Discussions of fear appeals in marketing have commonly centered on the cognitive and social mechanisms by which the introduction of anxiety in the context of a message can successfully persuade an audience [cf. Rotfeld 1989]. Despite the extensive use of fear appeals in advertising and promotions [Unger and Stearns 1983], the marketing literature has given very little attention to the ethicality of these persuasive devices. To address this gap in current understanding of fear appeals, we examine a framework to aid managers in analyzing fear appeals’ ethicality. We do not debate the issue of manipulation via fear but instead suggest that specific types of fear appeals can be evaluated as being more or less acceptable by various important public groups who use different ethical reasoning approaches. Our major goal is not to provide answers to ethical questions, but rather to provide a method of identifying sources of ethical conflicts associated with fear appeals and to suggest an approach for resolving those conflicts. After reviewing fear appeals, we explore ethical reasoning issues and present a framework for evaluating the ethical implementation of fear appeals.

Fear Appeals in Marketing

Fear and Persuasion
As one of a variety of persuasive mechanisms available to advertisers [Shimp 1990], fear appeals rely on some threat to one’s wellbeing to motivate an audience toward action [cf. King and Reid 1990; Tanner, Day, and Crask 1989]. The anticipation of a negative consequence from a given behavior is thought to cause fear [Ghingold and Bozinoff 1981]. The fear held by an individual may be evoked or aroused through message content, which then may contribute to persuasion [King and Reid 1990]. By increasing involvement and sensitivity to perceived risk, fear appeals attempt to influence behavior by inserting new attributes into decision-making procedures or changing attribute importance [Ray and Wilkie 1970], though arousal and reaction vary across receivers [cf. Rotfeld 1989]. The type of motivation fostered by fear appeals may be important whenever a powerful presentation is needed to develop a connection between a product and the consumer’s self-image, such as public service ads promoting seat-belt usage [Rossiter and Percy 1987]. Fear appeals seem to be better at converting nonusers of a product to users than at stimulating brand-switching behavior [Wheatley 1971].

Fear Appeals as a Questionable Practice
Though the incidence of fear appeals appears to be increasing, their use as persuasive communications is not universally accepted [Lantos 1987]. Critics argue that marketers often intentionally use inappropriate manipulative techniques in fear appeals when communicating with target audiences. Persons favoring marketing’s use of fear appeals suggest that dissatisfaction with these techniques derives from a mismatch between the communication of the appeal and the audience ultimately reached; that is, problems arise because persons other than the intended receivers of the fear appeal are also affected [Star 1989].

Lantos [1987] suggests that the interests of advertising and society are congruent and that advertising reinforces current social values and hastens the speed of emerging social changes. This “mirror” philosophy suggests that latent anxieties driving fear appeal effectiveness are already a part of society and that fear appeals simply reflect attitudes already held. Alternatively, critics of advertising [cf. Pollay 1986] hold that advertising “molds” social norms and exploits consumers to stimulate demand for products. Hence, fear appeal messages are unethical because they could describe the negative consequences of not consuming certain products. For example, fear has been used to suggest social ostracism as a result of hygiene practices [Baker 1987; Miner 1956]. Previously “unknown” problems described in various fear-based personal care ads have ranged from “gaposis” (puckered material around skirt buttons cured by Talon zippers in 1939) to “ring around the collar” (dirt not removed by normal laundry detergents but cleaned away by Wisk in the 1970s). This common style of social anxiety fabrication is
often used to illustrate perceived excesses in fear appeals [Baker 1987].

Ultimately, the ethical issue raised by fear appeal use is related to both the process of marketing and the products themselves [Laczniak, Lusch, and Strang 1981]. A key issue in this discussion is the perceived excessive use of symbolic, emotional, and social appeals to market manufactured goods as well as services.

**Appropriateness of Fear in Persuasion**

The appropriateness of fear appeals is a concern because some critics contend that the technique is based on messages that are intended (at least initially) to elicit negative and/or unhealthy responses in consumers. An examination of the ethical appropriateness of fear appeals is especially important in market-based economies that encompass widely disparate views of business decisions and methods [cf. Pollay 1986]. Additionally, the threat of regulatory control stemming from the abusive use of fear appeals forces the advertising community to consider the practice carefully. Fear appeals may be quite acceptable in certain situations (e.g., if they include building consumer confidence to solve consumption problems) but considered unethical or inappropriate in other circumstances or on the basis of other evaluative procedures [Pollay 1986].

