

**Final Project Outline: A Multi-Theoretical Analysis of Target's DEI Decision**

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# Interactive Outline

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## **Final Project Outline: A Multi-Theoretical Analysis of Target's DEI Decision**

### **Summary of Ethical Dilemma**

In January 2025, Target Corporation announced the termination of its \$2 billion diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) investment plan by ending the “REACH initiative” and restructuring its Supplier Diversity program into what is now called “Supplier Engagement,” constituting one of the most extensive corporate DEI reversals in recent history (Diversity.com, 2025, Feb. 19). Historically, Target had positioned itself as a national leader in inclusive hiring and support for minority-owned businesses, earning recognition as one of the top companies for equitable practices (Diversity.com, 2025, Feb. 19). Following the murder of George Floyd in Target's home city of Minneapolis in 2020, the company emerged as one of corporate America's most visible advocates for DEI reforms, pledging lasting commitments to racial and social justice (Meyersohn & McKend, 2025). However, in early 2025, the political climate shifted sharply following a series of Supreme Court rulings that weakened legal protections for DEI efforts, triggering increased scrutiny and backlash from political opposition groups (Meyersohn & McKend, 2025).

In the wake of these developments, Target faced mounting pressure to reevaluate its DEI strategy (Cavale, 2025). **The ethical dilemma confronting the actor, Target's corporate leadership, centered on whether to uphold its long-term commitments to fairness, equity, and inclusion, or to reverse their position in the interest of mitigating political risk and preserving financial stability** (Cavale, 2025). According to public relations strategist Eric Schiffer, “For Target, with an inclusive audience, this is their version of brand suicide,” suggesting that the actor's reversal alienated their core stakeholders and severely damaged their public image (as quoted in Cavale, 2025). The rollback provoked widespread criticism from civil

rights advocates, former community partners, and supported minority vendors who viewed the decision as a betrayal of Target's foundational ethical values (Diversity.com, 2025, Feb. 19). Ultimately, this situation presented a significant ethical and reputational challenge for the actor (Diversity.com, 2025, Feb. 19). Faced with intense political opposition and the risk of continued economic fallout, the actor chose to retract its DEI programs in a move that may have offered short-term relief but exposed the company to long-term consequences related to stakeholder trust and moral consistency (Cavale, 2025; Diversity.com, 2025, Feb. 19).

### **Application of Ethical Principals**

#### **Theory 1: Deontology**

##### ***Summary***

Deontological ethics evaluates moral choices based on whether they fulfill one's duties and uphold ethical principles (Rachels, 2018c). This framework emphasizes moral consistency, fidelity to promises, and the inherent obligation to act justly, regardless of practical challenges (Ross, 1967; Rawls, 1971). For the actor, this meant upholding its publicly stated commitments to DEI as stated in its corporate strategy (Target, 2025; Meyersohn & McKend, 2025). From this perspective, the ethical legitimacy of each potential choice depended on the actor's willingness to remain faithful to these moral commitments (Ross, 1967). Ross stresses that duties such as justice and fidelity are "*prima facie*" obligations, or core ethical responsibilities, which must not be abandoned for convenience or short-term gain (italics as quoted in Ross, 1967, pp. 19–24). Further, deontology argues that the actor should not selectively abandon values that had been embedded in Target's operational and ethical identity for decades (Ross, 1967; Rawls, 1971; Pollard, 2025). Upholding such duties would have reflected a principled moral leadership, rather than reactive decision-making that abandoned their core values (Ross, 1967; Rawls, 1971).

Finally, deontological theory also acknowledges the complexity of ethical decision-making (Rachels, 2018b). Ultimately, the actor's decision to fully retract Target's DEI initiatives constituted a direct violation of deontological duties (Ross, 1967; Rawls, 1971; Cavale, 2025). In doing so, the actor abandoned the ethical foundation that is required for trustworthy institutional conduct, undermining both public trust and internal moral consistency (Rawls, 1971; Pollard, 2025). From a deontological standpoint, the decision reflected an ethical abandonment that no favorable outcome could have ethically justified (Rachels, 2018c).

