The NFL Concussion Crisis: A Catastrophe That Will Never Be Forgotten

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**The NFL**

To analyze the importance of the issue one must first understand the importance of the organization behind it all, the NFL. In 1920 the American Professional Football Association was formed before renaming itself the National Football League 2 years later. In 1966, the NFL agreed on a merger between itself and the AFL (its main competitor) creating the NFL that we know today. During this time, the NFL was thriving, especially in the 1960s. The decade was defined by two starkly contrasting figures. The first was Vince Lombardi, he embodied the “purity in 1960s football when players were stoic and the NFL let the game sell itself…Lombardi symbolized conformity, sportsmanship, and discipline” (de Oca 301). The other figure was “Broadway” Joe Namath, “who brought an ethnic, working-class swagger to professional football. Namath understood the term “image is everything”, he oozed individuality, style, and freedom. Namath and Lombardi were symbols of “both the old and new definitions of masculinity” (Crepeau 351). There is also a sense of “wedding of the NFL to American patriotism”(Crepeau 351). The players, coaches, and the league itself developed in parallel with the United States and its citizens.

After decades of labor disputes players gained “liberty” and so did owners when Al Davis won the right to relocate the Raiders from Oakland to Los Angeles. Labor peace allowed players to receive astronomical salaries as well. Along with new stadiums and television networks fighting for contracts with the NFL, the league became extremely lucrative in the 1990s. The emergence of Monday Night Football and the immense popularity of the Super Bowl have become a sort of “festival of American consumerism” (Crepeau 351). The Super Bowl is a fully fledged national holiday today and has been for some time now. A powerful line from the movie concussion really encapsulates how much the NFL and the United States are intertwined: “The NFL owns a day of the week (Sunday), the same day the Church used to own, now it’s theirs” (Landesman). Continued growth reveals the true strength of the NFL brand and it’s ever expanding influence on Americans.

The growth of the NFL has coincided with the evolution of the United States during the last century and has thus played a large part in the lives of many Americans. As children, many dream of playing in the NFL. Children admire and emulate players like Tom Brady, Odell Beckham jr., and Drew Brees. The players are admired for their talent but also their superstar nature off of the field. People grow up rooting for their hometown team and spend years of their lives in agony during poor seasons and pure joy during their teams success as if it were their own. The NFL plays such a large role in so many American lives, that when a scandal of this magnitude arises, the entire United States turns its attention upon the organization demanding answers and a course of action.

**The NFL’s Moral Dilemma**

On May 14, 2007, during an interview with HBO, the NFL’s Mild Traumatic Brain Injury chairman Dr. Ira Casson adamantly denied any link between head injuries in NFL players and depression, dementia or any other long-term problem resulting in brain damage. The interview earned him the nickname “Dr. No.” This interview occurred well after hundreds of studies had been published focusing on the connection between brain injuries and football, all of which found a significant connection.
**Key Players**

Paul Tagliabue, the old NFL commissioner who created the MTBI committee and Roger Goodell, the current NFL commissioner are the two main players involved with the dilemma.

**Timeline**

In 1993, during the NFC championship game between the Dallas Cowboys and the San Francisco 49ers, star quarterback Troy Aikman took a punishing hit at the beginning of the second half of the game. One year later Aikman told the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* that “I didn’t know what planet I was on. I still to this day have no recollection of ever having played in that game. So whenever I see footage of that game, it’s like somebody else is out there doing it” (Ezell). Facing pressure to address the issues of concussions after the star quarterback on the most popular team in America clearly dealt with a brain injury, NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue created the Mild Traumatic Brain Injury (MTBI) committee in 1994. This committee focused on researching brain damage caused by football injuries. At the time of the MTBI’s founding, Tagliabue stated that “the issue of knees, of drugs and steroids and drinking is a far greater problem [than concussions to the NFL], according to the number of incidents” (Ezell).

At the beginning of 1997, the American Academy of Neurology came out with a study that suggested that players should be removed from the game if they exhibit concussion symptoms 15 minutes post-injury. They warned that concussions can cause cumulative brain damage if repeated over months or years. Just two years later, ex-NFL player Mike Webster came out to the public and claimed that football gave him dementia, likely due to repeated concussions, and was later deemed permanently disabled by the NFL retirement board.

After Webster's death, only two years after the NFL retirement board’s findings, Dr. Bennet Omalu examined Mike Webster’s brain, eventually discovering the first “evidence of a brain disease that had never been previously identified in football players, Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy, or CTE.” Omalu later published his findings on CTE with regards to Mike Webster’s injuries in the journal of Neurosurgery.

Throughout the years after Dr. Omalu’s findings, the MTBI committee published many articles of research dealing with repeated concussions and returning to a game after a player receives a concussion. None of these publishings followed what outside scientists were stating as their findings about concussions, leading many to believe that the NFL was downplaying the seriousness of brain injuries. Part of their research even stated that NFL players were less susceptible to brain injuries because they were tough and had already made it to the NFL. Stating that if they were to have brain issues, they would have already stopped playing football by the time they went pro.