Alternative reasoning approaches that managers might use to render an ethical decision in business situations have been widely discussed in the literature [cf. Laczniak 1983]. Moreover, managers appear to differ widely in their ability to apply various ethical perspectives in decision making [Laczniak and Murphy 1991]. Nevertheless, the call for more effective, functional, and practical ethical guidelines specifically related to fear appeal advertising [cf. LaTour and Zahra 1988; Marketing Science Institute 1992] has yet to be answered. In short, the transition from a discussion of general business ethics to fear appeal advertising is lacking.

Further discussion of the appropriateness of fear appeals might center on a mechanism to evaluate the ethicality of fear appeal messages. Such a mechanism should not depend on any specific decision or process model [cf. Ferrell and Gresham 1985; Ferrell, Gresham, and Fraedrich 1989; Hunt and Vitell 1986; Kohlberg 1969]. Rather, the framework should serve as input to decisions. It should be flexible enough to give decision makers a broad perspective of ethical reasoning approaches, yet detailed enough to consider all dimensions of ethics [Ferrell 1985, p. 39]. Businesses, policy makers, and others need access to robust frameworks that combine several different approaches and levels of specificity to evaluate the degree of ethicality associated with any given appeal. This idea has been voiced by other authors. For example, Laczniak and Murphy (1991) note that managers confront ethical issues in a variety of ways based on their own ethical perspectives. Managers can be classified into several categories. For example, “seekers” are those who want to make ethically correct decisions but lack the ethical reasoning training and background to recognize all of the ethical choice possibilities. Other managers, called “rationalizers,” realize that some decisions will have moral consequences but are able to fashion a rationale for why the moral outcomes are not applicable in their case. Both types of managers can benefit from a broadening of their ethical perspectives [Laczniak and Murphy 1991].

The intent of our article is to provide a basis on which such perspectives can be considered and enhanced. We draw attention to approaches for evaluating fear appeals across various publics and suggest that alternative ethical reasoning models employed by these publics may affect the perceived ethicality of a specific message. Failure by managers to consider the complex social consequences of advertising may hinder long-term objectives of business organizations while creating diverse effects across other social units (e.g., society, the individual). To enhance decision-making effectiveness, we propose an ethical evaluation framework, discuss the integration of the framework with fear appeal issues, and illustrate the utility of the framework with applications.

**An Approach to Ethical Reasoning Evaluation**

Ethics has been defined as “inquiry into the nature and grounds of morality where the term morality is taken to mean judgments, standards and rules of conduct” [Taylor 1975, p. 1]. Rules of conduct, or reasoning approaches, adopted by individuals and used in making decisions may originate from family, friends, employers, or, in general, from societal attitudes. Collectively, these reasoning approaches constitute a major construct in the ethical decision process and contribute to the development of ethical prescriptions called “philosophical ethical theories” [Ferrell, Gresham, and Fraedrich 1989]. The philosophical perspectives one holds and brings to decision situations become the directing influence in the determination of “right” and “wrong” behavioral direction.

**Ethical Perspectives**

The numerous ethical theories in moral philosophy can be broadly grouped as teleological or deontological [cf. Beauchamp and Bowie 1979; Hunt and Vitell 1986; Laczniak 1983; Murphy and Laczniak 1981]. Teleological philosophies determine the moral worth of a behavior by its consequences [Ferrell and Gresham 1985]. Accordingly, the moral weight of one’s action is judged on the degree to which the result is the best result for all affected parties. One widely held teleological theory is utilitarianism, which postulates that behavioral consequences should produce the greatest good for the greatest number in society. Similarly, egoism, when directed toward the propagation of the individual’s long-term interests, recognizes the importance of serving the interests of society in order to preserve or further individual circumstance.