### ***In-Depth Analysis of Choices***

The actor faced three ethically significant options in responding to the external economic and political pressures:

1. Uphold the original DEI commitments without compromise.
2. Modify the initiatives while preserving core ethical principles.
3. Fully retract the programs in favor of short-term stability.

**Choice One.** The first option available to the actor was to maintain a steadfast commitment to existing DEI initiatives, despite rising economic and political pressures (Meyersohn & McKend, 2025). From a deontological standpoint, this choice would have exemplified moral integrity by upholding Target's clearly articulated commitments to fairness, equality, and inclusion (Target, 2025; Meyersohn & McKend, 2025). According to Ross, duties such as fidelity and justice must be upheld regardless of the consequences, and this decision would have best honored those obligations (Ross, 1967). Likewise, Rawls (1971a) emphasizes that ethical institutions should not selectively abandon principles under duress, reinforcing that this option would have demonstrated corporate adherence to deontological ideals even in adversity.

**Choice Two.** The second option involved the actor strategically modifying or scaling back DEI programs while still preserving their core ethical principles (Pollard, 2025). This approach reflects a more nuanced application of deontological theory by attempting to balance external realities with moral duties (Pollard, 2025; Rawls, 1971). Rather than abandoning their obligations entirely, this path could have upheld the actor's foundational commitments to equity while also adjusting its implementation to the current circumstances (Pollard, 2025; Rawls, 1971). This option could have demonstrated an effort to maintain ethical fidelity and corporate integrity, which are important when trying to maintain stakeholder trust (Pollard, 2025; Ross, 1967). Lastly, this compromise would have respected the essence of deontological reasoning by showing that ethical consistency can coexist with responsible adaptation (Ross, 1967; Rawls, 1971; Rachels, 2018b).

**Choice Three.** The final choice is the one the actor took; to fully retract their DEI commitments in a direct violation of deontological principles (Ross, 1967; Pollard, 2025). By discontinuing programs supporting minority-owned businesses and eliminating public accountability metrics, the actor abandoned clearly defined ethical duties in pursuit of short-term economic stability (Target, 2025; Pollard, 2025; Ross, 1967). Additionally, Rawls (1971a) argues that fairness must guide institutional conduct, even when it is politically inconvenient. Therefore, the actor's choice to abandon its moral commitments completely undermined the actor's credibility and identity as an ethically grounded organization (Ross, 1967; Rawls, 1971).

### ***Deontology Theory Reflected or Violated?***

**Choice One: Reflected.** Upholding DEI initiatives would have fully aligned with deontological ethics by prioritizing moral duties over outcomes (Ross, 1967; Rachels, 2018c). In this context, the actor's previously established commitments represented clearly defined ethical

obligations that should have been upheld regardless of public backlash or economic pressures (Target, 2025; Ross, 1967; Rawls, 1971). By remaining consistent in its DEI stance, the actor would have embodied the deontological theory (Rawls, 1971; Rachels, 2018c).

**Choice Two: Reflected.** Modifying DEI programs while preserving their ethical core, shows an effort to remain committed to moral obligations while under pressure (Cavale, 2025; Pollard, 2025). Therefore, this approach would have shifted the actor from a rigid application of duty-bound ethics, and it would have reflected their effort to remain committed to their foundational moral obligations (Ross, 1967; Rawls, 1971).

**Choice Three: Violated.** The third choice was the option the actor took; to fully retract DEI commitments in a direct violation of deontological ethics (Rawls, 1971; Target, 2025). The actor disregarded its stated obligations to fairness, equity, and inclusion for the sake of political relief and short-term financial stability (Pollard, 2025; Diversity.com, 2025, Feb. 19). Finally, Rawls (1971a) argues that institutions must act in accordance with principles of fairness and equal respect, especially when challenged, making the actor's decision ethically unjustifiable from a deontological standpoint.