Finally, after Dr. Omalu’s second paper written on CTE was published, the NFL’s new commissioner Roger Goodell came forward and voiced concern over concussions. In 2007, the
NFL hosted the first ever concussion summit. During this summit NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell praised the work of the NFL doctors that were part of the MTBI and marked the summit as a great achievement towards the betterment of the NFL (Ezell). Even after Goodell voiced his concerns, and the new concussion summit was held, the MTBI chairman Dr. Casson continuously denied connections between football and concussions. In any interview he was ever part of, he would never mention a connection, to a point where, as we mentioned previously, he was nicknamed Dr. No.

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**Hosmer Six Step Decision Making Process**

**Step 1: The Moral Problem**

The moral problem is that the NFL has been profiting off of the violent nature of football at the players expense, without notifying them of the dangers of football.

**Step 2: Additional Facts**

In 2009, after hundreds of studies on CTE were made without the NFL ever stating a link between concussions and football, NFL spokesman Greg Allelio finally acknowledged the long term effects of concussions. With this, the NFL donated thirty million dollars to concussion research and produced a banner that hung within locker rooms stating the dangers of
concussions. Along with these changes, the NFL also changed the rules of kickoffs to attempt to help decrease the frequency of concussions. Even after all of these changes, in 2011 former Atlanta Falcons player Ray Easterling filed a lawsuit against the NFL. He was later joined by more than 4,500 other former players who claimed that the league engaged in a “concentrated effort of deception and denial” in its handling of the science of concussions and brain trauma. Not even a year later, Junior Seau, an ex-NFL superstar who was rumored to have had over 1,500 concussions throughout his career killed himself. His death was followed up by massive publicity over the integrity of the NFL, and their handling of concussion research.

In November 2012 at the annual Conference of Concussion in Sport, Dr. Ann McKee presented her findings of CTE in 33 of the 34 brains of former football players that she examined. During the same time, NFL commissioner Roger Goodell “emphasized the league’s focus on making the game safer, but also points out that there are still unanswered questions when it comes to the long-term impact of concussions…. The key issue for us is how we use this new understanding to make the game even safer and more exciting in the future” (Ezell).

In April 2013, former players argued that the NFL profited by glorifying the violence of the game, spread misinformation and lied to them about the neurological risks inherent in football. However, the NFL disagreed and stated that they did not withhold any information or mislead the players.

In August 2013, the NFL released a rule change which included a ban on “crown of the helmet” hits, designed to reduce high impact hits to the head. During the same time, the NFL agreed to pay $765 million to settle the lawsuit with the former NFL players, however Roger Goodell was adamant that “there was no admission of guilt. There was no admission that anything was caused by football” (Ezell).

In 2017 a study was published that showed that CTE was found in 99% of deceased NFL players’ brains that were donated to scientific research (Emanuel).

In an article published in early 2019, the NFL announced that reported player concussions in the 2018 regular season were down 29 percent from the previous year. NFL Executive Vice President of Health and Safety, Jeff Miller, said that these findings can be attributed to new rules being implemented. The NFL has also made a push for players to wear better performing and safer helmets, which Baltimore Ravens team orthopedic surgeon Dr. Leigh Ann Curl called a “meaningful shift” (Reyes). Recently, the NFL has been extremely cautious about testing for concussions even when a player may not have one, having 75% of their concussion screenings come back negative. Jeff Miller also stated there is still room for improvement to make the game even safer for the players. (Reyes).
Step 3: Available Alternatives

**Alternative One:** The NFL should have hired an outside party to perform research on the effects of concussions on players

Before the date we chose for our dilemma, the NFL continuously used their MTBI committee to almost counter what outside scientists were saying about concussions and CTE. Every time a scientist would come out with valid information on new research the MTBI would discredit them or say that it is not fully factual for different reasons. The NFL should have hired an outside party to perform research on the effects of concussions so that there would not seem to be any biases created by the NFL by having their only research come from within the corporation. Even though they found their own information, this can be easily seen as biased information by an outsider because it could have been created to protect the NFL as a whole.

**Alternative Two:** The NFL should have been transparent with players, warning them of the research linking chronic head injuries sustained while playing football to long-term brain damage.

After examining the brain of former Pittsburgh Steelers player Mike Webster, Dr. Bennet Omalu discovered the brain disease: CTE. After publishing his findings in *Neurosurgery* during July 2005 the NFL’s MTBI committee implored Omalu to retract his article. The NFL realized the risk to their business that this newly discovered brain disease could pose. Instead of being accountable in their role as “stewards of football”, the organization chose to discredit the work of a doctor who made an important breakthrough regarding player health. Instead of focusing on potential loss of profit, the NFL should have worked with Omalu and other experts to determine how to move forward in dealing with CTE and concussions. By rejecting Omalu’s research the NFL withheld information from its players regarding their own health and safety. The NFL says: “We humbly strive to make our teams, our players, our fans, and our communities proud and better.” (NFL). Their actions in this situation clearly go against their self imposed values.