Deontological philosophies offer a contrasting view of moral reasoning. Deontology emphasizes the importance of methods and intentions, ultimately judging individual acts by the nature of the act itself [Fraedrich and Ferrell 1992]. Theories drawing on this basic maxim include Kant’s “categorical imperative” and principles of justice articulated by Ross [1930]. Paramount consideration for deontologists is the preservation of individual rights at any cost.
Recently, several important ethical reasoning process models or frameworks have been proposed in the business literature [cf. Ferrell and Gresham 1985; Ferrell, Gresham, and Fraedrich 1989; Hunt and Vitell 1986; Laczniak 1983]. The importance of such models has been recognized [cf. Laczniak 1983]. All provide key insights by describing how moral philosophies contribute to ethical behavior in a decision-making context. In these models, ethical evaluation seems to be based on whether the action is arbitrary, singles out certain individuals, violates moral or legal rights, and conforms to accepted moral standards. Generally, these problem-solving processes attempt to identify and resolve actual or potential conflicts of interest by addressing important ethical issues associated with the decision outcome.

These moral models have contributed greatly to our understanding of the general nature of ethical reasoning in a business context. Yet, some troublesome issues remain for managers as they grapple with ethical decision making. First, agreement about the appropriate moral philosophy managers should embrace has not emerged. Cavanagh, Moberg, and Velasquez [1981] suggest that the field of normative ethics has evolved in the last century from three basic kinds of moral theories (utilitarian theories, theories of rights, and theories of justice), though none of them appear to be equally appropriate across all decision-making contexts. In fact, Hunt and Vitell’s [1986] model explicitly recognizes that marketers may engage in both deontological and teleological evaluations in making an ethical decision. Fraedrich and Ferrell [1992, p. 249] support this supposition empirically and conclude that “there is great diversity not only within philosophy types (used in making decisions) but also in the categorization of what constitutes ethical behavior.”

Other frameworks seem to emphasize specific moral philosophies. For instance, Laczniak [1983] embraced theories of rights exemplified by Kantian principles tempered by a proportionality framework articulated by Garrett [1966], which contends that ethical decisions are derived from scrutinizing intentions, means, and ends. However, Laczniak purposefully minimized tenets of utilitarianism.

Alternatively, Fisk [1982] suggested that any reasoning approach must explicitly recognize important principles articulated in the marketing concept and exchange theory [Bagozzi 1975]. In short, through discussion of equity theory [Adams 1963], libertarian thought [e.g., Rand 1964], and Austrian economics [Menger 1870, translated in 1950], Fisk contends that human behavior is selfish and that marketing ethics should explicitly recognize this fact; people are motivated to seek personal gain, and exchange occurs when it is beneficial to both parties involved. Consequently, the basic ethical principle put forth under this rationalization closely parallels that of egoism, which suggests that pursuit of self-interest by individuals tends to raise the level of prosperity and quality of life for all members of society.

**Ethical Reasoning and Stakeholder Analysis**

A second troublesome issue for managers is that most frameworks do not emphasize the moral consequences of decisions across various stakeholders, or societal levels, though the marketing literature is beginning to reflect the importance of this consideration in ethical reasoning [Cooke 1990; Laczniak and Murphy 1991; Wotruba and Simpson 1992]. Recognition that business decisions affect a broad cross-section of society is not new [Preston and Sapienza 1990]. The stakeholder concept [Freeman and Reed 1983] is intuitively simple; the corporation is responsible not only to its stockholders, but also to other groups that have a “stake” in its actions. The Stanford Research Institute in 1963 referred to stakeholders as “groups without whose support the organization would cease to exist” [Freeman and Reed 1983]. Laczniak and Murphy [1991] formally recognize that marketers should be ethical because failure to foster moral behavior might generate significant personal, organizational, and societal costs.

Our perspective, in an attempt to develop a logical, managerially oriented framework to use in evaluating the ethical consequences of fear appeals, embraces both multiple ethical approaches and stakeholders. First, we recognize that a reasoning framework emphasizing multiple moral philosophies seems most appealing given that reasonable people may disagree about which set of standards should be used in any situation. The goal of such a framework is to extend a manager’s knowledge base of reasoning approaches to a degree that enables him or her to be cognizant of the different ethical impacts each reasoning approach would emphasize. Second, the ethical impact of a decision may depend on the stakeholder group(s) examined. Organizations should not limit their understanding of ethical issues to individual perspectives, but rather broaden their horizons to potential consequences for the organization and society in general. Cooke [1990] supports this basic process and argues that ethical decisions should specifically consider principles of utilitarianism, as well as individual viewpoints typified by the Golden Rule approach, Kantian perspectives, and self-interest models. Laczniak and Murphy [1991] note the need for ethics education to expand the ethical sensitivities of managers who may not have the background to make fully informed ethical decisions.

