

An Empirical Investigation of a General Theory of Marketing Ethics

Michael A. Mayo

Kent State University

Lawrence J. Marks

Kent State University

Using a scenario technique, the study tests a core portion of Hunt and Vitell's (1986) general theory of marketing ethics in the context of a marketing research ethical dilemma. The results provide substantial support for the relationships proposed in this part of the model. Two additional hypotheses are confirmed. First, ethical judgments to resolve the dilemma are found to be jointly determined by deontological and teleological evaluations. Second, the relationship between ethical judgment and intention to adopt an ethical alternative is attenuated when its implementation does not result in a preferred consequence. Research limitations and recommendations are offered.

INTRODUCTION

While the topic of marketing ethics has become quite popular, most studies have been prescriptive (e.g., suggesting ethical rules to guide decision makers) with little effort directed toward the development and testing of a theory of business or marketing ethics (Bommer, Gratto, Gravander, and Tuttle 1987; Trevino 1986). Without an underlying theory to guide research efforts, the study of "marketing ethics has been less than innovative and systematic" (Murphy and Laczniak 1981, p. 262). Laczniak (1983) suggested the lack of an underlying theory has "retarded the teaching, practice, and research of marketing ethics" (p. 8).

Hunt and Vitell (1986) have recently introduced a "general theory of marketing ethics" which attempts to describe and

explain the decision-making processes employed by marketing managers in resolving ethical conflicts. These authors indicate that, in making a decision to solve an ethical dilemma, marketing managers may combine personal norms with their evaluation of the probable outcomes associated with alternative solutions to the problem.

PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES EMBODIED IN THE MODEL

Hunt and Vitell (1986) recognize that the resolution of an ethical dilemma depends on the philosophical perspective the decision maker employs and that each perspective has its own inherent limitations. In accordance with many moral philosophers (cf. Frankena 1963), Hunt and Vitell advocate a decision making system which combines more than one philosophical approach to resolve ethical dilemmas. In their model, Hunt and Vitell combine two major philosophical approaches (deontological and teleological) which they hypothesize marketing managers use to resolve an ethical dilemma. Although such an approach to decision making within an ethical context is not new (e.g., Cavanagh, Moberg, and Velasquez 1981), Hunt and Vitell's work is unique in its attempt to describe constructs and interrelationships in sufficient detail to guide empirical investigation of marketing decisions involving ethical dilemmas.

The primary purpose of the present study is to provide an initial empirical test of some of the core relationships proposed by the Hunt and Vitell model. Secondly, the relative strength of influence of deontological and teleological evaluative processes on decision making will be investigated.

THE MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

The central feature in Hunt and Vitell's model is their description of how marketing managers combine input from

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both a deontological and a teleological analysis to resolve an ethical dilemma. In the deontological evaluation, the inherent righteousness of each alternative being considered for adoption is assessed (e.g., approving a puffed advertisement for release). This assessment is conducted by applying personal norms elicited by the ethical dilemma to each alternative (e.g., always tell the truth). The teleological evaluation assesses the goodness or badness of the consequences which may result from the adoption of each alternative (e.g., consumers not receiving anticipated value from the product due to inaccurate advertisements). This analysis takes into account how probable and desirable each consequence is and how the decision may impact relevant stakeholders. See Figure 1, or Hunt and Vitell (1986) for a complete model description.

Hunt and Vitell suggest that, because the complete model specifies numerous constructs and interrelationships, initial testing should focus on portions of the model. Additionally, they recommend a scenario approach (e.g., Fritzsche and Becker 1984; Lacznik, Lusch, and Murphy 1979) as a useful methodology for initial testing of the proposed model. This approach involves developing a scenario which presents an ethical dilemma and providing several specific alternatives to resolve the ethical dilemma along with a set of corresponding consequences that may result from adopting any of the alternatives. With the authors' recommendations in mind, the present study used scenario stimulus materials to test the key relationships proposed in the model.

