

# Head and Heart Orientation: A Measure Of Marketers' Predisposition For Ethical Conduct

Dr. C. M. Kochunny, Marketing and Transportation, University of South Alabama  
Dr. Hudson P. Rogers, Marketing, University of Southwestern Louisiana  
Dr. Alphonso O. Ogbuehi, Marketing and Food Marketing, Saint Joseph's University

## Abstract

*This paper examines the penchant marketing professionals have for ethical decision making. An earlier study of marketing students is used for comparison. Akin to the results from the student study, this study demonstrates a marked bias amongst subjects for valuing qualities of the head. Heart related qualities are considered less important as instrumental values to achieve organizational objectives. The paper theorizes that proper balance between the two is a precursor to ethical decision making. Discussion of the results of this study and the earlier student study is expanded to highlight the need for instruction of ethics in marketing practice.*

## Introduction

The sharp increase in public disclosure of illegal activity by otherwise successful business professionals has made the study of business related ethics a timely issue (Zinkhan, Bisesi, and Saxton 1989; DeConinck and Good 1989). Interest in ethics is derived, in part, from societal concerns about ethics among businesses, given the widespread media coverage of such occurrences as insider trading (Werhane 1989). The supposition is that business people do not evince higher ethical attitudes or behaviors than other members of society. Although the theoretical underpinnings of this supposition remain to be established, societal attitudes seem to suggest relevance to the claim.

The operating practices of business practitioners have long been the target of criticisms. Attempts to avoid the unpleasantness which results

from unethical behavior have resulted in some firms developing training programs aimed at improving the ethical sensitivity of employees (Mokowitz 1985). Others have attempted to address the situation by establishing codes of conduct and punishing unethical behavior (*Marketing News* 1987; Hunt, Chonko, and Wilcox 1984).

Ethics is thought to be so important that the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) has called for including ethics in business curricula (AACSB 1987-88). One of the most significant trends in the last decade has been the inclusion of ethical considerations in the curricula of U.S. colleges of business. While there is no consensus on exactly how business ethics should be taught, researchers generally agree that ethics should be added to business education

(Harris and Guffey 1991; Pamental 1989). It is now widely accepted that future business professionals gain a lot by being exposed to business ethics (Gandz and Hayes 1988).

Kohlberg (1984) suggests that work environments requiring the ability to balance the welfare of multiple publics encourage the development of principled thinking. In other words, people whose occupations place them in group conflict resolution situations are required to formulate judgements based on responsible principles. Many marketing jobs seem to fit this definition. Applying Kohlberg's reasoning would permit deeming marketing as occurring in a morally complex environment and thus encouraging 'cognitive moral development' among marketing practitioners. To some extent, this contention is supported by research. Indeed, arguing that marketing managers revealed a higher ethical posture than other business managers, Lincoln, Pressley and Little (1982) attributed the ethical outlook among marketers to their 'people orientation.'

Albeit Kohlberg's hypothesis, marketing has always been open to criticisms about unethical practices (Ferrell and Weaver 1978). The marketing function of business is noted most for ethical abuse and almost every aspect of marketing has been criticized (Murphy and Lacznaik 1981; Whipple and Wolf 1991). Marketing continues to bear the brunt of the criticisms leveled at business and some critics view marketers as the epitome of unethical persons.

Researchers have diverse explanations for this unfavorable views about ethics of marketing practitioners. Some believe that the boundary-spanning role allows for unethical behavior (Miles 1980) while there are those who believe that marketing by its very nature attracts individuals who have questionable ethics at best or are unscrupulous at worst (Goolsby and Hunt 1992). Recently, researchers have questioned managers' ability to handle the ethical aspects of business decision-making as well as whether marketers are being trained to pay attention to "heart" traits such as social responsibility, ethics, honesty, and sensitivity to others. In a study by Beisel and Fugate (1981),

marketing majors ranked eleventh among twelve majors when compared on measures to assess honesty, trustworthiness, and generosity.

The purpose of this study is to assess ethical inclinations of marketing practitioners and to determine whether a head/heart trait imbalance exists among marketing practitioners employing measures developed by Maccoby (1976). This study does not purport to measure ethics using the 19-item scale. Instead, the scale is used to assess the foundations of or the inclination for ethical behavior or conduct (Kreitner and Reif 1980). In other words, the predispositions to behave (or not to behave) is the focus of this paper. Such an examination of marketing professionals is important in providing ethical training and instruction to practitioners and students alike. Comparing the results of this study to a previous study involving students (Rogers, Kochunny, and Ogbuehi 1993) provides some basis for discussion of ethics in business education.