**The Effects-Reasoning Matrix**

The ethical effects-reasoning matrix (ERM) proposed here incorporates these diverse reasoning models and compares the results of the approaches for each stakeholder (society, organization, and individual) that may be affected by the decision. Both axes of the ERM are further described to provide a basis for discussion and use by academicians and practitioners (Figure 1). For illustration, the specific moral reasoning philosophies mentioned by Cooke [1990] are offered for review, though we recognize that other ethical perspectives could add depth to the ERM. We offer the ERM as a tool to aid managers in structuring their ethical reasoning processes. Greater clarity and improved decisions may result as ethical issues are delineated, consequences formalized, moral philosophies applied, and various stakeholders considered.

**Dimension 1: Stakeholders (Societal Levels)**

Social responsibility of businesses can be considered from macro to micro levels. Marketing philosophy includes acknowledgement that marketing has a continuing interactive
Ad Description: Describe the ad in simple terms with the basic proposition and enough detail to suggest reactions from various stakeholders using differing ethical reasoning approaches. Specific attention should be paid to the following elements:

- **Emotion**: state emotional arousal level along with tension level (low to high).
- **Type**: state the kind of potential fear that can be evoked (physical harm or social disapproval).
- **Position**: state in terms of (1) undesirable action leading to negative consequences or (2) desirable action leading to avoidance of negative consequences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
<th>Utilitarian</th>
<th>Golden Rule</th>
<th>Kantian</th>
<th>Enlightened</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>Benefit</td>
<td>Detriment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Benefit</td>
<td>Detriment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Benefit</td>
<td>Detriment</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Effect on society** [cf. Hunt 1983, p. 12]. Therefore, the effects at the macro or social-system level must be considered in any ethical decision—particularly when the decision will adversely affect various other economic, legal, or political parts of the social system. Questions of justice or equity within the system must be raised.

A second legitimate stakeholder grouping for ethical reasoning processes is a midlevel grouping of institutions or organizations. Of primary importance is the company or firm. Decisions at the firm level include ones that affect others and ones made by others that affect the firm. These effects occur as the organization (i.e., company) interacts with society in general (such as impact on societal values), other institutions (such as the ad industry), or individuals. Ethical dilemmas are created when conflicts arise between the expected benefits or detriments to others and the expected effects on the firm. Organizational culture, in addition to formal codes of conduct, may encourage ethical conduct by employees or may hinder ethical decision making [cf. Laczniak and Murphy 1985]. On the negative side, managers may openly or inadvertently encourage unethical decisions based on perceived short-term financial gain to the ultimate detriment of ethical decisions based on long-term concerns (e.g., excessive pollution that changes an ecosystem).

The individual represents the micro level of ethical analysis. Here, ethical issues impact both individuals within the firm and individuals outside the organization. In the former case, the standards of the individual often clash with those of the firm. The ethical dilemma for the individual manager is to decide appropriate actions despite the potential for conflict. In the latter case, the individual consumer does not participate in the decision-making process, but is nonetheless affected by the actions taken. Advocates of consumer protection emphasize this particular relationship by publicly admonishing perceived violations of individual rights by firms or institutions [cf. Pollay 1986]. The effect of fear appeals on the individual has received by far the most research attention in response to these advocates and their influence on governmental overseers.

**Dimension 2: Ethical Reasoning Approaches**

Decision makers can use any of several ethical reasoning approaches when confronted with ethical issues or dilemmas. A set of reasoning approaches reflecting the common elements of most approaches, though not exhaustive or comprehensive, was chosen to illustrate this axis of the ERM. We briefly discuss each of the reasoning approaches included in this analysis (utilitarianism, Golden Rule, Kantian, and enlightened self-interest).