Hypotheses

Central to the claim that the proposed model accurately portrays the decision making process for problems having ethical content is the assumption that the causal relationships among the core constructs just described will be significant

in empirical tests. This is equivalent to claiming that the model "works" and can be formally stated as:

H1: The relationships proposed among the core variables in the model are significant and accurately reflect the way in which managers resolve ethical dilemmas.

More specifically, this article investigates four of the seven testable propositions which Hunt and Vitell (1986, p. 11) proposed about the key relationships in the model:

- H1a: Deontological Norms significantly influence Deontological Evaluations.
- H1b: Desirability of Consequences significantly influence Teleological Evaluations.
- H1c: Ethical Judgments are significantly influenced by Deontological and Teleological Evaluations.
- H1d: The Intention to adopt a particular alternative is significantly influenced by Ethical Judgments and Teleological Evaluations.

It must be noted that H1b is actually a simplification of Hunt and Vitell's original proposition. They suggest that Teleological Evaluations are a function of the Desirability of Consequences, the Probability of Consequences, and the Importance of Stakeholders. To make the subjects' task manageable, only the first of these variables was investigated in the current study.

The second hypothesis, as directly proposed by Hunt and Vitell (1986, p. 12) considers the relationship between Deontological and Teleological Evaluations and Ethical Judgments:

H2: Deontological Evaluations and Teleological Evaluations, taken collectively, will explain a higher percentage of the variance in Ethical Judgments than either construct taken separately.

Another relationship proposed by Hunt and Vitell hold that the most ethical alternative may not be adopted by marketing managers if it does not lead to one or more preferred consequences. In such a situation, the marketing manager's teleological evaluation of the consequences may be the primary influence on intentions. Thus, the third hypothesis as proposed by Hunt and Vitell (1986, pp. 9-10) is:

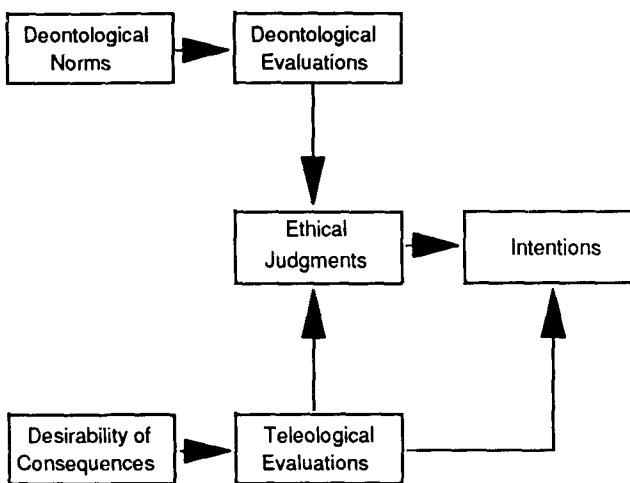
H3: Ethical Judgments may differ from Intentions because Teleological Evaluations will independently affect the Intentions construct.

METHODOLOGY

Overview

Guided by the recent attention ethical issues in marketing research have received (cf. Schneider and Holm, 1982) ar

FIGURE 1
Selected Relationships from a General Model of Marketing Ethics*



*Source: Hunt, Shelby and Scott Vitell (1986), "A General Theory of Marketing Ethics," *Journal of Macromarketing*, (Spring), pg. 8.

by results from a recent survey which found that research integrity was the top ranked moral problem facing researchers (Hunt, Chonko, and Wilcox 1986) marketing research integrity was selected as the domain in which to test the decision making model. Pretest results indicated that the issue of research integrity was quite relevant and involving to marketing researchers.

Sample

After making revisions to stimulus materials as suggested by pretest results, the final questionnaire was sent to 547 marketing researchers located throughout the continental United States. Both pretest and final subjects were selected from the *Green Book* (American Marketing Association, 1986), a directory of marketing research houses and services.