### **Literature Review**

Investigating ethical standards of business students in terms of personal business ethics, Arlow and Ulrich (1983) found that before taking a business and society course, accounting students had personal business ethics scores that were significantly higher than those for management and marketing students. The "after" scores, however, were not significantly different. Similarly, Fulmer and Cargile (1987) found little difference between accounting students and the aggregate of other business students.

In a study of the ethical behavior of marketing managers, Chonko and Hunt (1985) found that lower-level managers reported experiencing more ethical problems than their upper-level counterparts. Female managers perceived that they face more ethical problems than male managers. The authors suggested that female managers utilize different ethical frameworks than males. Beltramini, Peterson and Kozmetsky (1984) investigated attitudes towards ethics using a broad sample of college students. Their results indicated that the ethical concerns of students were similar across

academic disciplines. However, they found female students to be more concerned about ethical dilemmas than were male. Grant and Broom (1988) noted that there was likely to be some relationship between demographic characteristics and student ethical attitudes. They indicate that the type of business ethics instruction and exposure provided may have to be tailored to suit students' demographic characteristics and the background of the institution attended.

In an investigation of the ethical standards of marketing students, Crittenden, Crittenden, and Hawes (1986) found few differences in the ethical inclinations of males and females. However, students with greater exposure to the business curricula had markedly greater tolerance for unethical behavior. One reason for this finding is that business students may be trained to emphasize head traits over heart traits (Patten 1990). More recently, Kelley, Ferrell, and Skinner (1990) found that female marketing researchers tend to rate their behavior as being more ethical than did their male counterparts. They reported a number of significant relationships between demographic variables and perceptions of ethical behavior. To date, however, demographic characteristics such as gender, academic maturity, and work experience have yielded mixed results in describing differences among ethical judgements (Akaah 1989; Martin 1982).

Few studies have used Maccoby's head/heart traits to understand the ethical inclinations of business people. For the most part, those using Maccoby's head/heart traits have ignored marketers and focused instead on accounting students and practitioners, on business students in general, or managers. Maccoby's (1976) study investigated the ethical inclinations of 250 high level executives employed by large corporations. He identified nineteen character traits, consisting of nine "qualities of the head" (associated with thinking), and ten "qualities of the heart" (associated with feeling). Behavioral inclinations, along these traits, may be identified by determining if the respondent was being reinforced or rewarded for behaving in the manner specified. Maccoby's (1976) study indicated that head qualities are considered

more important and tend to be rewarded more often. Heart qualities were deemed less important and hence much less likely to be reinforced.

The perspective used here and in previous studies beginning with Maccoby (1976) is similar to the one utilized by Rokeach (1973). Rokeach identified two kinds of values: beliefs concerning desirable modes of conduct and desirable end states of existence. These were labeled instrumental and terminal values respectively. The instrumental values relate to the 'means of life' while terminal values relate to the ends. Both Rokeach (1973) and Maccoby (1976) noted that people may consider a number of approaches (means) to accomplish a given objective (end). It follows that knowledge of a person's value modes of conduct helps predict how that person will behave. Based on his observations, Maccoby developed a 19-item scale to assess instrumental values.

### **Methodology**

The data were obtained via a self-administered questionnaire mailed to a systematic sample of 342 marketing managers obtained from American Marketing Association directory. Overseas addresses were excluded from the sampling frame to limit the study to domestic marketing professionals. A total of 198 usable questionnaires were returned resulting in a 58.4 percent response rate. The response rate compares favorably with that of previous studies involving the use of American Marketing Association directories as sampling frame (cf. Hunt, Chonko, and Wilcox 1984; Akaah 1989). A comparison of the early respondents (first half returns) versus the later respondents (second half respondents) yielded no statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ), indicating the absence of non-response bias as a major problem (Gatignon and Robertson 1989).