### ***Positive and Negative Ramifications of Each Choice***

**Choice One.** Maintaining Target's DEI initiatives would have balanced ethical advantages with practical risks (Rachels, 2018a). From a deontological perspective, upholding DEI measures could have potentially improved long-term stakeholder trust and the actor's ethical reputation (Rawls, 1971). Furthermore, refusing to yield to ideological opposition could have attracted loyalty from socially responsible stakeholders (Meyersohn & McKend, 2025; Pollard, 2025). However, this course of action could have risked intensified backlash and economic strain from anti-DEI groups (Melville, 2025; Diversity.com, 2025, Feb. 19). Nevertheless,

deontological theory supports that sacrifices for moral principals are ethically permissible when moral principles are at stake, prioritizing consistency in ethical duty over external pressures (Ross, 1967; Rachels, 2018c).

**Choice Two.** Strategically modifying their DEI programs could have signaled ongoing respect for ethical obligations while also addressing the political pressures; this could have potentially mitigated the backlash while also maintaining their credibility with their equity-minded stakeholders (Diversity.com, 2025, Feb. 19; Pollard, 2025). However, this approach also risked being perceived as ethically ambiguous, casting doubt on the actor's true commitment to its values (Meyersohn & McKend, 2025; Pollard, 2025). Nonetheless, within a deontological framework, this compromise could have been justified if the actor upheld its principles despite the strategic adjustments (Rawls, 1971; Ross, 1967).

**Choice Three.** The decision to fully retract DEI commitments provided the actor with short-term relief but it also produced significant ethical and practical consequences that are inconsistent within the deontological framework (Rawls, 1971; Meyersohn & McKend, 2025). While this choice pacified certain consumer segments and reduced exposure to political scrutiny, it also violated the duties of justice and fidelity by discarding their long-standing commitment to equity and inclusion (Diversity.com, 2025, May 2). Likewise, abandoning these principles signaled to stakeholders that their values were conditional, resulting in public backlash, diminished trust, and reputational harm (Pollard, 2025; Brown, 2025; Meyersohn & McKend, 2025). From a deontological lens, the actor's failure to uphold their principles critically undermined their ethical legitimacy (Ross, 1967; Rawls, 1971; Rachels, 2018b).

### ***Fallout and/or Responses to Choices***

The fallout and responses to each of the three choices available to the actor reveal the ethical tensions and real-world consequences that arise when DEI commitments are either upheld, strategically adjusted, or abandoned under pressure (Rachels, 2018c).

**Choice One.** Had the actor upheld its DEI commitments, the organization might have faced immediate backlash from anti-DEI advocates and suffered short-term financial strain (Melville, 2025; Diversity.com, 2025, Feb. 19). However, from a deontological perspective, enduring these external pressures would have been ethically justified because maintaining the principles of justice, fairness, and inclusion is an uncompromisable moral duty (Ross, 1967). Additionally, Rawls (1971a) argued that institutions can earn legitimacy by upholding their principles consistently, but especially when challenged, suggesting that this choice could have strengthened the actor's ethical credibility. Ultimately, while the fallout may have included economic and reputational risks, this choice would have affirmed the actor's moral integrity and reinforced stakeholder trust (Rawls, 1971).

**Choice Two.** Had the actor strategically modified its DEI programs while also preserving their ethical foundation, they would have likely received both approval and criticism (Pollard, 2025). This choice reflects the complexity of balancing duty with contextual realities (Ross, 1967). From a deontological standpoint, this option could have been viewed as a partial fulfillment of moral obligations since it would have retained core commitments while adapting their implementation strategies (Rawls, 1971). However, any perceived change to their ethical promises may have triggered skepticism from equity-focused stakeholders, who could have interpreted the decision as a wavering in their commitments while under pressure (Pollard, 2025). Still, unlike a full roll-back, this approach could have preserved the actor's institutional

integrity by demonstrating a continued willingness to honor ethical duties within certain limitations (Ross, 1967).

