

Alexander Ryan

Tina Prouty

CPR E 394

03 March 2024

Ethics in Practice: A Case Study on the Volkswagen Emissions Scandal

The Volkswagen emissions scandal, known as Dieselgate, is a poignant example of ethical lapses within the automotive industry. This case highlights the importance of adhering to ethical codes, such as the IEEE Code of Ethics and the Virtue of Ethics, to ensure responsible business conduct and protect the interests of various stakeholders.

A "Code of Ethics" is a moral compass, providing professionals with a framework to make principled decisions. In the case of Volkswagen, adherence to a comprehensive code of ethics could have averted the intentional installation of cheat devices designed to manipulate emissions tests. The IEEE Code of Ethics, which emphasizes honesty, integrity, and the well-being of the public, directly applies to this situation, highlighting the need for a robust ethical foundation in the automotive industry.

In ethical decision-making, it is imperative to consider the potential consequences of actions on various stakeholders. I would refer to established codes of ethics, such as IEEE, and assess the impact on the environment, public health, and consumer trust. Balancing legal considerations, cultural nuances, and the virtues associated with ethical behavior, such as honesty and responsibility, would guide my decision-making process.

The VW issue involved deliberately deceiving regulators and consumers by manipulating emission tests. This breach of trust had severe consequences for the environment and public health. Ethical issues included violating the IEEE Code of Ethics principles, particularly those related to honesty, avoiding harm, and environmental responsibility.

Three virtues from the Virtue of Ethics particularly relevant to the Volkswagen case study are: Honesty, Integrity, and Responsibility. Volkswagen's lack of transparency about the emission levels of their vehicles violated the virtue of honesty. Consumers and regulators could have made more informed decisions if the company had been forthcoming. Integrity, or adherence to moral and ethical principles, was compromised as Volkswagen intentionally engaged in deceptive practices to meet emission standards, undermining the trust of both regulators and customers. Taking responsibility for the consequences of one's actions is a crucial virtue. Volkswagen's failure to promptly acknowledge and rectify the issue demonstrated a lack of responsibility, further exacerbating the ethical dilemma. These virtues are relevant to the case study as they address the core ethical shortcomings in Volkswagen's conduct. While other virtues, such as fairness and courage, could also be considered, the chosen virtues directly align with the deceptive nature of the scandal.

The Volkswagen emissions scandal underscores the critical importance of ethical considerations in business practices. Adhering to codes of ethics, embodying virtues such as honesty, integrity, and responsibility, and considering the broader impact on society is essential for fostering a culture of ethical decision-making. Similar scandals can be

avoided through a comprehensive ethical framework, ensuring industries' responsible and sustainable development