The questionnaire contained 19-items, ten of which were head traits and the rest were heart traits. Respondents rated the importance of each trait to their career performance via a three-point Likert scale with varying degrees of importance (1 = very important, 2 = somewhat important, and 3 = not important). They were also asked to indicate

Table 1  
Profile of the Sample (n=198)

Characteristics	Percentage
<b>Company characteristics</b>	
<i>Industry Category</i>	
1. Consumer/Industrial Products	22.0
2. Services	30.0
3. General	28.0
4. Other	20.0
<i>Size of Firm (Number of Employees)</i>	
1. Less than 5	58.0
2. 5 - 10	17.0
3. 11 or more	25.0
<i>Years of operation</i>	
1. Less than 5	42.0
2. 6 - 10	24.0
3. 11 - 15	10.0
4. 16 or more years	13.0
<i>Job Title</i>	
1. CEO/President/Owner/Partner/Principal	67.0
2. Senior Vice-President/Vice-President	12.0
3. Director	9.0
4. Analyst	7.0
5. Manager/Project Director	4.0
6. Account Executive/Sales Representative	1.0
<i>Existence of Corporate Code of Ethics</i>	
1. Yes	58.0
2. No	39.0
3. Don't Know	3.0
<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>	
<i>Age</i>	
1. 20 - 29	4.0
2. 30 - 39	6.0
3. 40 - 49	43.0
4. 50 or older	27.0
<i>Marital Status</i>	
1. Single	13.0
2. Married	77.0
3. Separated/Divorced	8.0
4. Widowed	2.0
<i>Highest Educational Level</i>	
1. Some College	3.0
2. Bachelor's Degree	11.0
3. Some post-Bachelor's Work	15.0
4. Master's Degree	34.0
5. Some post-Master's Work	13.0
6. Doctorate Degree	24.0

The questionnaire contained 19-items, ten of which were head traits and the rest were heart traits. Respondents rated the importance of each trait to their career performance via a three-point Likert scale with varying degrees of importance (1 = very important, 2 = somewhat important, and 3 = not important). They were also asked to indicate the traits that were being reinforced most in their companies. Finally, respondents provided information about themselves and their companies. Information about the company included number of employees, job titles, industry specialization, number of years in existence, and whether or not the company had a code of ethics. Respondents also furnished demographic information related to gender, age, marital status, education and the number of years in the present position. As Table 1 suggests, the sample of respondents spans a wide variety of demographic and company backgrounds. The profile is not deemed representative of the population and thus the generalizability of the results is limited.

## Results

For meaningful comparisons, respondents' job titles were classified into two sub-categories, namely, upper and middle management. Item by item variance analysis revealed no significant differences in percentages of respondents rating traits as "very important" between the two groups. Both groups, however, ranked head traits higher than heart traits. Those that have been in their current positions for relatively short time (less than 3 years), a little longer (4 to 9 years), and for a significant length of time (more than 9 years) were compared and the differences were significant for the traits, "ability to take initiative" and "friendliness." In both cases, a lower percentage of respondents in the 4 to 9 years sub-category considered these traits "very

important."

In a comparison between the sub-groups (less than 5 years, 6 to 20 years, and greater than 20 years) based on the number of permanent/full time employees, only "self-confidence" trait produced significant difference. Another factor, number of years respondents company has been in business, was split into three subcategories, namely, 1 to 3 years, 4 to 9 years, and greater than 9 years. Variance analysis revealed significant differences for three traits, i.e., "ability to take initiative," "open mindedness," (head traits) and "openness/spontaneity" (heart trait). In this case, "open mindedness" and "openness/spontaneity" were rated "very important" by a lower percentage of respondents in younger companies (1 to 3 years in business), while a smaller percentage of respondents in the 4 to 9 years in business category rated "ability to take initiative" as being "very important."

Respondents were also classified as being employed in one of three industry types: market research organizations, consumer product marketers, and service providers. Although research companies can be classified as service providers,

their high representation in the sample warranted a separate category. Two heart traits (honesty and critical/questioning attitude) and a head trait (cooperativeness) were the three items of significant difference between the sub-groups. However, the results indicate that lower percentages of respondents from consumer products sub-group considered the traits, very important."

Finally, when marketing practitioners from companies that have an established code of ethics were compared to those whose companies do not have a code of ethics, only "honesty" perceptions differed. The rankings revealed that ninety-five percent of respondents from companies with a code of ethics perceived "honesty" the most important trait. Interestingly, those from companies that do not have codes of ethics ranked "self-confidence" at the top (96 percent) and "honesty" was ranked sixth (85 percent).