**Utilitarianism** is a teleological theory that takes a societal view, suggesting that the most important issues in ethical dilemmas are the consequences an action may have on all of the stakeholders directly or indirectly affected by the action. Based on the belief that morally correct actions bring about the greatest good for the largest number of people, this approach balances overall social detriments with overall benefits. Given that individual actions are compared one to another, utilitarianism emphasizes efficiency. Inefficient action promotes less utility than efficient action and consequently is less ethical [Reidenbach, Robin, and Dawson 1991]. The decision maker should consider the alternatives available, the benefits and costs of each, how long these last, and who is benefited or harmed, then choose the alternative that presents the greatest net gain or lowest net detriment. In this approach, an action is appropri-
ate if it maximizes net benefits and minimizes overall detriments for all stakeholders.

Two other approaches considered in this example reflect traditional deontological perspectives, which focus more on individual viewpoints. The Golden Rule approach was developed from Judeo-Christian traditions and is somewhat related to a societal view because it is aimed more at others than at self. In this approach, a person should treat others in the same way he or she would expect to be treated. A justifiable action is one that emphasizes the dignity and self-respect of others. Managers attempting to assess the ethicality of a decision by using the Golden Rule approach would scrutinize the intent of the decision and its proximity to its governing axiom. The Kantian approach more specifically concerns the individual, suggesting that every person has basic rights and should be consulted about actions affecting them [Ferrell, Gresham, and Fraedrich 1989]. This position flows from Kant’s well-known “categorical imperative,” which scrutinizes the universality of an act. In essence, the individual should examine the inherent rightness of a contemplated decision and the potential result if the decision were to become universal law. This line of reasoning suggests individuals have inalienable rights and obligations they cannot ignore. Cooke [1990] and Cavanagh, Moberg, and Velasquez [1981] identify some of the “rights” to which an individual is entitled, such as the right of knowledge and consent to action, the right of privacy of personal activities, the right to refuse actions that violate personal conscience, the right to critique others, and the right to fair and impartial hearings when rights are potentially being violated. A Kantian view would protect an individual’s rights in the face of majority opinion.

Finally, the enlightened self-interest approach is the most self-centered of all approaches, combining utilitarian cost/benefit and Kantian rights analysis with the notion that individual pursuit of self-interest tends to raise the quality of life for all members of society. This egoistic approach gives attention to individual freedom of choice and other personal rights rather than to the rights of others. However, it acknowledges that individual self-interest is facilitated in the long run by some respect for others. So, the individual tries to maximize net benefits for self in a way that minimizes detriments to others.

In total, these reasoning approaches represent a diverse cross-section of moral principles. If used by managers, they may form an initial tier of ethical knowledge from which multifaceted ethical decisions can be made more effectively.

Evaluating the Appropriateness of Fear Appeals

The intent of the effects-reasoning matrix framework is to provide an organized method for elucidating the broad range of potential ethical consequences given a variety of stakeholders and ethical reasoning approaches. The ethical reasoning approaches we compare demonstrate a variety of views, synthesizing many different ethical approaches that embody often-used features of common good and individual rights [cf. Cooke 1990].

To evaluate a fear appeal, one first develops a description of the advertisement (or communication). The ad is briefly described by indicating the basic message to be delivered and the type of approach to be used [Moore 1985]. This statement forms a consistent basis that can be used to develop stakeholder reactions under various reasoning approaches. In addition to the ad description, the basis of the fear appeal is delineated. Three dimensions are often used to describe fear appeal messages [Unger and Stearns 1983]: degree (high vs. low emotional arousal), type (physical or bodily harm vs. social disapproval), and positioning (appeals describing undesirable actions leading to negative consequences vs. desirable actions leading to avoidance of negative consequences). The execution style chosen for the message (e.g., slice of life, expert testimonial) may act as a fourth dimension of fear appeals [Stern 1988]. Collectively, these dimensions of fear appeal messages can be used to identify the sources of persuasion, and perhaps audience manipulation, often associated with fear appeal usage. We exclude execution, which is important to the effectiveness of fear appeals [Stern 1988], only to avoid complicating the examples presented.