**Choice Three.** The fallout from the actor's choice to completely withdraw its DEI commitments came shortly after it was announced while also instantly hurting their reputation (Melville, 2025; Diversity.com, 2025, Feb. 19). This choice went against the core deontological belief that ethical duties must be followed no matter what the outcome may be (Rawls, 1971; Diversity.com, 2025, Feb. 19). By failing to maintain ethical consistency under pressure, the actor signaled to stakeholders that its values were negotiable which eroded trust and triggered widespread criticism from civil rights groups and DEI advocates (Brown, 2025; Diversity.com, 2025, Feb. 19). According to Rawls (1971a), institutions must model fairness especially when challenged, and the failure to do so compromised the actor's ethical identity. From a deontological standpoint, this decision reflected a serious breach of the actor's moral integrity that resulted in long-term ramifications to their credibility (Diversity.com, 2025, May 2; Ross, 1967).

## **Theory 2: Organizational Communication and Ethics Code**

### ***Summary***

Formal codes of ethics establish an organization's core norms and guiding principles for navigating ethically ambiguous situations (Johannesen et al., 2008b). These codes serve to clarify expected behaviors by defining overarching values as well as dictating how members should respond when faced with complex moral dilemmas (Johannesen et al., 2008b). The rollback of DEI initiatives at Target illustrates the consequences of lacking codified guidance under political and economic pressures (Cavale, 2025; Johannesen et al., 2008b). Without explicit commitments to DEI embedded within their formal ethics code, the actor resorted to

reactive decision-making that undermined stakeholder trust (Pollard, 2025; Johannesen et al., 2008b).

Likewise, effective organizational communication also depends on their systematic dissemination and socialization across all levels of the organization (Johannesen et al., 2008a). Target's "Belonging at the Bullseye" strategy initially communicated a strong commitment to their DEI values, but its abrupt reversal eroded their credibility among both employees and consumers (Target, 2025; Meyersohn & McKend, 2025). This discrepancy resulted in a longer than eight-week decline in foot traffic as well as significant reputational harm, underscoring the very critical role of consistent ethics communication in sustaining organizational legitimacy (Johannesen et al., 2008a; 2008b; Melville, 2025)

### ***In-Depth Analysis of Choices***

The actor faced three ethically significant options in responding to the external economic and political pressures:

1. Uphold the original DEI commitments without compromise.
2. Modify the initiatives while preserving core ethical principles.
3. Fully retract the programs in favor of short-term stability.

**Choice One.** Upholding the original DEI commitments would have embodied the codification of core ethical values within the organization's formal code of ethics, ensuring that its foundational principles guided the actor's decision-making under pressure (Johannesen et al., 2008b). This choice could have sustained stakeholder trust as well as their positive reputation, likely preventing the boycott-driven decline in foot traffic that was documented after the rollback (Melville, 2025). Such an unwavering adherence would have highlighted the actor's strategic

role of ethics communication in reinforcing organizational legitimacy and long-term resilience (Johannesen et al., 2008a).

**Choice Two.** Adjusting the DEI initiatives while still preserving their core values would have demonstrated the actor's adaptability that was built into their formal ethics codes, which allow for contextual adjustments without sacrificing their foundational commitments (Johannesen et al., 2008b). Therefore, if the actor would have transparently explained how the program adjustments maintained equity and inclusion, the actor would have signaled a continued ethical intent that would have mitigated consumer backlash and reputational harm (Meyersohn & McKend, 2025). This balanced approach would have shown how adapting ethics communication to real-world constraints could uphold moral integrity and make the organization more resilient (Johannesen et al., 2008a).