**Alternative Three:** The NFL should truly and fully live up to the core values stated on their mission and values page.

One of the NFL’s core values is integrity. According to the NFL, integrity means always looking to make the right call, even if it is unpopular, and accepting responsibility when you are wrong and working to make it right. Although recently the NFL has been performing extensive research and taking numerous steps to limit the amount of concussions suffered by players, that was not always the case. In 2013 when the NFL paid out $765 million to former NFL players who claimed that playing football left them with brain damage, commissioner Roger Goodell was adamant that the NFL was not guilty. This goes against their values of integrity, specifically, the NFL did not take accountability for their actions. With an admission of guilt, taking responsibility for their improper handling of the situation, and working to make their wrong decisions right, this option would show that the NFL is in support of making the game safer now and in the future, so they will not be seen as an enemy, but rather a helping hand.
Step 4: Identify Personal Impacts

We can determine personal impacts by asking ourselves if we would feel comfortable sharing our decisions with others. One process is the newspaper approach, where you would ask yourself if you would be comfortable with your decision being on the front page of a newspaper. Another approach is the loved one test, where you would ask yourself if you would feel comfortable telling your family of your decision. The last test is the tombstone test, where you would ask yourself if you would like to be remembered by your particular action or decision. If you would not feel comfortable sharing your decision with the public or loved ones, than your decision is likely unethical. Doing the right thing is very subjective. No one thinks alike, so doing the right thing in one person's perspective can be doing the wrong thing in another's and vice versa.

To be in Roger Goodell's shoes, you would have the power only a handful of people in history have ever experienced. But with power comes great responsibility and an even greater amount of scrutiny. When you are at the helm of one of the most prominent organizations in the world, the urge to discredit research findings that would be detrimental to such a large business is understandable. It is also understandable to agree to a settlement with former NFL players, paying out $765 million which is an extremely small portion of their annual revenue, in order to protect the NFL brand by not admitting guilt. The personal impacts of making these decisions would impact your career and reputation, not just for yourself but for the league as well. Roger Goodell and the NFL have faced a vast amount of backlash and negative media attention with how they dealt with player safety, and because of this, have performed an extensive amount of research into making the game safer while at the same time delivering the world's most exciting sports and entertainment experience.

Step 5: The 3 Moral Frameworks

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory and Shareholder Theory are similar in the regard that they both help determine what the company's role should be. However, Shareholder Theory primarily focuses on maximizing profits or some other non-economic goal. On the other hand, Stakeholder Theory looks at everyone that is affected by the decisions of a company. Stakeholders in the NFL are the company's employees, players, agents, owners, and fans. We also cannot forget the families of the players negatively impacted by brain injuries occurred from playing football. Considering rights, justice and utilitarianism -- alternative one beats out alternatives two and three for short term profitability, and all three alternatives are ideal for long term profitability.

Rights

Human Rights can be classified as basic and nonbasic. Basic rights are considered to be rights and freedoms to which all humans are considered to be entitled to. They refer to
the aspect of human life without which life would be intolerable. Nonbasic rights are considered to be something that should be valued and protected, however without these rights, life is not intolerable.

The NFL’s lack of awareness and irresponsibility with their actions towards player safety violated the basic rights of most of the NFL’s stakeholders. The fact that the NFL discredited a reliable research study in order prevent the dangers of concussions from getting out is a violation of basic rights. Many NFL players that suffer multiple concussions in their career are practically guaranteed to develop some type of mental health issue, sometimes resulting in death. Not only this, but to many players, life is intolerable because of their mental state caused from playing football so they resort to committing suicide. Basic rights include the freedom from torture, however the NFL was blindfolding its players and letting them get mentally tortured from all of their concussions without doing anything to prevent it. The rights for the players, their families and all the stakeholders involved to know how dangerous concussions can be are all basic. The right for the NFL to take action to make the game safer once introduced to this information instead of discrediting it is also a basic right. The right for the NFL to address the issue and take accountability are nonbasic, but still important for the stakeholders involved.

**Justice**

The Justice dimension of Stakeholder Theory states that a responsible company should treat people as a friendly equal, but at the same time pay special attention to the interests of the most vulnerable parties. The vulnerability aspect of Justice Theory emphasizes that a company should strive to protect the most vulnerable stakeholders and eliminate actions that could potentially harm them.

The most vulnerable party in this case is the players. The players are the ones that are suffering injury after injury and concussion after concussion. They are the ones that directly suffer from the brain damage and CTE caused by playing football. However, the NFL did nothing about it. It is the NFL’s obligation to make player safety a priority, however all they did was discredit ground breaking research on concussions and mental health. Previously, the NFL did nothing to eliminate actions that could potentially harm the players. Today, however, the NFL is performing extensive research and taking additional steps in preventing and treating concussions to ensure that the players are as safe as possible when playing football. To that end, hundreds of players suffer from concussions every year, and until this number goes down significantly, the NFL is not considered a responsible company.