Next in this analysis is the evaluation of the fear appeal in terms of consequences developed by the juxtaposition of stakeholder level and ethical approach. Consequences can be developed by a person or a group by specifically taking various ethical reasoning approaches as the basis of evaluation across stakeholders. These consequences, illustrating both benefits and detriments at various levels (e.g. societal, organization, and individual), are then judged in importance according to the different ethical reasoning approaches used. Managers may not always be able to develop a full set of benefits and detriments in isolation. Similarly, a manager may not be able to step back from a personally entrenched ethical reasoning model to develop evaluation statements for the consequences under the variety of reasoning approaches that may be required. Consequences (benefits and detriments) as well as evaluations can be developed for each stakeholder level by using classic qualitative research techniques [cf. Patton 1990] such as focus groups or the nominal group technique [Rahtz and Moore 1986], which we specifically address in the Conflict Resolution section. Small groups may be time efficient and may offer a broad range of potential consequences and evaluations. To facilitate the development of the interior of the matrix, fear appeal tests could be done at ad researchers’ facilities to develop consequences from small groups or a larger number of consumers. In using such groups, organizers must remember that the target market group is not the only one that must be consulted for reactions. Other constituent groups may react differently to the fear appeal.

A Short Example

A high fear appeal ad is most likely to be acceptable when most of the stakeholders benefit from the actions promoted in the ad. Prior academic studies have examined the effectiveness of fear appeals that address social issues (e.g., drug abuse, AIDS, seat belt use). Though some objections may be raised to ads on these highly emotional issues, the intended outcome of these ads is to change behavior in such
a way that social and personal benefits outweigh the detriments of increased personal or social anxiety. Using the basic format of the ERM (Figures 1), one can examine differences across reasoning approaches. Consider the recent “this is your brain on drugs” campaign, which is intended to illustrate graphically the detriments of drug use. An egg (“your brain”) in a frying pan (“your brain on drugs”) is positioned as the negative consequence of drug use, representing physical harm (the type of appeal), in a high tension and arguably moderate arousal setting. Utilitarian ethics would place high importance on the benefits of potential reduction in drug use and low importance on the detriment to the audience caused by the increased anxiety. A Golden Rule approach would have similar results, with perhaps slightly more concern for the negative effects on the audience. Kantian and enlightened self-interest approaches might indicate higher detriment on the grounds that the individual has the right to self-destruction but would more than offset this personal freedom argument with the individual benefits from better health. However, these views would differ across the stakeholders for any of the reasoning approaches. The individual might consider drug use a personal right, but organizations would tend to be more concerned with the lower cost of doing business if employees had fewer health problems. Additionally, many organizations might expect related social problems to be reduced if drug problems were reduced by the fear appeal. Society would encourage the appeal on balance, because drug use increases health care costs, necessitates higher expenditures on law enforcement, and increases the potential for each person to be a victim of crime. Even for this relatively acceptable fear appeal, not all stakeholders under all reasoning approaches would agree on the use of the ad.

If agreement is not obtained on an appeal such as this one, which seems widely acceptable, managers clearly need to broaden their ethical perspectives to understand the potential reactions to an appeal that may not be obvious. Even for ads that may seem to be neutral in appeal, the ERM can be used to develop a comprehensive review of fear appeal reactions that might result under several reasoning approaches for the relevant stakeholders.

A Complex and Detailed Example
Most situations that require a decision on the use of a fear appeal involve more complex and subtle ethical issues. A detailed analysis of a seemingly innocuous ad appeal demonstrates the flexibility of the ERM in uncovering some of the potential areas of ethical conflict. In this example (Figure 2), we use an ordinary commercial product to illustrate the variety of ethical viewpoints that might influence a manager’s decision. The example ad theme is drawn from an automobile tire campaign that uses babies in the commercials. The generic description of the ad follows a simple format stating the basis of the appeal: “baby and tires are shown with a low key voice-over implying protection of the family” (Figure 2). The Unger and Stearns [1983] variable descriptors can be used to delineate fear appeal issues in the ad that may be important to the stakeholder-reasoning approach combinations. In this example, low emotional arousal appeals are made, but moderate tension [LaTour and Pitts 1989] is evoked when low ability to cope with the danger of tire failure is suggested as a detriment to child safety. The resulting type of fear is physical harm to self and family, as well as potential social disapproval for not buying the “right” brand of tires. The appeal may be positioned in different ways but is assumed to suggest that a desirable action (purchasing the correct brand of tire) prevents a negative result (harm to family).