**Choice Three.** The actor's choice to fully retract their DEI initiatives effectively abandoned their stated commitments for short-term gains which is a direct violation of the codified ethical obligations defined in their formal code of ethics (Pollard, 2025; Johannesen et al., 2008b). This abrupt decision eliminated the transparent and reciprocal dialogue that is required for sustained ethical practices (Johannesen et al., 2008a). News coverage of the rollback's sudden announcement resulted in widespread boycotts and intense negative outrage, evidencing the breakdown of the actor's credibility (Cavale, 2025; Brown, 2025; Pollard, 2025). Ultimately, this choice illustrated how undermining ethics communication can compromise organizational legitimacy, resulting in prolonged consumer disengagement and reputational damage (Melville, 2025).

### ***Organizational Communication and Ethics Code Reflected or Violated?***

**Choice One: Reflected.** Upholding the original DEI commitments without compromise would have exemplified the use of formal codes of ethics since the decision would have aligned their code and communication to maintain their legitimacy (Johannesen et al., 2008b). This choice would have ensured message coherence by aligning internal practices with external communications, which is a principle of effective organizational communication that emphasizes the use of multiple channels and feedback mechanisms to embed ethical norms into everyday interactions (Johannesen et al., 2008a). Furthermore, by maintaining public DEI commitments the actor could have reinforced stakeholder trust through the predictability of its ethical conduct; this would have directly countered the loss of credibility that resulted from the rollback (Meyersohn & McKend, 2025; Johannesen et al., 2008a). Finally, resisting the rollback could have mitigated reputational damage and consumer decline, highlighting how consistent ethics communication is a strategic asset in preserving organizational legitimacy and resilience (Melville, 2025; Johannesen et al., 2008a).

**Choice Two: Reflected.** This choice would have demonstrated the adaptive capacity of the formal codes of ethics, which would have allowed the actor to update their guidelines while still preserving their foundational values (Johannesen et al., 2008b). Therefore, the actor's adjusted strategy could have sought to maintain their core inclusion efforts amid external pressures (Meyersohn & McKend, 2025). Such transparent modifications could have reduced the severity of consumer backlash and could have stabilized consumer foot traffic by showing consistent ethical intent despite their policy adjustments (Melville, 2025; Johannesen et al., 2008a).

**Choice Three: Violated.** The actor's decision to fully retract their DEI commitments in favor of short-term stability went against the basic ethical principles that were defined in their formal codes of ethics (Target, 2025; Johannesen et al., 2008b). This decision undermined the principle that ethical norms require transparent and consistent communication across organizational levels (Johannesen et al., 2008a). By implementing the rollback, the actor sent mixed messages between public commitments and internal practices, ultimately eroding their credibility and signaling that ethical obligations were sacrificed for short-term goals (Johannesen et al., 2008a; Meyersohn & McKend, 2025). Ultimately, this decision violated the core function of ethics communication as a resilience mechanism, resulting in reputational harm and consumer backlash (Johannesen et al., 2008a; Melville, 2025).

#### ***Positive and Negative Ramifications of Each Choice***

**Choice One.** Upholding the original DEI commitments would have reinforced the organization's formal code of ethics by demonstrating an unwavering commitment to its stated values (Johannesen et al., 2008a). This would have resulted in the positive ramification of signaling consistency between internal practices and external promises, enhancing message coherence and stakeholder buy-in (Johannesen et al., 2008a). Additionally, this steadfast approach could have reassured consumers of the brand's integrity and long-term vision which could have prevented the boycott-driven decline in foot traffic (Melville, 2025). Conversely, such uncompromising adherence might have intensified the short-term political backlash and generated financial strain by alienating groups opposed to DEI initiatives, illustrating the tension between ethical consistency and operational stability (Johannesen et al., 2008a; Diversity.com, 20205, Feb. 19).

