Ethics Essay Assignment: Takata’s Airbag Recall Case

Where this all dilemma started? And who should be held responsible?

Takata is the largest supplier of automotive safety systems. “With great powers come great responsibilities”, sequences of small actions can accumulate and impact not only the company in the future, but its end users’ safety as well. That is actually the case of Takata’s airbag faulty.

It started with the decision in manufacturing in Takata’s plant in Mexico, 2002. Where they allowed a defect rate above the acceptable limits. This decision clearly contradicts the company’s posture towards safety and quality. This decision could be debatable, but it clearly is a right vs. wrong dilemma. In my opinion, it is the engineers’, and above all, the management’s fault to allow such risk in manufacturing. This might have been the main reason in all injuries and deaths the airbags have caused.

As a former employee states in the New York Times article, Takata knew about the safety problem associated with the airbags since 2004. They started conducting tests and they found 2 out of 50 airbags had a faulty. However, Takata responded and said these allegations are “inaccurate”. The action Takata took with destroying the test results raised the questions: Why they destroyed them instead of keeping them? What were they “hiding”? And it raised bubble of doubt about the company’s statements toward this matter.

The ethical dilemma the former employees faced was a Truth vs. Loyalty. They had a choice between keeping the knowledge about the “secret tests” within the company, or spread the word to the outside world. Obviously, they chose the latter. Another way of thinking about the situation that it could be thought of as an individual vs. community type of dilemma. These employees could have chosen to save the company’s reputation from spreading more “rumors”, or to inform the “community” of this issue and raise the awareness of this problem to prevent more damages to the society.

The company’s explanations and responses to this dilemma could have been defended only if they took faster actions to this problem, instead of giving meaningless excuses. Only if they took the matter rather seriously from the beginning, one could argue that none of these deaths and injuries could happen.

Takata’s engineers’ responsibility was the safety of its end users. Their product (The airbag) failed to deliver maximum safety. Hence, it resulted in multiple deaths and injuries. Maybe, the engineers were “ordered” to do what they were told by the managers and to keep
quite. However, it is unethical to cross such lines and endanger the people for the sake of the company’s short-term goals. Those engineers should come forward with the truth about the company and their actions and clarify the rumors about the tests the company conducted in 2004.

Takata’s response to the matter should have been informing the car makers of the defect as soon as they knew about it in order to take action and save lives, also, the company’s reputation. An action similar to Johnson and Johnson tylenol recall in 2010. Takata have a responsibility to ensure high quality, safety and effectiveness of their products and not endanger their customers.

Hypothetically speaking, if I were the CEO of Takata. The first action I would take is to cooperate with the car makers to identify and recall all the cars with the defected airbags worldwide and fix them. Also, I would start investigating within the company and see where this problem has started, whose decision at first accumulated this nonsense and hold them responsible. In addition, to prevent this from happening in future projects, I would change how projects are handled and restudy the authority and responsibility of each individual in the design process.