A single mailing was done which resulted in 104 usable questionnaires returned (a 19% response rate). Although this response rate is low and may have been attenuated by the sensitive nature of the topic under investigation, it is somewhat comparable to other studies in the ethics area. For example, response rates of 25.1% and 26.4% were reported by Hunt, Chonko, and Wilcox (1984) and Lee (1981), respectively.

The average respondent in the present study was from top management (59% president/owner, 15% vice-president, 31% manager/director), college educated (89% college or graduate degree), middle aged (60% were 30–49 years old), employed at a small sized (60% had between 2 and 49 employees) private (96%) research firm. Both sexes were well represented in the sample (56% male; 44% female).

Stimulus Material/Questionnaire

The instructions in the questionnaire asked that the respondents put themselves into the role of the researcher described in the following scenario:

A marketing research project is nearing completion and is coming in on time and budget. Keeping on schedule is vital for the client and it means positive merit considerations for you. The project involved developing and administering a questionnaire to ascertain what new product benefits consumers might want from an established and moderately successful durable good. The research instrument was pretested and subsequently approved by the client. However, data analysis of the main study suggest that some questions regarding the instrument’s validity and reliability remain. The interpretation of the results may be suspect and so further refinement of the questionnaire may be in order. This refinement would push the project over budget and behind schedule. It is unclear whether such refinement would change the interpretation of the results. The best available interpretation of the data indicates that a product revision is in order.

As suggested by Hunt and Vitell, specific alternatives for action and corresponding consequences were then offered to all respondents. Alternative A essentially suggested that the study be completed and the report written without reporting the flaws. Alternative B was to write the report recommending product revisions and to discuss, but minimize, any problems with the instrument’s reliability and validity. Alternative C was to stop the study, consult with the client, and redevelop the questionnaire (i.e., re-do the study). Consequences common to all alternatives included damage to the firm’s reputation and relationship with the client and negative reprisals assessed against the responsible researcher. A consequence only for Alternatives A and B was that the client would experience some difficulty in introducing the modified product (since flaws would be corrected in the additional research conducted by the firm under Alternative C). The amount of work the agency would perform varied across alternatives (none, some, and much for Alternatives A, B, and C, respectively).

Pretest results indicated that the scenario was perceived as presenting researchers with an ethical dilemma and that the alternatives for action and consequences described were realistic and exhaustive. This was reinforced by manipulation checks in the main study.

Although it would have been preferable to have each subject respond to multiple scenarios (to increase the generalizability of the results and to help ascertain reliability), because the existing questionnaire was already four pages long, it was decided to use only one scenario to mitigate subject fatigue and to avoid attenuation in the response rate.

Measures

Where possible the measures used in the questionnaire were based on Hunt and Vitell’s suggestions. Six measures were included in the present study.

Deontological Norms

Deontological Norms were measured by having the subjects rate 16 statements generally related to the scenario and the alternatives on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = “clearly right,” 7 = “clearly wrong”). Analysis using the SPSS-X (1988) reliabilities procedure indicated that only

TABLE 1
The Seven Deontological Norm Statements

It is very important to complete a project on time.
The research agency is totally responsible for actions by clients based on research recommendations.
It is essential to bring a project in at the budgeted cost.
Individual researchers assigned to a project are totally responsible for actions taken by clients if based on their recommendations.
Professional codes of ethics should provide absolute guidance in making ethical decisions.
Flawed research can never be the basis of useful recommendations.
It is very important for researchers to report all flaws in the design of every study.

seven of the items were useful measures (see Table 1). A summated score was created using these items.

Desirability of Consequences

Desirability of consequences was measured in a two-step process. For each possible pair of consequences, subjects indicated which consequence they preferred, then they rated the strength of this preference on a seven-point scale [Mildly Prefer (1) to Strongly Prefer (7)]. With three comparisons, each consequence was considered twice. Overall preference ratings were computed by summing the scores for each consequence (range from 0 to 14). For the consequences associated with Alternative A the mean desirability score was .48 (s.d. = 2.12), Alternative B was 5.64 (s.d. = 4.47), and Alternative C was 7.92 (s.d. = 5.26).