As with the application of rights, all three alternatives are in line with the Justice element of Stakeholder Theory. Under the premise of treating all stakeholders fairly and justly, the NFL would choose all three of these options to provide justice in the short and long term. The NFL stakeholders deserve to know the devastating impact concussions have on the players brains. The stakeholders also deserve for the NFL to admit responsibility and be held accountable for their negligent actions.
Utilitarianism

The last component of Justice Theory is utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is a principle that an action is right to the extent that it promotes the greatest good for the greatest amount of people. Taking this viewpoint would be prioritizing the greater good over any one individual.

The NFL has been successful in satisfying most of its stakeholders. The NFL is a global superpower, with billions of dollars in revenue every year. It is also by far the most popular sport in America, practically owning a day of the week. The fans are happy, the ones who support good teams anyways, the owners are happy because the value of their team is trending upwards, and the players are happy because most are making millions of dollars playing the sport they love.

A big component of football is the violence. Many people love football because of the big hits, dirty plays and amazing feats of athleticism. However, these hits have a detrimental effect on the players. The players are the ones that suffer from brain injuries. Not the fans and not the owners. The NFL is technically following utilitarianism. The big hits bring joy to the millions of fans and owners at the expense of the thousands of players to have played at the highest level. This action promotes the greatest good for the greatest amount of people, even if it means sacrificing the interests of the players.

This perspective would align with all three alternatives. The most people would benefit from the NFL hiring an outside party to conduct research in alternative one, warning the players of the risks head injuries pose from alternative two, and lastly the NFL taking steps to make things right from alternative three. These alternatives would not ruin the integrity of the game, but instead make it safer for the players so even more people can be satisfied with the NFL.

Real Trust

Real Trust is a concept that is strongly related to Stakeholder Theory. The prime virtues of Real Trust are honesty, promise-keeping, fairness, respect and decency. Real Trust is about how moral values make business sense. The concept is built on the belief that if a company can live up to its own standards of accountability and responsibility, it will gain social capitals such as reputation and goodwill that fuel its long term growth.

The NFL exhibited little effort on building real trust with stakeholders. Part of the NFL’s mission statement and values are that they do the right thing even if it's unpopular. The NFL prides itself on accountability, responsibility and when they get things wrong, they work to make things right. The NFL went against their values in previous years by discrediting groundbreaking research by Dr. Bennet Omalu, not taking accountability or responsibility for putting players safety at risk, and took no steps to make things right. However, recently, the NFL has been prioritizing player safety by changing the rules and designing safer equipment.

Although the NFL previously exhibited little effort on building Real Trust with stakeholders, they eventually followed their mission statement and values which helped the NFL develop Real Trust with its stakeholders. However, the NFL still has a lot of work to do to gain the complete trust of its stakeholders considering the awful decisions they made in years prior.
this trend continues, the NFL will continue to be one of the most powerful organizations in the world.

**Shareholder Theory**

**Lawful Directives**

Lawful directives are the way that shareholders want the company to operate. Initially, the main lawful directive of a company is to drive profits for the shareholders. Even if company X is a non-profit, the company still needs to balance out its expenses with money that the managers will need to organize. Shareholder theory involves other directives, including non-economic ones such as donating money to charity. If all shareholders were to want company X to donate a % of their profit to charity, the managers would have a duty to ensure that that money went to charity. Overall, lawful directives are the way a company will need to be ran by its managers. They give a sense of what the executives and managers need to do to satisfy their shareholders, and guide the company to be what their shareholders envision it in the future.

**The NFL’s Lawful Directives**

In shareholder theory, the goal of any for-profit organization is obviously to create a profit. This is a lawful directive that any such corporation should share. Like mentioned, one of the main lawful directives of the NFL is to drive profit. Since the NFL gave up its tax-exempt status initially given by the government, it has been a for-profit business. With $14.2 billion in revenues, it shares roughly half of its earnings with the NFL teams. The NFL also has a lawful directive to help create profit for its teams that are within the organization. They have a duty to do as much as they can to help the teams maximize their profitability. Along with profitability, the NFL states that it has other duties to their teams.

The NFL has stated that their directives towards the 32 teams in the league mainly involve creating an environment of trust and confidence. The teams in the league need to be able to trust the executives in charge, and must believe that what they are doing is for the betterment of the league at all times. Along with teams, the NFL has directives set in place for its employees. The NFL Compliance Plan, created in January 2018, ensures that all employees are aware of their responsibilities to each other, and to those they represent and do business with. This compliance plan is a whopping twenty five pages long outlining all expected policies the NFL and its employees will abide by. The plan involves taking care of their employees and helping them strive to be better day in and day out. Like any company, the NFL is very careful with its relationships to both the public and other businesses. The organization shows its compassion with its program named play60 dedicated towards teaching kids how to play football. Pros help teach children how to properly play the game and the organization donates large sums of money towards schools in need. The NFL has an overall very ethical company on paper.
Is the NFL Following Their Directives?