**Choice Two.** Modifying DEI programs would have exemplified the adaptive capacity of formal ethics codes, allowing the organization to respond to external pressures while also upholding their foundational commitments (Johannesen et al., 2008a; 2008b). This choice would have started ongoing dialogue and feedback loops to embed revised ethical norms through transparent explanation, key principals of organizational communication theory (Johannesen et al., 2008a). On the positive side, this kind of adjustment could have mitigated consumer backlash and reduced reputational harm by demonstrating responsiveness and transparency (Johannesen et al., 2008a; Meyersohn & McKend, 2025). However, a negative ramification could be that core advocates see this option as a watering down of the actor's ethics, eroding trust among those who demand full DEI commitments (Pollard, 2025).

**Choice Three.** The actor's choice to fully retract its DEI programs brought short-term benefits by easing political pressure and reducing criticism from anti-DEI groups (Cavale, 2025). However, the actor's decision was misaligned with the values written in Target's formal code of ethics, which publicly committed to fairness, equity, and inclusion (Johannesen et al., 2008b; Pollard, 2025). From an organizational communication perspective, pulling back these programs weakened their open and honest communication which is necessary to maintain an ethical culture (Johannesen et al., 2008a; Pollard, 2025). Therefore, in making this decision, the actor sent the message to the stakeholders that the company's values can be set aside when facing outside pressure, which damages trust with employees, customers, and civil rights advocates (Diversity.com, 2025, Feb. 19; Melville, 2025). Regardless of the positive and negative ramifications, the actor risked long-lasting damage to its identity, credibility, and stakeholder loyalty (Melville, 2025; Pollard, 2025).

### *Fallout and/or Responses to Choices*

**Choice One.** Upholding the original DEI commitments would have bolstered internal morale and reinforced the organization's ethical identity by demonstrating an unwavering commitment to its formal code of ethics (Johannesen et al., 2008a). Activist groups and DEI advocates would have praised the decision, similar to the positive media coverage the actor received when it was first commended as an outspoken supporter of DEI practices (Meyersohn & McKend, 2025). Conversely, conservative political stakeholders might have criticized the actor for defying the external pressures and policy directives, mirroring the backlash that initiated the initial rollback (Cavale, 2025). Such polarized responses would have tested the actor's resilience and its capacity to sustain their legitimacy (Johannesen et al., 2008a).

**Choice Two.** Modifying the DEI initiatives to preserve the actor's foundational values would have elicited cautious approval from moderate stakeholders who value practical adjustments grounded in ethical frameworks (Johannesen et al., 2008a; Diversity.com, 2025, May 2). In the actor's choice to refine program parameters, some core DEI advocates might have criticized the changes as tokenistic, echoing the concerns about the corporate philanthropic commitments that were raised in response to the rollback (Pollard, 2025; Diversity.com, 2025, May 2). Finally, consumer engagement would have likely stabilized in response to upholding their DEI initiatives, but rebuilding full trust with stakeholders would have been a longer process (Diversity.com, 2025, Feb. 19).

**Choice Three.** The actor chose to fully retract their DEI initiatives resulting in a consumer boycott and an eight-week decline in foot traffic, perfectly illustrating the fallout of compromised ethics communication (Melville, 2025; Brown, 2025). Internal communications suffered as employees expressed dissatisfaction and distrust, with hundreds of negative

comments flooding social media and signaling eroded morale (McFall, 2025; Diversity.com, 2025, Feb. 19; Brown, 2025). Major news outlets characterized the actor's decision as a betrayal of their prior commitments, amplifying stakeholder skepticism and worsening stakeholder trust (Meyersohn & McKend, 2025). These negative responses show how ignoring the transparent, reciprocal communication channels required of formal ethics codes can weaken organizational resilience and legitimacy (Johannesen et al., 2008a).