Deontological Evaluations

The subjects' Deontological Evaluations of the alternatives were measured on a seven-point scale ranging from "Clearly Wrong" (1) to "Clearly Right" (7), in response to the statement, "Considering your own norms and values, please rate each alternative in terms of how Right or Wrong you view it." Means and standard deviations for the alternatives were: Alternative A (\bar{x} = 1.33; s.d. = 0.96), Alternative B (\bar{x} = 3.28; s.d. = 1.71), and Alternative C (\bar{x} = 5.50; s.d. = 1.79).

Teleological Evaluations

The subjects' Teleological Evaluations of the alternatives were measured on a seven-point scale ranging from "Very Bad" (1) to "Very Good" (7), in response to the statement, "Considering the desirability of the consequences and the importance of each party, please rate each alternative in terms of how GOOD or BAD you view it." Means and standard deviations for the alternatives were: Alternative A (\bar{x} = 1.32; s.d. = 0.77), Alternative B (\bar{x} = 3.37; s.d. = 1.60), and Alternative C (\bar{x} = 5.07; s.d. = 1.78).

Ethical Judgments

The subjects' Ethical Judgment of each alternative was measured on a seven-point scale ranging from "Clearly Unethical" (1) to "Clearly Ethical" (7), in response to the following statement, "Considering the desirability of the outcomes and your own values, rate each alternative as to how ethical an action you believe it to be." The statement was worded this way to reflect the notion that an ethical judgment is presumed to be influenced by both deontological and teleological evaluations. Means and standard deviations for the alternatives were: Alternative A (\bar{x} = 1.28; s.d. = 0.76), Alternative B (\bar{x} = 3.30; s.d. = 1.62), and Alternative C (\bar{x} = 6.31; s.d. = 1.12).

Intentions

Intentions were measured by asking the subjects to indicate how likely they thought it was that they would actually adopt each alternative on a scale ranging from 0% (I would definitely NOT choose this alternative) to 100% (I would definitely choose this alternative). Means and standard deviations for the alternatives were: Alternative A (\bar{x} = 5.59; s.d. = 12.15), Alternative B (\bar{x} = 40.07; s.d. = 30.23), and Alternative C (\bar{x} = 63.35; s.d. = 33.43).

RESULTS

The general path analyses models (cf. Dillon and Goldstein 1984) representing the marketing research managers' decision for the three alternatives are presented in Table 2. For each decision, four regression analyses were necessary. One regression was performed to investigate the effect of Deontological Norms on Deontological Evaluations, a second analysis was done for Desirability of Consequences and Teleological Evaluations, a third for the joint influence of Deontological and Teleological Evaluations on Ethical Judgments, and a final analysis for the joint effect of Ethical

TABLE 2
Standardized Beta Coefficients and Correlations Among Path Model Variables

Dependent Variables	Predictor Variables	Path Coefficients, Proposed Model for Alternative			Adjusted r-Squared Proposed Model for Alternative		
		A	B	C	A	B	C
Deontological Evaluation	Deontological Norms	.17 ^c	.16	-.33 ^a	.02	.01	.10
Teleological Evaluation	Desirability of Consequences	.42 ^a	.54 ^a	.43 ^a	.17	.28	.18
Ethical Evaluation	Deontological Evaluation	.24 ^a	.22 ^a	.23 ^b	.65	.71	.28
	Teleological Evaluation	.65 ^a	.67 ^a	.37 ^a			
Intention	Ethical Evaluation	.37 ^a	.34 ^a	.09	.55	.66	.47
	Teleological Evaluation	.42 ^a	.51 ^a	.64 ^a			

^ap ≤ .01.

^bp ≤ .05.

^cp ≤ .10.

