Ford Motor Company has continued to produce automobiles for over a century now and has had an enormous affect on the world today. Due to inappropriate behavior of large corporations today and the failure to comply with society standards, large corporations are loosing trust in there customers. The Chairman and CEO of Ford Motor Company, Bill Ford, addresses a Management Briefings Seminar with a speech titled, “Meeting the Challenges of a Global Society.” Bill Ford explains how the auto industry is not responsible for the actions of these other large corporations and shows how the automotive industry has been an example for continuous progress in the business world.

It is the goal of this paper to use neo-Aristotelian criticism to evaluate this speech. I will first begin with contextual reconstruction, talking about the rhetor, the rhetorical situation, and the audience. Secondly, I will move to the Analysis of the rhetorical artifact using the canons of arrangement, style, and invention. Lastly, I will describe the assessment of the effects that the speech withheld.

This speech is given by the CEO of the Ford Motor Company, Bill Ford. As one can tell by looking at the name, Ford is a family relative of the original Ford Motor Company. His family has created cars since the beginning of the twentieth century and it continues to be a family owned company. Not only was he born into this corporation by blood, but Bill has been established in the business for “nearly 25 years” (2). Bill can even remember in his earlier days when people wrote “songs about T-birds and
Corvettes” (2). Because Ford was a CEO of a large company, he has seen the affects of the downfall of other large companies such as Enron and WorldCom. Ford’s speech was given at the 2002 Management Briefing Seminar. We can assume that he is talking to other CEO’s at the speech because Ford states in the beginning, “Even though many of us work for different companies and in many ways, are competitors, we obviously have a lot in common and we have a lot at stake in this industry” (1). The audience is made of similar managerial positions that Ford holds in his company and most likely those of other automobile manufactures. The audience can see that Ford has the experience and capability to understand how the downfall of the economy due to Enron and WorldCom has played a significant role on the way large corporations are viewed by the public. Because the audience members play significant roles in companies affected by economic downfall, they have common traits and have similar interests to gain the trust back from the public that these other companies have lost.

After reconstructing the context, I must move onto the analysis of the rhetorical artifact. There are five cannons of rhetoric, invention, organization, style, memory, and delivery. These cannon will serve as a guide to help analyze the speech given by Ford. Because I was not present for the speech I can only address the canons of invention, organization, and style. I will begin with the cannon invention. Ford uses great logos by using the statically information that “a recent poll shows that 70 percent of Americans do not trust the word of corporations. One-third says they have hardly any confidence in big-company executives” (2). Ford has great credibility to be giving this speech due to his family history in the automotive industry thus allowing Ford to represent a worldwide crisis was crucial. Ford speech represents fear within the large companies that they are
not being trusted and that the failure of Enron and WorldCom has brought other companies such as Ford Motor Company down with them. Ford wants to prove that their company and other companies follow the rules of business. Ford’s fear is expressed when he states, “Like other industries, we’re being hurt by the backlash caused by a handful of greedy and unethical individuals and corporations” (2). Ford explains how his company has stepped up and other companies must follow their lead. This includes research and development, new technologies, and customer satisfaction must be met to a greater extent.

The second canon of Neo-Aristotelian Criticism is organization. This deals with how the rhetor organizes his speech. Ford uses a problem solution technique. He begins his speech with how the downfall of large companies has played an enormous impact on consumer trust in large corporations such as his own. The title of his speech, “Meeting the Challenges of a Global Society,” influences his audience to the need of change. Ford quickly states the problems and the lack of trust within large corporations. From here, he give his audience solutions to conquer this problem. One solution Ford states for a solution to consumer credibility is “issuing corporate citizenship reports that outline in detail the economic, social and environmental impact of everything that we do and sell” (3). Ford quickly uses his example of the development of new drive trains to meet the needs of the changing society with the use of hydrogen powered cars and hybrid Sport Utility Vehicles. He states that “Innovative technology is still the best way to improve productivity, reduce costs and improve all of our products” (4). He later states “We have to continue to reduce the social and environments impact of our businesses. The best way to resolve regulatory debate would be to eliminate the concerns that caused the
debate in the first place” (5). It is easy to see that Ford uses a problem solution technique during his speech.

The last canon of Neo-Aristotelian Criticism is style. This canon deals with the language the rhetor uses during his speech. Ford uses a critical style for the audience that he is representing. Fords viewpoint is expressed through a person that is at high power in a large corporation. He is representing his own corporation as well as several others. He uses language that could be understood by people sitting in similar roles as he does. He talks about the economy, customer needs, and profiting large businesses.

The last step in a Neo-Aristotelian Criticism is the assessment of effects. This is how effective the speech was in an immediate and long-term context. I think that his speech has made a tremendous impact on the automotive world as well as several other large companies. This can be proven, because today there is more research and development being devoted to new technologies including hydrogen powered cars, hybrids, and better fuel efficiency. Ford is using his company as an example for other companies to follow. Ford states, “I believe the growing trend toward greater corporate transparency and accountability will be the most effective regulatory tool of the 21st century… that customers will be the real regulators of our products… and that market driven solution will offer the best hope of building stronger businesses and a better world” (4). A year later after his speech, there has been no major downfalls in companies and large company’s creditability has risen impressively. His speech set an example for others to follow and has strengthened the trust barrier between consumer and corporations.
Bill Ford, a CEO of Ford Motor Company, is concerned that with the lack of trust of large companies might have an affect on their own and several others who are innocent of large scandals. He believes that Ford Motor Company and several others should set the example and become leaders into the 21st century. Ford states, “We should hold ourselves collectively to a very high standard. And, when we do, we will show the world once again, that the automobile industry is going to lead the way” (5). Through a Neo-Aristotelian Criticism I was able to break down and understand his argument using contextual reconstruction, analysis of the rhetorical artifact, and assessment of effects. I believe Bill Ford has several great ideas to help lead this nation’s economy to a higher standard in this new century.

Works Cited