Implementing the ERM in Fear Appeal Analysis
This sample fear appeal ad can be evaluated at various stakeholder levels, three of which we illustrate: general society, organization (the firm), and the individual (customer). The example benefits and detriments were evaluated under each of four illustrative ethical reasoning approaches. By concentrating on the effects at each level under different reasoning approaches, managers can develop insight into not only their own ethical processes, but also the reactions of other people who might use alternative ethical reasoning approaches. The matrix cell evaluations (Figure 2) can be used by managers to examine the ethical pros and cons of an ad campaign. For instance, utilitarian approaches suggest that society may gain from increased safety awareness and newer tires being used. Golden Rule approaches suggest that the organization would expect other companies to use similar campaigns. Other reasoning approaches suggest that the firm’s workers would benefit from increased sales and jobs. However, detriments derive from diverted resources (i.e., society-utilitarian and organization-enlightened self-interest), facts not fully presented (i.e., all Kantian sections), and excess anxiety in relation to the danger presented (individual-Kantian). Other cells of the matrix yield benefits and detriments that managers can study to fully understand the complex ethical picture that emerges.

From this point, the manager follows some type of process in deciding to use or not use the fear appeal. To make a decision, a manager might evaluate the importance of each consequence. By acknowledging the differences in approaches and placing some sort of relative value on the strength of differences, a manager might predict objections and overcome them in advance by altering the message. Prediction can be enhanced by asking how ethical a particular fear appeal might appear for specific stakeholders under one or another ethical reasoning approach. Various appeals might be judged for ethicality on the basis of some scale. In sum, if managers are able to identify the stakeholders, possible reasoning approaches, and consequences (benefits or detriments) of a fear appeal, they may be able to forecast the reactions of various stakeholders.

One approach to evaluating the consequences and responses produced by the matrix is to use some sort of compensatory model of decision making. A manager may quantify the ethicality of alternative fear appeals by (1) developing the consequences as benefits/detriments, (2) placing a value (plus or minus) on the “morality” or ethical impact of the consequence, and (3) determining the severity of the impact by various methods (such as low-medium-high or 0 to 10). Alternative reasoning approaches may result in different valences (plus/minus) or levels of impact (high/low) for any given consequence. Assessment need not be sophis-
### Figure 2. Ethical Effects–Reasoning Matrix (ERM): Example Evaluation

**Ad Description:** Baby is shown with premium priced tires. Voice-over is a low key proposition that this tire brand protects family. **Emotion:** low arousal with moderate to high tension. **Type:** physical harm (to self or family) and social disapproval (from friends and family). **Position:** desirable action prevents negative consequences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
<th>Ethical Reasoning Approaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>persons or groups affected by the ad</td>
<td>Utilitarian</td>
<td>Golden Rule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>persons or groups affected by the ad</strong></td>
<td>benefits to stakeholders of the fear appeal ad; detriments to stakeholders from fear appeal ad.</td>
<td>'greatest good for the greatest number'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Society</strong></td>
<td>Example Benefit</td>
<td>Fewer accidents with lower medical and insurance costs since newer tires are used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Example Detriment</td>
<td>Tire performs no better than less costly models, leading to redirection of society resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exploiting children reduces sensitivity to other safety issues.</td>
<td>Reduces sensitivity to exploitation of children in advertising. Other safety issues may not be effectively communicated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td>Example Benefit</td>
<td>Firm increases sales and creates jobs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Example Detriment</td>
<td>Backlash of exploiting child safety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual</strong></td>
<td>Example Benefit</td>
<td>Awareness of tire safety increased. Fewer accidents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Example Detriment</td>
<td>Price paid is too high when compared against equally performing competitor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fear of potential danger to self or family from using other tires is exaggerated.</td>
<td>Raising safety awareness at cost of individual anxiety is worth the price.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ticated. The manager may choose to sum consequence scores for each reasoning approach to consider which reasoning approach may be most crucial to the analysis. Similarly, summing across stakeholder level may direct attention to a critical stakeholder in the analysis.

Note that simply contrasting evaluative statement intensity across reasoning approaches may suffice to illustrate severity of responses. For example, Figure 2 lists a society-level detriment of “exploiting children,” which draws a mild utilitarian response of “reduces sensitivity” but a strong Kantian response of “blatant manipulation” that should be expected from a part of the consumer market. At the individual-stakeholder level, the example detriment of “price paid is too high” draws strong criticism in the Kantian approach (“excess profits garnered”), high but milder criticism in the utilitarian approach (“diverts resources from other needs”), and bland response in the enlightened self-interest approach (“amount of money is not extreme”), indicating that many different groups may be concerned about this issue. Some issues may not elicit such diverse reactions. For example, at the organizational-stakeholder level for the benefit of increased sales and jobs, all reasoning approaches lead to positive responses. These convergent evaluations present no significant problems and enable the manager to proceed as planned. However, some consequences produce larger variations; they should be addressed directly to understand viewpoint differences and the associated risks to the firm, adjust the fear appeal to forestall criticism, or discard the appeal as too risky.