TABLE 3
Correlation Matrices for Alternatives A, B, and C

Correlations for Alternative A						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Deontological Evaluation	1.00	0.60	0.55	0.53	0.17	0.37
2 Ethical Evaluation of A	0.60	1.00	0.78	0.70	0.20	0.41
3 Teleological Evaluation	0.55	0.78	1.00	0.71	0.33	0.42
4 Intention for Alt A	0.53	0.70	0.71	1.00	0.22	0.47
5 Deontological Norms	0.17	0.20	0.33	0.22	1.00	0.30
6 Desirability of A	0.37	0.41	0.42	0.47	0.30	1.00

Correlations for Alternative B						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Deontological Evaluation	1.00	0.71	0.73	0.63	0.16	0.38
2 Ethical Evaluation of B	0.71	1.00	0.84	0.77	0.14	0.44
3 Teleological Evaluation	0.73	0.84	1.00	0.79	0.06	0.54
4 Intention for Alt B	0.63	0.77	0.79	1.00	0.07	0.48
5 Deontological Norms	0.16	0.14	0.06	0.07	1.00	0.01
6 Desirability of B	0.38	0.44	0.54	0.48	0.01	1.00

Correlations for Alternative C						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Deontological Evaluation	1.00	0.47	0.64	0.59	-0.33	0.36
2 Ethical Evaluation of C	0.47	1.00	0.52	0.42	-0.25	0.35
3 Teleological Evaluation	0.64	0.52	1.00	0.69	-0.38	0.44
4 Intention for Alt C	0.59	0.42	0.69	1.00	-0.42	0.51
5 Deontological Norms	-0.33	-0.25	-0.38	-0.42	1.00	-0.19
6 Desirability of C	0.36	0.35	0.44	0.51	-0.19	1.00

Judgments and Teleological Evaluations on Intentions.

Additionally, to obtain the reproduced correlations and the residual error terms, a personal computer version of PATH, a path analysis program by Hunter and Hamilton (1986), was used. The correlation matrices used as input

are presented in Table 3. The reproduced correlations and residual errors can be found in Table 4.

Overall, the results are quite supportive of Hypothesis 1. That is, the causal paths proposed by the model generally are significant and the relationships account for a significant

TABLE 4
Reproduced Correlations and Residual Errors*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>Alternative A</i>						
1 Deontological Evaluation		0.26	0.02	0.11	0.17	0.05
2 Ethical Evaluation of A	0.34		0.65	0.65	0.12	0.28
3 Teleological Evaluation	0.53	0.13		0.66	0.13	0.42
4 Intention for Alt A	0.42	0.05	0.05		0.10	0.28
5 Deontological Norms	0.00	0.08	0.20	0.12		0.23
6 Desirability of Alt A	0.32	0.13	0.00	0.19	0.00	
<i>Alternative B</i>						
1 Deontological Evaluation		0.21	0.00	0.08	0.16	0.00
2 Ethical Evaluation of B	0.50		0.69	0.70	0.04	0.38
3 Teleological Evaluation	0.73	0.15		0.74	0.01	0.54
4 Intention for Alt B	0.55	0.07	0.05		0.02	0.40
5 Deontological Norms	0.00	0.10	0.05	0.05		0.01
6 Desirability of Alt B	0.38	0.07	0.00	0.08	0.00	
<i>Alternative C</i>						
1 Deontological Evaluation		0.24	0.03	0.04	-0.33	0.06
2 Ethical Evaluation of C	0.23		0.38	0.33	-0.11	0.13
3 Teleological Evaluation	0.61	0.14		0.68	-0.08	0.44
4 Intention for Alt C	0.55	0.09	0.01		-0.06	0.30
5 Deontological Norms	0.00	-0.14	-0.30	-0.36		-0.03
6 Desirability of Alt C	0.30	0.17	0.00	0.21	0.00	

*Reproduced correlations are above the diagonal; error terms are below the diagonal.