### **Noteworthy Theory: Intercultural and Multicultural Communication Ethics**

In addition to the theories mentioned above, intercultural and multicultural communication ethics were also violated. The rollback of DEI programs disregarded the actor's previous commitments to marginalized communities and diverse suppliers, reflecting a failure to uphold respect and equity across cultural lines (Casmir, 2018; Johannesen et al., 2008a). Ethical communication in multicultural contexts requires sensitivity to the values, histories, and identities of all stakeholder groups, especially those historically excluded from mainstream economic systems (Casmir, 2018; Zaharna, 2000).

The actor **chose** to fully retract their DEI initiatives, a decision that clearly violated the principles of intercultural and multicultural communication ethics, which emphasizes responsiveness to the needs and identities of diverse cultural groups (Casmir, 2018; Zaharna, 2000). By discontinuing programs that supported minority-owned suppliers and marginalized communities, the actor failed to honor intercultural respect and justice (Casmir, 2018).

Therefore, the actor's decision resulted in a **violation** of the intercultural and multicultural ethics framework. By scaling back supplier diversity programs and other inclusive policies, the actor's decision undermined respect and accountability toward diverse communities and marginalized the very groups those initiatives were meant to support (Casmir, 2018;

Zaharna, 2000). Lastly, instead of prioritizing marginalized voices and fair treatment of all stakeholders, the actor ignored cultural inclusion and mutual respect, core principals of multicultural communication ethics (Casmir, 2018; Zaharna, 2000).

Likewise, the negative **ramifications** led to a loss of goodwill among communities of color and minority-owned suppliers and like-minded stakeholders (Casmir, 2018). While the actor's decision may have appeased certain political critics, the decision damaged their social capital and weakened the brand's credibility in future partnerships (Melville, 2028; Zaharna, 2000).

Finally, the **fallout** from the actor's decision to retract Target's DEI initiatives alienated diverse stakeholders and weakened the company's position within socially responsible markets (Diversity.com, 2025, Feb. 19; Zaharna, 2000). Ultimately, the actor's decision resulted in both immediate and far-reaching violations of multiple ethical frameworks including virtue ethics, organizational communication ethics, and intercultural ethics (Hursthouse & Pettigrove, 2022; Johannesen et al., 2008a; Zaharna, 2000).

### **Discussion of Ethical Dilemma**

I believe that the actor did not make the most ethical choice for this situation, as the full retraction of its DEI initiatives violated foundational duties of fairness, justice, and moral consistency, all of which are essential to deontological ethics (Rawls, 1971; Ross, 1967). By abandoning programs supporting marginalized communities and supplier diversity, the also actor disregarded the ethical principles of intercultural communication and corporate responsibility (Casmir, 2018; Zaharna, 2000). Lastly, this decision ultimately damaged their organizational credibility and stakeholder trust, undermining the long-term ethical and reputational integrity of the company (Johannesen et al., 2008a). Instead, I believe that the choices explored above show that it would have been easy for the actor to maintain an unwavering commitment to their DEI

initiatives with very little fallback or negative ramifications to their reputation (Johannesen et al., 2008a; Pollard, 2025).

### **Prompts**

#### **Prompt 1:**

Considering the actor's decision to retract its DEI initiatives, how can organizations remain ethically consistent with their stated values when external pressures threaten those commitments? Referring to deontological ethics, should moral duties like justice and fidelity ever be adjusted when facing practical risks, or does adapting one's core values under pressure inherently violate ethical integrity regardless of the move being done strategically?

#### **Prompt 2:**

When an actor publicly commits to ethical values through formal codes and strategic communication, what are other long-term consequences of reversing those commitments under external pressure that may not have been highlighted in the case of Target reversing its DEI initiatives? Does abandoning one's ethical communication frameworks damage more than it protects and what does that mean for organizational legitimacy?

#### **Prompt 3:**

How do you think intercultural and multicultural communication ethics should guide corporate decision-making when facing political or economic pressure that conflicts with their commitments to inclusion, equity, and cultural respect? What do you think are the long-term risks of abandoning programs that affirm the identities, voices, and histories of underrepresented stakeholders?

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