

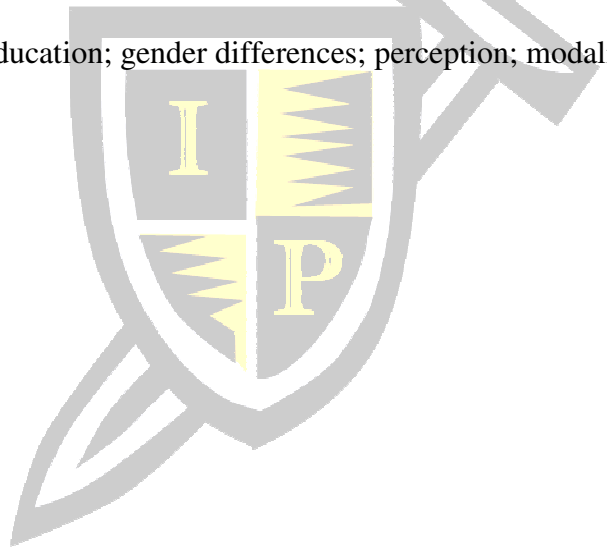
## Comparing men's and women's perception of modality of teaching business ethics

Iraj Mahdavi  
National University

### Abstract

This paper is the second report of a research project involving collecting information via e-survey about occasions in which graduates of a California private University have encountered ethical issues/dilemma after graduation and the role that they think their education and the ethics course they had taken played in recognition and resolution of such issues. An associational analysis is made between the methods employed in teaching business ethics and its effectiveness in resolution of ethical dilemma. A clear difference of perception of modality of instruction is found between the male and female respondents attending the same ethics courses. "Perceptual sets" is suggested as a possible explanation.

Key words: ethics education; gender differences; perception; modality of instruction



## Introduction

This author in several studies has shown that there was no discernible difference between men's and women's definition of success or where they learn their business ethical attitudes. Those were argued to be related more to up-bringing than to a natural tendency related to their gender. It was further assumed that since men and women attending a university attend the same classes, courses, and curricula they are in fact receiving the same education.

In a recent study, this author was able to show that graduates from universities do in fact face moral issues at work, and try to resolve them; many by falling back on the training they received taking ethics courses at the university. It was also shown that courses which were perceived to be more practical than theoretical were reported to have higher level of influence in recognition, definition, deliberation and resolution of moral issues. In this study modality of instruction was determined by measuring the respondents' perception of the modality of the ethics courses that they had taken at the college. Since the respondents had taken the same courses at the same university, within a relatively limited span of time, it was assumed that the courses were essentially the same as far as the modality of teaching is concerned. Thus the modality of instruction was considered to be an objective reality.

In this paper that very assumption is tested. In other words, this is the preliminary results of an investigation into whether there is any difference in the perception of instructional modality of the business ethics courses among the students, based on some individual traits. The first of these traits is the gender of the respondents. An attempt is made to address this question regarding association between gender of respondents and their perception of the modality of the ethics courses they attended in college. .

## Literature Review

Perhaps the oldest question regarding education is the modality of teaching and learning. This controversy in our time assumes the form of theoretical versus practical format of teaching environments. While theoretical format emphasizes the abstract treatment of the subject, using conceptual tools, and little reference to the application of such tools and concepts, the practical format shuns away from abstraction and emphasizes the practical environment and application of the knowledge and skill being taught.

Of course, with very few exceptions, these formats in their purest forms constitute the extreme poles of a continuum. Thus, educational modality fall somewhere between the two extremes, and various class formats may be differentiated from each other by the degree to which they bear a resemblance to one or the other extreme.

In recent years a few scholars have published articles and books addressing these formats, among which Crème (1999); Long (2008); Kyle (2008) and Rhodes, et.al. (2006) stand out in the width of their varied expands. These authors are good representatives of the move towards introduction of the practical reality into the abstract academic setting and course formats.

There is a great body of research that points to variance in individuals' perception of the seemingly objective events and experiences. The richest collection of such studies

is usually placed under the topic of perceptual differences and factors that influence such differences. However this writer was not able to find any writing on the topic of men and women’s perceptual differences on the practical-theoretical continuum. Probably the closest conceptual area to this topic is the concept of *perceptual set* defined as “an expectation of a particular interpretation based on past experience with the same or similar object” (Hellriegel and Slocum, 2009, p74).

**Methodology**

This study was designed and developed using a set of survey questions which are presented in Table I. All questions were close-ended, with Likert-style measurement answers. These questions were preceded by a question on the modality of ethics course taken by the respondents, and followed by four demographic questions relating to gender, age group and level of educational program completed at the university.