TABLE 5
Regression Results Using Deontological and Teleological Evaluations as Independent and Joint Predictors of Ethical Evaluations

	<i>Sum of Squares Regression</i>	<i>Adjusted r-Square</i>	<i>Variance Inflation Factor</i>
<i>Alternative A</i>			
Deontological Eval. Only	21.1054	.3528	
Teleological Eval. Only	36.0258	.6093	
Both Deontological and Teleological Evals.	38.4625	.6476	1.19
<i>Alternative B</i>			
Deontological Eval. Only	131.6511	.4970	
Teleological Eval. Only	182.0204	.6911	
Both Deontological and Teleological Evals.	188.0661	.7114	1.67
<i>Alternative C</i>			
Deontological Eval. Only	27.4354	.2094	
Teleological Eval. Only	33.3972	.2570	
Both Deontological and Teleological Evals.	37.4420	.2822	1.55

amount of the variance in the constructs. The most problematic relationship is between Deontological Norms and Deontological Evaluations. The standardized regression coefficient is only significant for Alternative C. For Alternative A the coefficient approaches significance ($p \leq .10$) and it is not significant for Alternative B. As is discussed below, this may indicate problems in operationalization of the constructs. All of the other relationships were significant (at .02 or better) and produced small residual errors, with the exception of the relationship between the Ethical Judgment and Intention measures for Alternative C. This exception is actually consistent with Hypothesis 3, and is discussed below.¹

Hypothesis 2 was investigated by a series of regression analyses using Ethical Judgments as the dependent variable with the independent variable being only Teleological Evaluations, only Deontological Evaluations, or the combination of both. For each of the decisions, the adjusted *r*-square (see Table 5) indicates that the two evaluations taken collectively accounts for a larger percentage of variation in Ethical Judgments than either one taken alone. Inspection of the variance inflation factor (SAS 1982) in Table 5 shows that these relationships were not unduly influenced by multicollinearity (cf. Neter, Wasserman, and Kutner 1989).

linearity (cf. Neter, Wasserman, and Kutner 1989).

To evaluate whether each type of judgment made a *significant* contribution in the presence of the other, a series of regression analyses was performed which forced the entry of Deontological Evaluations followed by Teleological Evaluations and then reversed the order of entry. For each regression, the addition of the second variable caused a significant change (.05 or better) in the *r*-square value (see Table 6) which provides added support for Hypothesis 2. These results also provide information about the relative strength of each influence, indicating that Ethical Judgments were influenced more strongly by Teleological than by Deontological Evaluations (also, note the beta coefficients in Table 2).

Support is found for Hypothesis 3 in that Intentions and Ethical Judgments were significantly related for Alternatives A and B but not C. Hunt and Vitell account for such occurrences by noting that often the most ethical alternative (here Alternative C) may not be chosen by managers because it does not lead to some preferred consequence(s). In such cases, Intention is driven more by a Teleological Evaluation than by an Ethical Judgment. Evidence may be found for

TABLE 6
The Significance of Deontological and Teleological Evaluations on Ethical Judgments Given the Presence of the Other

	<i>r-Square Change</i>	<i>F Statistic</i>	<i>Significance</i>
<i>Alternative A</i>			
Deontological Evaluations given Teleological Evaluations	.04	11.88	.0008
Teleological Evaluations given Deontological Evaluations	.29	84.67	.0000
<i>Alternative B</i>			
Deontological Evaluations given Teleological Evaluations	.02	7.99	.0057
Teleological Evaluations given Deontological Evaluations	.21	74.55	.0000
<i>Alternative C</i>			
Deontological Evaluations given Teleological Evaluations	.03	4.50	.0363
Teleological Evaluations given Deontological Evaluations	.07	11.14	.0012

this in that the path coefficient between Teleological Evaluation and Intentions for Alternative C (.64) is larger than that found for Alternatives A (.42) and B (.51).

Additionally, qualitative responses provided by the respondents support the hypothesis. Subjects who rated Alternative C as the most ethical but who intended to implement Alternative B indicated that the client also has some responsibility (i.e., they approved the research plan) and that the agency should not be held totally liable. Thus, while some respondents found Alternative C to be the most ethical, consistent with Hypothesis 3 they did not all select it as being the most practical choice in their business situation.