The first and most important directive of the NFL is to drive profit for themselves and the teams. This is very obviously being achieved, since the NFL drove in revenues of over $14 billion and profited greatly. The NFL then followed their directive to teams with regard to profiting by distributing this $14 billion in revenue to the teams. It is clear that the NFL is following their main directive, but they have faced many issues when it comes to their employees and their directives meant to protect them.

In their mission statement, the NFL mentions that they want to help their teams, players, fans, and communities be proud and better. It is clearly seen through the media that a lot of NFL players are currently not proud of the work they do when it comes to their long term health. The betterness of their lives may be taken care of financially through their football careers, but their health is not being well taken care of. Though the NFL has evolved and tried to protect their players and their mental health, it is too late, and that is why they are facing the concussion dilemma they are in today.

The NFL clearly profits by players giving hard hits and being broadcasted all over television, and this in itself counters their core values and directives. While profit may be the first goal the NFL should strive for, they should not achieve this by breaking their values. Unfortunately for them, the game is rough and it cannot be changed in a way where it will not endanger their players. The only way they could fix their failure to abide by their values is to change the players perceptions about concussions and regain their trust. Many players do not believe they are being taken care of properly, as seen with the pure hatred across the league towards the commissioner Roger Goodell, and the constant lawsuits being made against the organization. All in all, the NFL is keeping their shareholders happy, but it comes at a cost of breaking their own core values, which many view as unethical.

Timeline / Perspective

Short Term Perspective

If the NFL were looking for a short term fix to their dilemma, they would want to implement option two as their directive. By informing all the players of the dangers of the sport and then implementing rules that will keep the players completely free of many of the dangers they currently, and in the past faced, they would overtime regain the trust they lost. The NFL would not have faced any lawsuits from past players over the safety regulations that were not in place, and they would have never gained a bad reputation over “hiding evidence.” Similar to tobacco companies when lawsuits first came out over their bad health, the NFL would have never faced any issues, and would never recieve any new lawsuits placed against them over brain injuries related to the sport.

While this does make sense, the NFL hardly lost any money over the lawsuits they have faced with regards to their profits. The hundreds of millions of dollars they have faced and paid in lawsuits are only five to seven percent of their yearly revenue. Unlike BP, who didn’t become profitable until two years after their oil spill in the Gulf, the NFL has easily remained profitable even with their bad reputation.
Overall, the NFL should do more than they are currently doing for concussions. The NFL should continue to press the issue of concussions, fund more research on how to keep players safe, and be straightforward with the public about what is going on behind the scenes of their organization. The organization may not regain the trust they once had with their players immediately, but the public will view the NFL as a much more ethical company in a short time if they become more straightforward with their internal information.

Long Term Perspective

If the NFL wanted to fix their dilemma with a focus on long-term results, they would need to begin with alternative 3 which deals with rebuilding and focusing on the NFL’s overall mission as a company. The NFL will need to find a way to fix their company in a way that protects the players, and doing so in any manner possible. They absolutely have to find a way to rebrand themselves as a company who is focused on the lives of their employees.

Currently they are seen as a company that takes their players, makes the most amount of money out of them as possible, and then forgets them forever. This viewpoint needs to be changed as soon as possible, but unfortunately this can only happen over the course of the next decade or two, which is why this must be their long term perspective fix. By creating a sense of community around service and care to the players and their families, the NFL will be able to prove to outsiders that they are living up to their directives.

Hard Trust

Hard Trust deals with the rules and laws that overlook businesses, coercing them to be ethical. These laws can be created by the government to regulate an industry. An example of a hard trust law would be the FDA, which regulates food and drug companies products. If a company were not to comply with their standards, they would be punished heavily. Any laws are meant to protect both employees and outsiders.

Hard Trust can also deal with unwritten laws, laws based on continuity. These types of laws are not illegal to break, but they are ones that revolve around public opinion. Public opinion can easily dictate what a company does because even though there are not certain laws in place, the public can revolt if they do not believe a company is acting ethically even though the company is abiding by all government regulations. For example, if a company is meeting all pollution regulations, if the public still thinks they are polluting too much, they could easily cause a boycott of said company. Overall, hard trust does mainly operate around the government and their opinions on what society thinks is right and wrong, but there are ideas not represented by the law that citizens would still like to see in place.

The NFL’s application of Hard Trust

Since the dealings of the NFL in the concussion dilemma at hand were more moral based and no overall laws were broken to get the NFL to where it was today, they did not use or apply the governmental side of hard trust. Many of the NFL’s dealings within the dilemma had to do with the theory of Real Trust because they obviously violated their own moral codes, and this has nothing to do with illegality in the government's eyes. While the NFL is not seen as unethical
in the eyes of the government, the theory of hard trust still applies with regards to the unwritten laws of society. Through the technological side of Hard Trust, the media has shown that a large percentage of the US population does not view the NFL as ethical. The concussion crisis has lead to many viewers of the NFL to disagree with its policies. People disagree with the NFL when it comes to the unwritten rules of disclosing information. The NFL is viewed as not protecting the players properly, when it should have disclosed all of the negative side effects of concussions that outside sources had been publishing. The governmental side of hard trust is a difficult theory to apply to the NFL due to its sports-related actions, but it is clear that many citizens do not agree with the NFL's actions with regards to the unwritten rules of society.