Each reasoning approach may inherently suggest different “weights” based on the stakeholder level. For example, a utilitarian perspective may place higher weights on societal issues than on individual issues; Kantian reasoning may place higher weights on individual consequences than on societal issues. Again, this assessment need not be complicated; a simple “high, medium, or low” evaluation can be made. Combinations of high impact (for a particular consequence) and high reasoning approach weights (for that stakeholder level) may indicate significant opinions that should not be dismissed.

**Conflict Resolutions**

The ERM is suggestive of the disparate views that can arise in fear appeal assessment because of the use of different ethical frameworks by various stakeholders. However, the matrix alone may not be indicative of how to resolve conflicts. Though resolution of conflict is not the central theme of our article, we describe how one available tool—the nominal group technique (NGT)—can assist managers in conflict resolution when used in combination with the ERM.

The NGT is a brainstorming procedure in which participants are first asked to individually and silently record on paper their responses or ideas about a question or topic. For example, the first step of implementing the NGT with the ERM for fear appeals is to present and explain the axes of the ERM. Then decision makers, using the ERM as a guide, are asked to record the various types of ethical benefits and detriments as well as potential conflicts they feel might arise when the cells of the ERM are compared. In the second phase of the NGT, respondent reactions (e.g., citing conflicting response to a fear appeal that could arise due to the interaction of stakeholders and ethical reasoning philosophies) are recorded on large sheets and displayed for all to see. Responses are then clarified by the group so that participants fully understand each idea or answer. Finally, each group member is asked to vote on his or her top five choices by assigning points to the most important (5 points), next most important (4 points), and so on.

In this manner, a group consensus is extracted to indicate conflict issues and their importance for any particular fear appeal. Once agreement has been established on which set of conflicts may be experienced, the NGT can be reapplied. In the second application, the participants focus on how the important conflicts might be resolved (i.e., participants develop their own conflict resolutions), thus lending additional credibility to the solutions generated.

Further adaptation of the NGT as an implementation arm of the ERM is also possible. For example, after presentation of the ERM, participants could be asked to take on the role of a particular stakeholder and given a specific ethical philosophy. Participants would then generate specific reactions to a fear appeal given a specific stakeholder-ethical approach combination. Combining various elements of these two dimensions could continue as long as the participants continue to extend their realm of possible reactions. In sum, the NGT could be used in conjunction with the ERM to identify, isolate, and suggest resolution for important conflicts arising from the interaction of disparate stakeholders and ethical frameworks. Rahtz and Moore [1986] provide additional information about the NGT.

**Discussion**

Fear appeal ethicality assessment has previously been relatively intuitive with little structured guidance available to aid in developing potential reactions from varied audiences. However, the ERM provides an opportunity for structured assessment. It does not change decision processes, nor does it demand a compensatory decision model. The user simply uses the matrix as a tool to visualize and evaluate a fear appeal without ignoring a particular consequence, stakeholder, or ethical reasoning approach.

Comprehensive analyses of fear appeal ads should be expected to include more benefits and detriments than those illustrated here. Multiple effects compound a manager’s trade-off analysis and force acknowledgement of complex issues among various publics. Stakeholder definitions, or groups, other than the ones presented here are likely to exist. Also, other ethical philosophies may need to be examined. The ones proposed here offer a synthesis of ethical approaches and contain many of the common aspects of those approaches. Because fear resides within the individual, a manager must project beyond personal opinion about what fear issues are important and develop perspectives similar to those of other stakeholders to properly evaluate the effects of a fear appeal.

Decision makers must not ignore the viewpoints of persons who do not hold the same views or share the same ethical reasoning approaches. Rather, evaluating other ethical approaches enables the manager to be prepared for the concerns of various publics. A proactive managerial approach...
References