DISCUSSION

This initial empirical test of Hunt and Vitell's model provided encouraging support for several of the core relationships. Only one relationship, the causal link between Deontological Norms and Deontological Evaluations, was problematic. This may be due to the particular operationalization chosen for the Deontological Norm construct in the present study. Although an attempt was made to follow Hunt and Vitell's suggestions on how to measure the proposed constructs and relationships, some interpretation was necessary at times when precise operationalizations were not available. Subsequent studies should employ other operationalizations of the Deontological Norm construct to determine how it is related to subsequent Deontological Evaluations. For example, subjects could rate how strongly the general and issue-specific values (norms) elicited by the ethical dilemma would apply to each alternative solution (e.g., 7 = this norm applies strongly to this alternative, 1 = this norm does not apply to this alternative). Then a summated score could be calculated to represent Deontological Norms.

Alternatively, since Hunt and Vitell discuss Deontological and Teleological Evaluations not only as constructs, but also as processes, a process-oriented measure of these evaluations could be developed. Such a measure might be similar in form to that used for obtaining cognitive responses to persuasive messages (e.g., advertisements). Subjects might be asked to tell the researcher (orally or in writing) everything that they were thinking as they tried to come to a decision about what to do. These responses could then be coded in terms of whether they reflected deontological or teleological evaluations. The number of each type of response might then be used in the analysis, with a hypothesis that the type of evaluation which generated the most thoughts would have a stronger effect on the Ethical Judgment.

While Hunt and Vitell hold that the joint influence of deontological and teleological processes is the norm, they indicate that in some situations marketing managers may favor one input over the other. In the current study, Teleological Evaluations were found to have the strongest influence on the managers' Ethical Judgments and Intentions. This is consistent with a variety of studies that have indicated a general tendency for managers to focus on organizational expectations and goals (e.g., Carrol 1975, England 1967) or on a utilitarian orientation (e.g., Fritzsche and Becker 1983, 1984) rather than on personal norms.

Future research should investigate the conditions under

which one philosophical input will dominate the ethical decision making process. Three areas for investigation are suggested here. First, situational factors may determine which input (deontological or teleological) will have the strongest impact. For example, Hensel and Dubinsky (1986) indicated that during periods of duress (e.g., intense foreign competition) limits as to what constitutes acceptable behavior (cf. Ross 1970) may be expanded. During such periods teleological evaluations (e.g., protecting the domestic economy) may dominate deontological considerations (e.g., fair treatment of all competitors under a free trade belief system).

Second, the manager's level of moral development (see Kohlberg 1981) may influence the type of decision process used. Trevino (1986) speculated that most managers look to others and to the present situation in order to decide what is right and wrong (teleological input). As managers move to higher, more principled stages of moral development, they should "behave consistently with their internally held determinations of right and wrong" (deontological input) (Trevino 1986, p. 608).

Third, the specific decision style which managers employ may influence the type of criteria and processes used in resolving an ethical dilemma. Fleming (1985) identified four managerial decision styles in terms of what sources of information are preferred (sensation or intuition) and how information is processed (through thinking or feeling). These different managerial styles may approximate deontological or teleological approaches to resolving ethical dilemmas. For example, managers using intuition and feelings are likely to form ideal standards of behavior to resolve ethical dilemmas. This orientation is deontological in nature.

Each of these three areas has the potential of helping to understand the conditions under which a particular evaluative process may dominate. It should not be difficult to examine them in the context of the Hunt and Vitell model.

Hunt and Vitell's hypothesis that the most ethical alternative may not be selected because it may not lead to some preferred consequences was also confirmed. This occurred because Intentions to adopt an alternative were not only influenced by Ethical Judgments, but also directly by Teleological Evaluations. The direct effect of Teleological Evaluations on Intentions was most evident in the present project for Alternative C (re-do the study). Although this alternative was perceived to be the most ethical choice, the causal link between Ethical Judgment and Intention was not significant. From qualitative comments provided, it appears that the preferred consequence of the firm assuming only partial responsibility caused some of the respondents to select the relatively lower ethical alternative (B). In subsequent studies, a measure of the degree to which specific consequences are preferred would provide useful information to further test this hypothesis.