**Virtue Theory**

Virtue Theory has primarily been discussed in the context of business by Robert Solomon and Ed Hartman. Solomon emphasized a more Aristotelian approach to business ethics. An approach that doesn’t consider one’s duty or how one could avoid trouble. Instead the Aristotelian approach asks what would be beautiful, powerful, admirable, or excellent. Solomon emphasizes the lack of a connotation of failure in Virtue Theory as there is in duty-based theories. In Virtue Theory if you fall short of excellence it means there’s more work to be done, there is no connotation of failure. Hartman specifically emphasizes the dimensions of community that lead to a good life, especially related to business. Hartman states that people are products of the environment they grew up in. A person’s character is built through community reinforcement or lack thereof. The same thinking can be applied to business institutions because businesses are also communities. Our entire lives we have been trained to absorb community norms so business situations are no different. Unfortunately, this sometimes results in developing bad behaviour as a result of a bad environment. If we are more mindful of how we behave in communities, we can avoid adopting bad behaviors and focus on behaviors that we truly value.

To apply Virtue Theory, three steps are required. The first is to identity virtues. There are many ways to select virtues including the consultation of philosophers who study and work with ethics such as Aristotle, Solomon, and Hartman. In a corporate setting, one could look at a specific company’s core values. The last method of selecting virtues is gathering a group of people to list out all the virtues they personally feel are important. After doing this, the group can vote on its combined virtues to find out which ones are most widely accepted. The second step is refining the list of virtues into a smaller group of the most relevant virtues. After choosing specific virtues they need to be clearly defined. A virtue may take on an entirely different meaning in different contexts, it is important to specifically define what each virtue means given your situation.
What virtues does the NFL value?

Respect

*Everyone matters. Everyone contributes.*

In a game of Xs and 0s, we embrace all people for who they are regardless of status, title or background. We celebrate diverse opinions and perspectives. We honor hard work and commitment. Every contribution makes us better.

Integrity

*We always look to make the right call.*

We do the right thing when no one is looking, and even if it's unpopular when they are looking. We demand accountability and we expect fair play. We say what we mean, mean what we say, and always follow through. We accept responsibility when we get things wrong and then work to make them right.

Responsibility to Team

*As a team, we support one another. We depend on one another.*

Our fans give us their hearts. Our communities see themselves in us and we see ourselves in them. No matter how much we accomplish, no matter how successful we are, no one is bigger than the game. Everything we do has a consequence for someone else. We embrace our interdependence. We humbly strive to make our teams, our players, our fans, and our communities proud and better.

Resiliency

*We set high standards, and continuously strive for excellence.*

Anything is possible. No matter how great the obstacles, we overcome adversity. We turn losses into lessons. We adapt to changing circumstances and lead in new contexts. We embrace the greatest challenges and rise to meet them.
**Apply the Virtues**

**Integrity**

We define integrity as having strong moral principles. To be integrous one must not only have strong moral principles, one must also be resolute in adhering to these principles. Having and adhering to moral principles is a good start but clearly defining these principles is crucial. In a business setting, defining moral principles helps employees understand what is expected of them from the leaders of the company.

The NFL was not integrous in their handling of the concussion situation. The NFL lists integrity as one of its core values but it failed to live up to what it means to be integrous. The organization states that “We always look to make the right call” (NFL). How could they hold themselves to making the right call without even defining what the right call is. For Roger Goodell/Paul Tagliabue the right call could very well be risking player health in order to preserve the reputation of the sport and organization. The NFL not only ignored Dr. Omalu’s research, they attempted to discredit him despite his findings being legitimate and significant. After years of the MTBI denying a link between chronic concussions and brain disease it is clear that although the NFL says: “We accept responsibility when we get things wrong” (NFL), they were clearly more interested in protecting their reputation than accepting responsibility for spreading misinformation about the impacts that chronic concussions have on the long term health of NFL players. Because of the consistent gap between the actions of the NFL and its own mission statement, the NFL conclusively did not act with integrity in their handling of the situation.

**Responsibility**

We define responsibility as having the personal strength and independence to make decisions that are in the best of interest of organizations/people that you have a duty towards. Responsibility also means owning up to the results of your decisions, both good and bad.