In order to confirm the similarity in ranking for each trait amongst various sub-groups, Kendall's coefficient of concordance (W) statistic was calculated. Kendall's coefficient of concordance takes on values between 0 and + 1. A high value of W means that respondents in the sub-

**Table 2**  
Analyses of Ranking of Traits Among Factor Sub-Groups

Factor/Sub-group	Kendall's (W)	Chi-square	p value
Job Title: Upper vs. middle management	.9921	37.699	.006*
Years in Present Position: Less than 3 yrs vs. 4-9 yrs vs. over 9 yrs	.9792	55.812	.000**
Number of Full Time/Permanent Employees: Up to 5 vs. 6-20 vs. over 20	.9765	55.659	.000**
Companies' Number of Years in Business: 1-3 yrs vs. 4-9 yrs vs. over 9 yrs.	.9711	55.354	.000**
Industry Category: Research vs. Consumer Products vs. Services	.9710	55.345	.000**
Code of Ethics: Yes vs. No	.9832	37.363	.007*

\* = significant at .01 level

\*\*= significant at .001 level

groups within a variable are applying essentially the same standard in ranking the traits. Table 2 reveals the values of W in each instance along with the p-value of Chi-square. Results shown in the table indicate W values close to + 1. The test of significance of W using Chi-square statistic, the probability associated with the occurrence of H<sub>0</sub> of any value as large as the observed W. The Chi-square values shown in the table along with the p-values leads one to reject the H<sub>0</sub> that ranking are unrelated.

Responses to the question of reinforcement of traits revealed a bias against heart traits. In general, a greater number of respondents indicated that heart traits were not being reinforced by their organizations while some of the head traits were actively being reinforced. Cross tabulating reinforcement statistics with whether or not the companies had codes of ethics uncovered a detailed picture (Table 3). A majority of respondents from organizations with codes of ethics felt that five head traits (satisfaction with creating something new, ability to take initiative, flexibility, self-confidence, and pride in performance) were reinforced. Those that were not reinforced were cooperativeness, open-mindedness, coolness under stress, and pleasure in learning something new. At the same time for each of the heart traits listed in the questionnaire, a majority of respondents indicated lack of reinforcement. The story is not very different in companies without codes of ethics. Here again, a greater majority felt that six head traits were being reinforced whereas there were nine heart traits for which a majority indicated lack

of reinforcement. Interestingly a majority indicated that "independence," a heart trait, was being reinforced while head traits like "pleasure in learning something new," "coolness under stress," and "open-mindedness" were not being reinforced.

**Discussion**

Results of this study show that marketing professionals exhibit a head/heart trait imbalance. In this respect marketing professionals' perceptions of the relative importance of head/heart traits are consistent with those of general business managers and accountants reported in earlier studies. Respondents, in general, rated head traits as being most important compared to heart traits. Similar results were evident among the various sub-groups of marketers. In most cases, head traits such as, "self-confidence," "ability to take initiative," "flexibility," and "pride in performance" were in the top five ranking for every sub-group. The highest rated heart trait, "honesty," was the only trait of its kind that consistently placed in the top five ranking. A point of interest here is that in earlier studies with other professionals, "honesty" did not occupy this high a ranking. In other words, marketers ranked "honesty" much higher than accountants and general business managers in previous studies. These findings may help dispel unfavorable notions about marketers' honesty. Furthermore, marketers from companies with codes of ethics ranked honesty higher than those from companies without codes of ethics. This might be an indication of the effectiveness of formal codes of ethics in companies. Yet without further inquiry,

one cannot assert a correlation between the two.

Among the companies surveyed, fifty-seven percent had formal codes of ethics and respondents from these companies generally ranked "honesty" (heart trait) higher. Notwithstanding this finding, further analyses reveal that when reinforcement

**Table 3**  
Reinforcement of Traits vs. Code of Ethics

	Reinforcement - Yes*	Reinforcement - No*
Code of Ethics - Yes	Head Traits - 5 Heart Traits - 0	Head Traits - 4 Heart Traits - 10
Code of Ethics - No	Head Traits - 6 Heart Traits - 1	Head Traits - 3 Heart Traits - 9

\*These columns specify the number of traits that a majority of respondents indicated as being either reinforced or not reinforced.

is taken into account, heart traits in general were not perceived as being reinforced by the sample of companies, while a few head traits were. Surprisingly, companies without formal codes of ethics reinforced one more heart and head trait than companies with codes of ethics. Although generalizations cannot be made based on one study, one might conclude that the existence of codes of ethics may result in lax reinforcement because of the assumption of voluntary compliance. In any case, additional data is required to test this hypothesis.

