sources within and around Burkett Randle. One source is a female that is in Burkett Randle’s counter intelligence group. Another source is gained when a spy seduces an employee in a critical role and gains some knowledge.

Spying, in my eyes is equivalent to breaking in and stealing. The difference is you can do a better job when you have spies because you have a step up on information. It is very un-ethical because it’s unfair to competition first of all; secondly, I’m pretty sure there are some legal implications involved. As it turns out, Equikrom was not the only company doing this. Burkett Randle also had a spy working in Equikrom’s spying department. She plays a major role in getting the outcome that Burkett Randle wants.

We never see any resolution to this issue in the movie, with the exception of both companies having a spy, leveling the playing ground. What should be done is spying should not be sponsored by the company in that manner. As a comparison, my company finds out information about competitors and their products from ways that are more legal, but they still border on being ethical. To be totally ethical, competitors could form some form of anti-spying agreement, and if one is caught or suspected, then both companies look into it together. The way I would try to obtain competitive information and still remain ethical is to ask current and potential customers what they like about our product.
and the competitors. This way information is offered up that anyone can get and no-one is going to be caught or charged with spying.

The next most important ethical issue I saw was Burkett Randle planting untrue information in various records to trick Equikrom into thinking there was something special. They added information into files regarding travel of the CEO, acquisitions, employees and expenses for them. They also placed people in situations to make the story appear real. The problem with this is now a company is playing the spy game and attempting to deceive their competitor. What if this information got out to the wrong people such as real stockholders and they believed this information to be true? A lack of trust could develop between the company and its stockholders, and the company’s public image could diminish.

Again, we never see resolution of this issue as the CEO is involved in the scandal as well. What should be done is to look at the whole situation and see what parties could be affected if the false information got out. Most likely this would point to the idea that too many bad things could happen from this miss-information to make it worth doing. I would not partake in such schemes, and I would encourage companies I’m involved with not to either.

Part of the set-up was to have a Burkett Randle employee act as though they were caught with the information and trying to steal it. They had a counter-intelligence employee watch this person until additional help arrived. This person happened to be a spy from the other company. This is when the secret was physically transferred. They only had one person watching the guy, they didn’t bring them to a standard room, and they didn’t have any cameras. This is an ethical issue because things happened before
other people got to the room, and who is more believable, an employee who still appears
good or one who appears to be a thief? It becomes a he said she said argument and the
“good” employee will most likely win.

For a third time, we don’t see any resolution to the issue, but many improvements
can be made. Having more than one person watching the criminal creates witness
testimony as to what happened. Having a standard room provides equal treatment for all
people in a similar situation. The good person used tape to cover the bad person’s eyes
and mouth while she left the room. Finally, having cameras in this room or in other areas
would help settle the he said she said argument that could ensue if other things aren’t
done. Those are things I would like to see if I had any say.

All of the issues mentioned above were portrayed as ok and commonplace. The
CEO and other management were involved, and that made it very difficult for a person to
blow the whistle and still have good standing, even if they are 100% in the right.

Other Business Ethics Issues

There are many other ethical issues portrayed in this movie that were of lesser
importance in my eyes but nonetheless still worth mentioning. Equikrom gained
information on Burkett Randle electronically. They essentially hack into Burkett
Randle’s computer system and document printer locations and then steal copies of
everything being printed on those machines. Anything important would most certainly
be printed out for a report at some point in time from someone’s computer.

Burkett Randle’s counter intelligence team was given a tip when workers “lost”
information or stuff such as a laptop. They investigated these losses immediately and
thoroughly, and then kept a file on each person involved to track if there is a continued
problem. This is a good manner to resolve these problems if key people are trusted with information.

At the beginning of the movie, we see the two companies meeting up at a remote airport (this is actually the end of the story and the movie tells us how it got to this point). The CEO’s meet in the middle and argue then fist fight. This situation would have been better handled by meeting with the same groups, but hiring an arbitrator to hear the discussions, especially since in this example both companies were acting un-ethically to begin with.

When the employee is seduced, we see her entering a code by hand. She entered someone else’s code so that she wouldn’t be caught. As using other’s codes is unethical, companies could switch from hand entered codes to cards or other means of identification such as retinal scans or print scanners for access to secure and important information.

The last issue that I really noticed and had a concern with was Equikrom had a double of the CEO for making appearances so he could go and work with the spy department. Going to work with the spy department is bad enough, but the double is what I really want to mention. Again, there are many bad things that could come from this if people outside the company find out.

**Summary**

In watching *Duplicity*, I learned that some things my company does, I view as unethical. It’s hard to see any of them until you can reflect on something similar. The one issue that made it most relevant to me was the spying that occurred. At trade shows, we’ll have people with different shirts and badges going around and looking at competitors’ equipment. We’ll also rent equipment from competitors under our rental
company and get information off that unit. We’ve also got people that call and get information from competitors, posing as a potential customer.

I also learned that there are more business ethics issues every time you turn the corner. Many little things come up, and when you are consciously looking for them you see how many are really out there. I’ve begun to question which of Kohlberg’s stages I thought I was at. I thought I was higher, maybe between a four and five for most things, but then I began to realize how at times I drop down to lower levels. It’s almost somewhat scary. If everyone at the same time were at their lower points, what kinds of things could happen?