**Table I: THE MAIN SURVEY QUESTIONS**

<b>1. Since your graduation, how often have you encountered situations in which ethical considerations were significantly relevant to the decisional outcome?</b>				
Quite Often	Often	Few Times	Rarely	Very rarely
<b>2. How important do you think the ethics course(s) that you had taken in college was/were to your ability to recognize the ethical dimensions of these situations?</b>				
Extremely Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not important	Not Important at all
<b>3. How important do you think the ethics course(s) that you had taken in college was/were to your ability to speak up in situations in which ethical considerations were significantly relevant?</b>				
Extremely Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not important	Not Important at all
<b>4. How important do you think the ethics course(s) that you had taken in college was/were to your definition of the issues involved?</b>				
Extremely Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not important	Not Important at all
<b>5. How important do you think the ethics course(s) that you had taken in college was/were to your deliberation of the issues involved?</b>				
Extremely Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not important	Not Important at all
<b>6. How important do you think the ethics course(s) that you had taken in college was/were to your resolution of the issues involved?</b>				
Extremely Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not important	Not Important at all

An electronic survey was made, utilizing randomly selected email addresses of recent business graduates of a private American university in California. Approximately two thousand five hundred email addresses were contacted requesting participation in the survey. A total of 456 visits (18%) were made from which 251 (55%) responses were generated. Respondents consisted of alumni (graduate and undergraduate levels) from several program at the School of Business and Management. Of the total 251 respondents 141 were male and 110 were female.

**IV. Results**

It was postulated that working in the American corporations does expose the alumni of business schools to a variety of situations in which ethical issues are present

and require resolution. To verify this assumption, respondents were asked if they had in fact faced such situations, and if so, how often. Table III below summarizes their response.

**TABLE II: RESPONSE TO QUESTION 1: Since your graduation, how often have you encountered situations in which ethical considerations were significantly relevant to the decisional outcome?**

Totals	Very Rarely	R a r e l y	Few Times	O f t e n	Quite Often
251	5	31	103	72	40
100%	2%	12.4%	41%	28%	15.90%

The major research question involved comparative effectiveness of teaching modality of ethics courses at the university. Of the many possible techniques of measuring and comparing courses in terms of their modality, it was determined that probably the most suitable for the purposes of this study was to rely on the seemingly subjective evaluation of the courses by the students. Thus, respondents were asked about their impression of the modality of the ethics courses they had taken. The result is summarized in Table III below.

**TABLE III: SUMMARY OF MODALITY RESPONSE**

**Which of the following do you think best describes the ethics course(s) that you took at the university?**

Total	Gender	Purely Theoretical	Somewhat Theoretical	Theoretical and Practical	Somewhat Practical	Purely Practical
141(56%)	Male	8 (57%)	24 (75%)	92 (53%)	14 (61%)	3 (27%)
110(44%)	Female	6 (43%)	8 (25%)	80 (47%)	9 (39%)	8 (77%)
251	Totals	14	32	173	23	11
100 %		5.54%	12.75%	68.92%	9.16%	4.39%

As it can be observed, responses were distributed along a bell curve, with almost even distribution on the two sides of the middle measure: “theoretical and practical”. Questions two to six (see Table I, above) were used to measure the effectiveness of ethics courses through the perceived role of these courses in recognition, pointing out (i.e. speaking up), definition, deliberation and resolution of ethical situations in the work place.

The overall results indicated that **the practical modality of teaching ethics courses was more effective than the theoretical modality as shown in Table IV below** which summarizes the results, by combining the percentages of responses with values of “extremely important”; “important” and “somewhat important”.

**TABLE IV: SUMMARY OF CROSS TABULATION OF MODALITY OF TEACHING AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS IN THE FIVE AREAS**

(Combined percentages of responses with values of “extremely important”; “important” and “somewhat important” in each area).

<b>TOTAL251:</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Response Categories</b>	<b>Purely theoretical</b>	<b>Somewhat theoretical</b>	<b>Theoretical &amp; practical</b>	<b>Somewhat Practical</b>	<b>Purely Practical</b>
Recognize	71.40%	84.50%	93.00%	95.70%	90.90%
Speak-up	71.50%	81.30%	93.70%	91.30%	91.00%
Define	71.40%	83.90%	91.30%	91.30%	91.00%
Deliberation	50.00%	71.00%	91.90%	86.90%	91.00%
Resolution	64.20%	71.90%	90.80%	91.30%	90.90%

As it can be seen recognition is most facilitated by the “somewhat practical” modality of teaching; ability and tendency to speak up tends to be most related to the “theoretical & practical” modality; while definition, deliberation and resolution of ethical concerns are reported to be most associated with the “theoretical& practical”, “somewhat practical” and “purely practical” modes of teaching.

In order to discern any gender-based differences of perception of modality of the ethics courses the data was further refined into Table V, below. This table combines the data from the middle to one end of the modality modes (“theoretical and practical”, “somewhat practical” and “purely practical” combined) and the middle to one end effectiveness modes (“somewhat important”, “important”, and “extremely important” combined). Data thus combined is separated in terms of gender of the respondents.