Overall, a significant percentage (43%) of the companies surveyed did not have codes of ethics and those that had did not seem to reinforce heart traits. Reinforcement also seems to be lacking in business education at most universities. Business ethics is neither listed as a separate course nor do a majority of business courses attempt to provide an ethical perspective. It is likely that greater emphasis and reinforcement of ethics in business practice could improve chances that the focus will trickle down to business schools. Of course, business schools can take a leadership role and initiate indulgence in business ethics instruction and practice. In this respect, business-university interaction along the lines of Arthur Anderson's "Faculty Development Program in Business Ethics" can go a long way in enhancing ethical training and improving ethical inclinations.

### **Ethics in Business Curriculum**

The apparent imbalance between head and heart traits among marketing practitioners cannot be attributed solely to lack of formal codes of ethics or reinforcement of traits. Since 97 percent of respondents had university degrees, education, or more specifically business education, might have played a significant role. As indicated by MacCoby (1976), organizations (including colleges of business) tend to reinforce attitudes which encourage the development of head rather than heart traits. Head traits tend to focus on the intellectual qualities required for decision making. Human or emotional qualities that go with decision making is often overlooked. Traditionally, heart traits were viewed as unnecessary in the business world and were therefore de-emphasized in business schools.

If character is shaped first in the family, second in the school and then in the wider society, business schools can be expected to continue playing a vital role in shaping the ethical inclinations of marketers. In this respect, marketers ought to reflect a balance between ethical concerns and the economic needs of society.

Marketing practitioners face ethical questions and concerns in their relations with customers, employees, and members of the larger society. At times ethically correct courses of action are clear and marketers act accordingly. Situations do occur when there is uncertainty about ethical obligations when ethical courses of action conflict with demands of marketing activities or business in general. For instance, a sales representative who has successfully persuaded the potential client about buying his/her company's products might be faced with a ethical dilemma with respect to whether or not to inform the client about the impending production/supply delays at the factory.

Businesses might consider building ethics modules into their training seminars so that professionals may be provided with the managerial and ethical understanding and skills needed to foster change in thinking and attitude. Training sessions should also include discussions among practitioners of cases studies that expose them to ethical concerns in various marketing oriented situations. Similar to the practice of sending employees to seminars and training sessions offered by Tony Robbins, Steve Covey and so on, companies can contract the services of ethicists and moralists to empower their employees. In many cases taking a moral point of view in business is easier said than done. It is not that marketing is an immoral activity but more of an amoral activity. In other words, marketing and business in general is conducted by a set of rules of their own and moral considerations are to some extent not relevant (DeGeorge 1990).

If businesses employ ethically stunted marketers then we can expect a backlash from consumers and the society in general. In an attempt to resolve the imbalance, businesses should seek to stimulate and reinforce not only head traits but also heart traits such as idealism, compassion, and

generosity in their employees. In other words, both head and heart traits should be emphasized. It simply calls for increased attention to and recognition of heart and head traits in the design of decision making processes and training exercises used in imparting ethical orientation. At the basic level the two sets of traits are complementary rather than conflicting. However, corporate trainers must be sure to shape realistic expectations along with qualities of the heart. By affirming that balance is a desired outcome, the program ensures that professionals become more ethically inclined and, at the same time, they will not be disappointed when they try to implement the lessons learned in their day-to-day jobs. Like cognitive developmental programs these training programs must enlighten professionals on reasoning when faced with dilemmas by exposing them to merits of reasoning patterns and also helping advance their reasoning skills.

### Implications for Future Research

Similarity in ranking from the present study reveals that marketing professionals, regardless of their sub-group memberships, essentially had similar perceptions of the relative level of importance accorded to the various traits. In this regard, perceptions of consumer products marketers, market research professionals, and service marketers appear comparable. What might be interesting for further study would be the inclusion of sales and advertising professionals. These groups tend to be held in disfavor by society for their alleged ethical infractions. Uncovering such information might also help to dispel some of the myths and misperceptions of ethical behavior among marketing practitioners. □

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