From a managerial perspective, it is interesting to note that managers may be able to properly identify the most ethical alternative, and not select it. It would be useful to explore the impact of ethical codes and corporate sanctions against unethical decisions on the selection of alternatives. Can codes and sanctions result in the selection of the "ethically correct" decision? While Chonko and Hunt (1985) have found that codes of ethics which are not integrated into the

corporate culture are not effective, research into the results of codes that are enforced is needed (see Robin and Reidenbach 1987 for ways in which codes can be enculturated).

LIMITATIONS

Although support for most of the key relationships and hypotheses of Hunt and Vitell's model was found, these results must be tempered by several limitations of the research. First, the issue of operationalization is of concern. In areas which have had much more research attention than this one (e.g., attitude), authors still debate the proper form and scaling of measures (cf. Oliver and Bearden 1985, p. 338). Although the measures for this study were developed based on Hunt and Vitell's suggestions, the interpretation necessary in operationalizing some constructs may have attenuated the interrelationships proposed by the authors. For example, as noted, Hunt and Vitell discuss Deontological and Teleological evaluations both as processes and constructs. The present study treated these evaluations as constructs, but future research should consider the possibility of measuring them as processes.

Additionally, the present study used only single items to measure model constructs. Consequently, it was not possible to estimate measurement reliability. Given the encouraging results found using these measures, future work should be done on measurement development, focusing on validity and reliability. As other constructs from the model (e.g., importance of stakeholders) are added to the decision-making process tested in the present study, researchers should use multiple measures of each construct to help evaluate the measures and constructs. Such a procedure would be amenable to LISREL analysis. The results then could be evaluated using both measurement and structural equations models.

Second, the degree to which results are dependent upon the particular subjects, issue, alternatives, and consequences offered is unclear. For example, the ethical problem in the current study dealt with research integrity and conflict of interest. However, Fritzsche and Becker (1983) have identified four areas of ethical problems other than conflict of interest (i.e., coercion and control, physical environment, paternalism, and personal integrity). The generalizability of the results to other types of ethical problems and marketing contexts cannot be determined from the present study. Research to investigate these matters is in the planning stage.

Third, the relatively low response rate (due in part to the questionnaire length and the sensitive nature of the topic) may mitigate the representativeness of the results.

Finally, the degree to which social desirability and motivation to respond may have biased subjects' responses in the present study (and in other research investigating the ethical decision making process) has yet to be determined.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, based on this initial empirical test, the core relationships in Hunt and Vitell's model appear to capture much of the decision-making processes that marketing man-

agers employ in resolving an ethical dilemma. In addition, the model's explicit constructs and proposed interrelationships should provide a useful guide for theory development and testing in marketing ethics. This is an initial foundation which should lead to a better understanding of the factors influencing marketing managers' decisions in ethically problematic business situations.

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NOTE

1. Given the weak relationship between Deontological Norms and Deontological Evaluations in the proposed model, a set of trimmed models were created which excluded this relationship and, for Alternative C only, also excluded the causal link between ethical evaluations and intention. The results for these trimmed models were very similar to those for the originally proposed model and so, in the interest of maintaining consistency with the proposed model, the rest of the results are based on the original model.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

MICHAEL A. MAYO (Ph.D., Kent State University) is Assistant Professor of Marketing at Kent State University. His current research interests are in ethics in marketing decision making and in international marketing. He has been published in *International Marketing Review*.

LAWRENCE J. MARKS (Ph.D., Pennsylvania State University) is Assistant Professor of Marketing at Kent State University. His articles have appeared in *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Advertising*, and *Journal of the Academy of the Marketing Science*, as well as in the Proceedings of the American Marketing Association, the Association for Consumer Research, and the American Psychological Association.