

Ford pinto ethicsassignment assignment

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Ford Pinto Case: The Invisible Corporate Human Pricetag In this essay, I will argue that Ford Motor Company's business behavior was unethical as demonstrated in the Ford Pinto Case. Ford did not reveal all the facts to consumers about a harmful gas tank design in the Ford Pinto. They tried to justify their decision to sell an unsafe car by using a Cost-Benefit Analysis which determined it was cheaper to sell the cars without changing to a safer gas tank. The price of not fixing the gas tanks is human injuries and fatalities.

By choosing not to make the Pinto a safer vehicle Ford placed a price on the head of every consumer. Ford's primary concern was to maximize profits. Ford had a duty and ethical responsibility to customers to stop production once they knew of the evident dangers and take the necessary measures to eliminate them by redesigning the gas tank. I will discuss the Ford Pinto Case and the harm Ford Motor Company (FMC) caused by its inability to make decisions that competently respect the wellbeing and rights of people. Pinto crashes have caused 500 burn deaths to people who would not have been seriously injured if the car had not burst into flames. The figure could be as high as 900. " Ford was not obligated legally to change the unsafe gas tank design. However, acting legally doesn't mean the behavior is ethical. Ford was ethically responsible either to inform consumers of the probable harm or stop production when they knew of the apparent danger to buyers and take the necessary actions to eradicate them by redesigning the gas tank.

Ford withholding valuable product information that violated the moral rights of others, and exchanging human life for company gains and profits is not only unethical but egregious. In the late 1960s the idea for the Ford Pinto

came about as a result of the influences of foreign auto manufacturers. As a response to the pressures of competition for developing a more fuel efficient and smaller car, Ford Motor Company designed a subcompact car that turned out to be substandard and unsafe. This was due to Ford's precipitate production of the Pinto in less than adequate time.

What should have taken three and a half years from conception to production; Ford completed it in two years. Before Ford began production, they ran rear-end collision tests on models and the engineers discovered a dangerous design flaw. The gas tank had a significant risk of exploding when impacted from the rear. Ford's intention was to gain profit and stay on top of market demands for a more economical car. According to the case there was no legal government safety standards in place at the time the Pinto was in the pre-design stage regarding fuel leaks in rear-end crashes.

Before release of the Pinto, Ford crash tested many model cars against the 20-mph moving barrier federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 301, which was just a proposal at the time. All of the tests results were failures, the tests cars when hit from behind had gas tank leakage. Ford engineers continued testing and proposed several safer gas tank designs which were tossed out because of high costs. Ford had knowledge of new design which would lower the probability of the Ford Pinto from catching fire and blowing up; the new design would have cost \$11 per car. Ford chose not to use the new design.

Their defense was based on a cost-benefit analysis (CBA) to determine if the costs of using the safer gas tank design were greater than the cost to pay a settlement to those that got injured or killed. The analysis done with the new

design resulted in 180 less deaths occurrences. Ford's CBA resulted in \$12.5 million X \$11 per vehicle produced totaling \$137 million to change to the safer gas tanks, versus \$12.06 million for 180 injuries, \$1.47 million for 2,100 damaged cars and \$36 million, their value for human life bringing Ford's total costs to \$49.5 million.

Ford continued the production on the Pinto with the unsafe gas tank design, knowing the risk of harm to consumers. Pinto engineers were under high "anti-safety pressure from the goal set by Lee Iacocca (Ford's vice-president) known as the limits of 2,000. The Pinto was not to weigh an ounce over 2,000 pounds and not to cost a cent over 2,000. Iacocca enforced these limits with an iron hand," Lee Iacocca was known for saying "Safety doesn't sell". The Pinto was released for sale with the flawed design. There are a few concerns about harmful behavior of the FMC that should be discussed.

A behavior is harmful when it wrongfully sets back the interest of others and has a high risk of harm. Obviously, the gravity of harm in this case is very high being that it is life threatening. Once a consumer has purchased the Pinto and drives it off the lot he is at risk to getting rear ended, and burned to death by a car fire or explosion. Since the weight of this harm is very severe, the low probability of the consumer having an accident doesn't discount Ford's unethical behavior. Indeed, driving a Ford Pinto would place a consumer's life at risk.

Also at stake are the interests of Pinto passengers and drivers of other vehicles who certainly are not willing to risk their lives so Ford can make an extra buck. Everyone has an interest in not getting injured or killed. Setting

back the interest of consumers isn't the only thing Ford Motor Company was responsible for. Indubitably, the company wronged the consumers and passengers by violating their rights to not be killed in a car fire and their right to minimal health by not being severely burned. One might even say their right to freedom of choice was also violated by not being told all the facts about the Pinto.

Consumers would have probably chosen a different car. One might argue that FMC's behavior is excusable because the company used the NHTSA legal decision that CBA qualified as an appropriate method to determine safety design standards. Ford used NHTSA's figure of \$200, 725 to estimate the cost for a person killed in a Pinto auto accident. However, this is not a valid justification since only innocent ignorance and mistakes constitute an excuse. Ford's unethical behavior is indefensible, they should have known better.

Once the company gained the knowledge that the number of accidents, injuries and deaths associated with the Pinto were rising, they could have stopped production. Ford even tried to use the excuse that there were many other cars catching fire and causing injuries. However, the data presented in this case study show that the production of the Ford Pinto with the flawed engine design was followed by a notable increase in injuries and deaths caused by Pinto car fires to drivers of all ages. As indicated in the case 500 or more burn deaths were caused by the Pinto catching fire.

Instead, Ford continued to produce the Pinto with a flawed dangerous design because the price for injury and death was less than paying the \$11 per car

to make them safe. It is evident Ford values money more than human life. Ford fails ethically when posed with the questions, did consumers provide valid consent? Did the consumer know of the risk and life threatening affects of the flawed gas tank design? Ford failed give consumers the right to consent to something so significant by withholding valuable information about the bad gas tank design.

It could be considered valid consent if consumers were aware of the dangers and risk they would be susceptible to if they purchased the Pinto. Under the IEEE Code of Ethics, the number two code, IEEE Bylaw I-104. 14 states companies must “ avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest whenever possible, and to disclose them to affected parties when they do exist. Be honest and realistic in stating claims or estimates based on available data”. Since, there was no valid consent the setback of interests is wrongful.

Kant would say Ford treated them solely as a means to their own company gains since the consumers never had the right to decide if they wanted to risk injury or death. At amusement parks, before you get on the roller coaster there are signs warning you of the possible dangers and risks of the ride. If people were not informed of the dangers before riding roller coasters, not knowing the possible life threatening conditions their lives are considered as being at stake for profit without giving them the opportunity to decide to ride safely or not.

It is clear that FMC treated consumers purely as a means to increase gains and profits. We can conclude that FMC made the unethical decision that its profits prevailed over human life. Fords only concern during the engineering

process of development when confronted with existence of defects, was the delays and cost of millions. It seems Ford believed that it is perfectly fine to sacrifice a few lives for their gain. Ford has a duty to design their cars in order to avoid probable risks of harm. The economic theory of CBA should never be used when it means putting human life before profit and gain.

Since we have the right to minimal health, every Pinto car purchaser, passenger and even other drivers were wronged by Ford's decision to put costs of the car before on human life. Indeed, Ford withheld critical information about their car from consumers which setback their interests. Knowing that ford wrongfully set back the interests of many people, we can conclude that it is harmful for FMC to continue selling the Pinto with flawed gas tanks without revealing all the facts and gaining consumers valid consent.