This is another area in which the NFL has failed at in their handling of the concussion situation. The NFL includes responsibility in their mission statement as one of their core values yet it fails to adhere to its promise of responsibility. It specifically fails at making: “our players… proud and better” (NFL). By ignoring and attempting to discredit Dr. Omalu’s legitimate findings they are in direct violation of their promise to make their players proud. If NFL players had known that the NFL was hiding legitimate research from them linking concussions to brain disease, the players would have been far from proud of the organization. The NFL even had a chance to own up to their previous mistake (the MTBI spreading misinformation about concussions and brain disease) by working with Omalu to get to the bottom of the issue and to plan a course of action. That would have been the responsible thing to do but they elected to do the easy thing instead.
**Honesty**

Honesty is a difficult virtue to uphold if you define it using its most basic definition (telling the truth). Sometimes doing the right thing means being dishonest. A perfect example is giving a dying person false hope. This may sound immoral but if a person is dying, the best thing to do is to make them as comfortable as possible. One part of doing this is making them think, in some cases, that they will be fine. Sometimes saying a white lie is the moral thing to do, being honest, in certain situations, would be morally reprehensible. Instead of being honest, it is better to have honest intentions. This way instead of having to adhere to strictly facts, what you say can be more results oriented. Having honest intentions means always making the best decision for all parties affected in the situation.

The NFL’s handling of the concussion situation was filled with dishonesty. The organization was dishonest both in their intentions and with the facts. As included in their mission statement, the NFL strives to make their players proud. While they included this on their mission statement it was nothing more than an empty gesture, the actions they took to cover-up a major issue regarding player safety proved this. Not only were their intentions dishonest, they also worked to discredit the legitimate research of Dr. Bennet Omalu by releasing their own false information about the issue, therefore lying about the facts as well.

**Adaptability**

Especially in a business setting it is important to have the ability to quickly adjust your approach when circumstances change. Part of being adaptable is having the humility to accept that you can never have the ultimate right way of doing things. As the world changes, circumstances change. Established systems and protocols become outdated as new trends are created and new information is uncovered. As english writer H.G. Wells put it: “adapt or perish”, those who don’t move forward are almost certainly left behind, especially in the business world.

The NFL ignored their responsibility to adapt to the changing circumstances presented by Dr. Bennet Omalu’s research. Instead of adapting to Omalu’s discoveries they opted to try and stifle progress by discrediting him. The NFL’s reputation was injured because it refused to acknowledge the importance of adaptability.

**Good Trust**

Hard Trust and Real Trust are both important but to have the highest level of corporate success, companies must integrate the concept of Good Trust into their organizations. Having Hard Trust and Real Trust means that the company has a good reputation with the public. An important aspect of business is having the trust of the public, but what about the people within the organization? Good Trust emphasizes the importance of everyone in the organization buying into the idea that the company’s end goal is genuinely worth their maximum effort. According to professor Fort, “the aim of how businesses can contribute to sustainable peace… is an inspiring enough “good” to transform how people approach their work”(Fort 206).

In this case, the NFL did not apply the idea of Good Trust in their organization. The NFL has a natural advantage with its employees because of the nature of its business. The teams part
of their organization are adored by millions of people. For many, without even knowing what it would be like to work in the NFL, having a job in the organization would be a dream based on pure love for the sport. Although the NFL had all this going for them, they failed to foster Good Trust within the organization. This fact is made apparent by the actions of the MTBI and the organization as a whole against Dr. Bennet Omalu and indirectly against the best interest of its own employees (the players). Good Trust is about motivating employees in their work by making them realize how they can contribute to sustainable peace. Acting against what is right (discrediting Omalu) and putting their players’ health at further risk are surely not things that contribute to “sustainable peace”.

Step 6: Conclusion

Unfortunately, the NFL decided to discredit the research performed by Dr. Omalu. The NFL instead focused on limiting the information that got out to the players. Many players suffered career ending and life threatening injuries and on top of that, the NFL refused to take accountability for their actions or work towards improving player safety. Eventually the NFL decided to follow their mission statement by fixing what was wrong and working to make it right.

Based on our analysis we believe that the best option would be for the NFL take an integrated approach of all three alternatives. This approach prioritizes the NFL’s virtues and stakeholders and sets them up for long term success while also factoring in short term success. Following alternative one, by hiring an outside party to conduct medical research, the NFL will have an unbiased, independent source that they can use to further increase the safety of the vulnerable stakeholders (players). If the NFL was to follow alternative two as well, by being transparent with the players, they would be acting in the best interest of the players as well as the rest of the stakeholders. It is imperative for the players to know the effects concussions can have on their brains, and being transparent with the players is one way to ensure this happens. Once told about the impact concussions may have, it will be their choice to determine whether it is worth it to play football. Lastly, the third alternative, which states that the NFL should live up to its mission statement also is beneficial to all stakeholders. By following the mission statement, the NFL would be obligated to be accountable, responsible, and to work to make their wrong decisions right. Not only this, but the NFL is dedicated to deliver the world's most exciting sports and entertainment experience. If the NFL follows all three alternatives, this would follow rights theory, justice theory and utilitarianism while at the same time not ruining the integrity of the game.

