Most studies of ethics in the pharmaceutical industry are conducted at the clinical level. One study by Latif and Berger (1999) compared scores on a moral reasoning test between pharmacy students at a large university, pharmacists in clinical practice, and students of other health professions. They found that pharmacy students were significantly "less morally developed than their counterparts in other health professions" (p. 20) and also less morally developed than pharmacists at "high levels of clinical performance" (p. 26). The researchers concluded that training in ethics should be a standard part of the curriculum.

In another study of the ethics of pharmacists, Latif (1998) et al. found that moral reasoning was the factor that allowed excellence in clinical care, rather than high grades, test scores, or product knowledge. Clearly ethics has an application to pharmacy. It needs to be studied at an organizational level as well as at a clinical level. My theory of ethical issues management can contribute to the pharmaceutical organization's commitment to an organizational culture that reinforces ethical decision-making that extends from the dominant coalition to lower levels of the organization.

Issues Management: What Is an Issue?

To understand and study issues management, one must first determine exactly what is meant by an "issue." There are many definitions of an issue in the literature, and these must be reviewed for an understanding of the term. The excellence theory of public relations, with its grounding in the cognizance of both publics and practitioners, best associates itself with the definition given by Crable and Vibbert (1985): "An issue is created when one or more human agents attached significance to a situation or a perceived problem" (p. 5). This definition is valuable because it separates issues management from crisis management by noting that some issues are situations whereas others may be perceived as problems. Not all issues are problems; they may be matters of importance, concern, favorability, or benefit to the organization. The Crable and Vibbert (1985) definition allows for that contingency through its inclusion of a significant situation. I relied on this definition of an issue as I researched issues management for this dissertation.

Chase, author of the seminal book Issue Management: Origins of the Future (1984), defined an issue as "an unsettled matter which is ready for decision" (p. 38). He contrasted his simple definition of an issue against

"trends" by noting that trends are more subtle and often precede issues. In a more recent discussion, Chase (1996) stated, "an issue exists when there is a gap between corporate action and stakeholder expectation," and he views issues management as the process of bridging that gap (p. 130).

In Renfro's (1993) definition of an issue, he pointed out that a broad area of concern can give rise to several issues. Heath (1997), building on his 1986 definition with Nelson (1986), defined an issue as a "contestable question of fact, value, or policy that affects how stakeholders grant or withhold support and seek changes through public policy" (p. 44). J. Grunig and Repper (1992) emphasized how issues are perceived by publics in their definition: "Publics make issues out of problems that have not been resolved" (p. 146).

Two elements should be added to the understanding of an issue to make it comprehensive: frames of reference and diversity. A person's frame of reference is a set of learned beliefs and values that frames all subsequent learning and attitude formation on an individual level (Bettinghaus & Cody, 1987). Frames of reference can vary across cultures and societies, and the frame of reference a person brings to an issue colors how that issue is

perceived.

The second factor in defining an issue is diversity;
Wilson (1990) criticized previous attempts to define
issues management as ethnocentric. Given the changing
nature of the global economy and the demands for
organizations to deal with multinational publics, it is
reasonable to expect issues management to move into the
global arena. Kruckeberg (1995-96) wrote, "Virtually
everyone is being forced into new relationships within
social systems that are becoming both increasingly diverse
and divisive" (p. 37). A definition incorporating cultural
and ethnic diversity, as well as the frames of reference
unique to various cultures, will be of paramount
importance to issues management in the future as global
issues management grows.

## Defining Issues Management

In the literature of issues management, the term is
defined in various ways, and I will discuss the best of
those definitions. Gaunt and Ollenburger (1995) wrote,
"Issues management is the organized activity of
identifying emerging trends, concerns, or issues likely to
affect an organization in the next few years and
developing a wider and more positive range of
organizational responses toward that future" (p. 201).

J. Grunig and Repper (1992) equated issues management with strategic management and argued, "Throughout the literature on issues management, writers make frequent reference to issues management as the external component of strategic management" (p. 147). Another definition that accentuated the strategic mission of issues management was offered by Murphy (1996): "Issues management attempts to discern trends in public opinion so that an organization can respond to them before they amplify into serious conflict which breaches the social fabric and eludes control" (p. 103). A similar definition of issues management emphasizing the management role was given by Wilson (1990), who wrote, "Issues management can be best understood as an action oriented management function which seeks to identify potential or emerging issues. . .then mobilizes and coordinates organizational resources to strategically influence development of those issues" (p. 41).

Lauzen and Dozier (1994) stressed the boundary-spanning and environmental-scanning roles of the issues manager in their definition: "[issues management is] the process that allows organizations to know, understand, and interact effectively with their environments" (p. 163). Clearly, Lauzen and Dozier approached issues management

from a systems theory and strategic management perspective. The rhetorical perspective views issues management as the agent of corporate discourse (Cheney & Vibbert, 1987). Arguably the most important work on issues management from a rhetorical perspective is Heath's (1997) book <u>Strategic Issues Management: Organizations and Public Policy Challenges</u>. In that work, Heath offered the following definition: "Issues management is the strategic use of issues analysis and strategic responses to help organizations make adaptations needed to achieve harmony and foster mutual interests with the communities in which they operate" (p. 3). Heath added that issues management "helps organizations grow and survive: by reconciling their interests with those of the publics in their environments who have the ability to influence public policy" (p. 3). Heath's definition is similar to L. Grunig's (1992e) discussion of possible constraints on the organization imposed by activist groups and subsequent governmental regulation.

In summary, issues management coordinates communication about issues of interest in the organization with the stakeholders and publics in its environment enabling the organization to continue its business with minimal interference. In this light, issues management is

defined in the broadest sense, parallel to the management function of public relations and incorporating many duties of the practice. Issues management is the function of strategically aligning the corporation with the environment, allowing continued survival and development of a mutually beneficial relationship with members of that environment.

## Origin of Issues Management

Issues management is a relatively new field, existing for approximately three decades. Certain functions of issues management have been carried out by public relations for a greater time, but issues management as a distinct management function of public relations is in its infancy. Ewing (1997) deemed W. Howard Chase the "father of issues management" and credited Chase with the term "issues management" used in the inaugural issue of his 1976 newsletter, Corporate Public Issues and Their Management.

Chase used the term "issues management" to describe an activity taking place in forward-thinking corporations and businesses (Hainsworth, 1990). In the social turbulence of the early 1970s, many executives were struggling to maintain control of the environment, to predict changes, and to regain stability. The function of