

Fords disregard for ethical responsibility

[Business](#), [Company](#)



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With the demand for sub-compact cars, Ford responded with the release of the Ford Pinto. With a timeframe of 2 years to complete, and a projection target of 2000lbs for \$2000, Ford released the new vehicle in 1971. Since the projection target was so high, the company had to make an ethical decision on compromising the target or the safety of others. Ultimately their decision resulted in the deaths of many, and pain and suffering to even more. Ford's agenda was not led by any ethical decision-making process but rather by sale margins and projection deadlines. I can prove this by discussing three ethical decision-making processes, and how the company completely disregarded them. The first one I will discuss is the utility theory, it involves doing the most good with the least harm. Then the rights theory, is required to respect the rights of all who have a stake in the outcome of the decision. Finally, the virtue theory, a decision process made by someone with good characteristics that offer for the development of our humanity. The Pinto hit the project target, but Ford exposed the public to this product with a faulty gas tank, that resulted in unnecessary amounts of death and anguish.

Absence of Utility Theory

Companies take in to account safety issues and know that there might be some amount of risk with the goods or services. For liability purpose, and ethical corporate responsibilities, they might take some precautions to prevent unnecessary amounts of that risk. The utility theory is an ethical theory that is used to doing the most good with the least harm. When Ford went to the drawing board and developed their plan for the Pinto design, nowhere on there did it discuss safety. In fact, Ford employee went on to say, “safety doesn’t sell”. This train of thought deliberately ignored the safety of the public. This proves the absence of the utility theory. The company was driven by making sales at any cost, even an unnecessary amount of death and anguish. Additionally, earlier to making the Pinto they had previously designed a safer version of a gas tank of which they owned a patent for and did not use it. What it boils down to is that the company had a choice, and they did not consider all the people with stakes of the outcome.

Absence of Rights Theory

The truth is they had choices. Rather than respecting the rights of all who have a stake in the outcome of the decision, they prioritized that projection target. The company could have extended the projection time to allow for a design that would be both cheap and safe. They recklessly set a time frame of 25 months, the average time a company takes to produce and manufacture a new vehicle is 45 months. This is almost half of the average timeframe. Alternatively, they could have spent a little more money to make it safe for the public. They went as far as developing several solutions to the faulty gas tank, one of which was only one dollar and weighted all but a

pound. This one pound would have saved the lives of many and prevented many burn victims. Negligently, they did not include this feature. They could of also went back to the drawing board and started over or scratched the Pinto entirely. Every alternative compromised the projection target, even slightly. Ford went the distance to meet their projection target, including the disregard of any amount of respect they owe to society. Which leads to my final example of the virtue theory, a decision process used by someone of good character.

Absence of Virtue Theory

Virtue Theory decision making is an approach to ethical decisions that are consistent with certain ideal moral characteristics that offer for the development of our humanity. Ford has taken a known stance against safety regulation policies. In attempts to address the elephant in the room so to speak, a staff member held a meeting to discuss the gas tank safety issues. There were only two people who attended the meeting including the said employee himself, Lou Tubben. The company's ethical behavior is completely and utterly absent int his example. Staff members went on record saying they feared if they mentioned the gas tank, they would have been fired. This is the kind of working atmosphere that the company cultivated. They continue to demonstrate this lack of ethics or virtue decision making since over two million ford pintos pre-1977 are still out there acting as ticking time bomb. This means that there will continue to be burn injuries and death until it is fixed. Since the standard 301 does not bind them to do so, they have not fixed this and this will result in about 70 deaths per year. These are not the actions of a person who demonstrates good character.

On The Other Hand

There are other forms of ethical theory for making decisions but none of them were explored either. While it is true many companies are faced with valuing human life, they do take steps to avoid an unsettling amount of negligence. Reconstruction men were able to determine the issues with the vehicle and this resulted in the Pinto lawsuit. The company put these cases in front of jury's and ended up paying out millions of dollars to plaintiffs. In 1977 a court in orange county California awarded 125 million in damages to Richard Grimshaw, it was later reduced to 3.5 Million but demonstrated that there can be repercussions to making unethical decisions. Ethics are doing what is right, and they failed to make any decision based on ethics. Which is what draws me to conclude the bottom line of this all.

The Bottom Line

The company exposed the society to these risks knowing the outcomes would be harmful to the public but would likely be able to outweigh this with the revenue they generated. Ultimately, they compromised ethical decision making to meet the project target. They did not do the most good with the least harm. Ford did not spend much time working on safety and went as far as acknowledging that safety doesn't sell, they even owned patents on other safer gas tanks they did not use. Ford did not respect all the stakeholders who would be affected. Had they been more respectful they would have extended the projection times, adjusted the budget, started from scratch, or scrapped the whole project all together. Finally, Ford did not demonstrate good character, otherwise they would bite the bullet and pay for each vehicle to be repaired for the Pintos built prior to 1977 despite 301 not requiring

them to. The company had a projection target and blatantly disregarded the duty they have to society to hit that target. Wouldn't it suck to be a cost and benefit analyst for Ford? Wouldn't want to know what the price is for sacrificing a moral compass, considering they value human life at only a dollar.