Total Integrity Management

Hard Trust

Like mentioned earlier, hard trust deals with shareholder theory with regards to the laws that the government has in place, along with the unwritten laws of society. The laws in place by the government force organizations to be ethical from what the government deems to be good or
bad. The NFL did not violate any laws with regards to this aspect of hard trust, so there is nothing that they could have changed in the past to change the views of the government with regards to their operations. Where the NFL needs to become more active is within the realm of fixing their reputation in the eyes of the public. From the public's view, the NFL treats their players as lesser employees that are only there to make them money. The NFL clearly broke an unwritten rule in the public's eyes that deals with the care given to their players. By not informing the players about concussions, and not taking proactive measures to reduce the sickening amount of concussions that occur year in year out during football games, the NFL has gained a terrible reputation.

By implementing a way to increase the public's opinion on the NFL, they would not be in the situation they are in today. A preventative, proactive strategy that the NFL should take is to disclose all of their information to the public about player safety. Unlike when the first concussion and CTE reports were coming out in the 2000s, the NFL needs to come out and say that they are joining together with these researchers and finding a solution to the problem. Firstly, they need to come out and apologize about the past actions they have taken to try and cover up the dangers of concussions. The NFL needs to prove to the public that player safety is their number one concern. By developing new helmets and having weekly checkups with players, along with conducting more research with scientists about preventative ways to at the very least reduce concussions each year, the NFL could regain public trust in the realm of concussion safety. Fixing the concussion dilemma is a huge way to fix public perception of the NFL currently, but they also need to help prevent other issues from occurring in the future.

The future is everything to the NFL. They plan to have revenue of over $20 billion by 2020, the only way to do this is to ensure that the public and its players have faith in their statements. The NFL needs to rebuild their reputation with players by focusing on what they want. They need to poll all current NFL players, see what they want to see done by the NFL in the future and execute just that. No matter what it may be, the NFL needs to do what the players want. This will change public opinion as well because it will show that the NFL truly does care about its players and what they want. With this, the NFL also needs to constantly evolve the game to be safer. While this may change the rules of the game, which some viewers may dislike, it is what has to be done to prevent another health dilemma like what has occurred in the past. Through health studies on players, along with injury prevention studies, the NFL can evolve to become a better organization. All in all, the NFL has a lot of work to do so that they can rebuild their reputation, the first step they need to take is to ensure player satisfaction.

**Real Trust**

As stated earlier, Real Trust is a concept that is strongly related to Stakeholder Theory. The NFL has to have real trust with its stakeholders in order to survive. The main principles of this theory is for a company to live up to the standards set forth in a company’s mission statement or values. Unlike Hard Trust where a company can suffer serious legal ramifications for not following certain rules or regulations, with Real Trust a company will not. Instead, the company will harm its reputation and goodwill which will stunt its long term growth.

The NFL violated several areas of Real Trust located in its Value section. The NFL did not follow the “Respect”, “Integrity”, “Responsibility to the Team” and “Resiliency” portions of their Values. The NFL did this by discrediting Dr. Omalu’s research on concussions, not being
proactive about player safety until very recently, and not taking accountability or responsibility for their actions. This in turn, created major problems for the NFL and bad publicity for years and it is still to this day negatively affecting the league.

To prevent this issue from recurring, the NFL has to follow its mission statement and values. These are promises to the stakeholders that the stakeholders expect to be fulfilled completely. If the NFL knows that they cannot follow certain commitments, then they should remove it from their mission statement and values. However, they have to be careful about what to include. Just because a company follows their mission statement and values does not mean that they have real trust. For example, the NFL has nothing in their mission statement or values about player safety, however one of the main reasons why they don't have real trust is because of the leagues lack of player safety. The NFL has to include their dedication to player safety in its mission statement, and follow it in order to develop real trust with their stakeholders.

**Good Trust**

Good Trust is undeniably intertwined with Virtue Theory. Virtue Theory discusses the impacts that community (corporate environment) has on becoming a “good person”, and in turn, a better member of society (employee of a corporation). Good Trust is about fostering motivation in employees through developing a corporate environment that motivates employees to want to genuinely do their best work.

As described by Professor Fort: “Good Trust is about caring about ethics” (Fort 206). In this situation, the NFL didn’t propagate care for ethics within its employees. This lack of Good Trust caused the NFL and its employees to make unethical decisions regarding player safety and general medical progress.

If the NFL wants to avoid a similar situation recurring, it must establish Good Trust within its employees. Professor Fort says one way to develop Good Trust amongst employees is to tell stories. Perhaps the NFL league office and the MTBI would have made a more ethical decision if they knew the people they were affecting with their decisions (the players) better. The NFL needs more cohesion within their organization. Unfortunately, the NFL is made up of thirty-two individual and opposing organizations all with their own culture and ideas. Each organization works largely independent of one another, because of this there is a lot of room for disconnection. It’s hard for NFL teams to see other teams as groups of people, all with their own ideas, dreams, and goals, rather than faceless organizations. The NFL must encourage more inter-team communication as well as team communication with the league. This way everyone knows exactly who they are working for and with. The actions taken by the MTBI to cover up information impacting player safety would have been much harder to make (maybe even impossible) if the members of the MTBI and employees who influence the MTBI knew the people who they would be hurting on a personal level.
References