**TABLE V: SUMMARY OF CROSS TABULATION OF PRACTICAL MODALITY OF TEACHING AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS IN THE FIVE AREAS, SPARATED BY GENDER**

	Recognition		Speak-up		Definition		Deliberation		Resolution	
Gender	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
A *	127	100	127	100	123	96	121	94	123	95
B **	101	91	103	89	100	87	102	86	102	85
C. ***	79.5	91	81	89	81	90	84	91	83	90

\* Total number of respondents who considered their college ethics course was somewhat to extremely important to them to recognize, speak-up, etc.

\*\*Number of respondents who perceived their ethics course to be mixed practical to purely practical.

\*\*\* Percentage of respondents who perceived their ethics course to be mixed practical to purely practical

The results show a consistent difference between the male and female students in their perception of modality of the ethics courses they had taken at the same university. A significantly higher number of males who said ethics courses were somewhat to extremely important to their handling of ethical dilemma perceived these courses to be

more theoretical than the female respondents who reported the same level of importance to these courses.

## Discussion

This study is the second of a series of studies that this author plans to undertake to determine the most effective modality of teaching business ethics at universities. At the present stage of development of this project data collected has provided evidence for the following conclusions:

1. Graduates of business schools do in fact face many ethical issues at work ;
2. Taking ethics courses at the university does in fact help business graduates to recognize, speak-out, define; deliberate and resolve such issues.
3. Practical modality of instruction in these courses is a more effective form of teaching ethics at business schools.
4. The present paper points to existence of differences of perception of modality of the teaching among students based on their gender.

The last point is a rather unexpected result of the study that requires further analysis of the data in this study, and other future studies, both on the reason(s) for such a difference and possible implications that such differences of perception may have on the ability of students to benefit equally from same modality of instruction. One area of investigation to shed light on this difference of perception seems to be perceptual set. It seems to warrant a closer look in order to find reasonable explanation for this variance. Of course, it can also be stipulated that this difference is a just an instance of data abnormality which leads to the need for further similar studies.

## Selected Bibliography

- Bennis, Warren G. and O'Tool, James, (2005), "How Business Schools Lost Their Way", Harvard Business Review Online, May 2005.
- Brunskill, Karen, (2006), Learning to be Honest, Kind and Friendly, Paul Chapman Publishing, London.
- Crème, Phyllis, (1999), "A Reflection on the Education of the 'Critical Person'", Teaching in Higher Education, Oct. 99, 4:4, p. 461-473.
- Goodpaster, Kenneth E., (2007), Conscience and Corporate Culture, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, ME.
- Hellriegel, Don and Slocum, J.W., (2009), Organizational Behavior, (12<sup>th</sup> ed.) South-Western, Mason, OH
- Kohlberg, Lawrence (1984) The psychology of moral development: the nature and validity of moral stages. San Francisco: Harper & Row
- Kyle, Gaye, (2008), "Using Anonymized Reflection to Teach Ethics: A Pilot Study", Nursing Ethics, 15, 1.
- Lapsly, Daniel K. and Power, F. Clark, (editors), (2005), Character Psychology and Character Education, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN.
- Lennick, Doug and Keil, Fred, (2005), Moral Intelligence: Enhancing Business Performance and Leadership Success, Wharton School Publishing, Upper Saddle River, NJ.

- Lisman, C. David, (1996), The Curricular Integration of Ethics, Praeger, Westport.
- Long, Trisha W., (2008), “The Full Circling Process: Learning into the ethics of history using critical visual literacy and arts-based activism”, Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 51;6.
- Mahdavi, Iraj, (2001), “American Business Education and Transfer of Culture”, Journal of American Association of Behavioral and Social Sciences, Fall 2001.
- Mahdavi, Iraj, (2002), “Effects of Business Ethics Courses on Students’ Attitude” Proceedings of Hawaii International Conference on Business.
- Mahdavi, Iraj, (2003) “Ethical Growth: Do business Ethical Attitudes mature as individuals Get Older?” Proceedings of the International Business Association Conference.
- Mahdavi, Iraj, (2004) “Effects of University Education on the Development of the Students’ Business Ethical Attitude” Proceedings of the American Association of Behavioral and Social Sciences Conference
- Mahdavi, Iraj (2007) “Effectiveness of Ethics Education: Do Ethics Courses Matter after Graduation”, International Academy of Business Disciplines Conference
- Rhodes, Martin, Ashcroft, R., Rifta, A.A., Freeman, G.K., and Jamrozik, K.,(2006),”Teaching Evidence –based Medicine to Undergraduate Medical Students: a course integrating ethics, audit, management and clinical epidemiology”, Medical Teacher, 28; 4, pp.313-317.

