

## Moral Judgment Competence Between Public and Private Workers. A Comparative Study in Mexico

ROBLES- Victor†\*

*Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Canal de Miramontes 3855, Ex Hacienda San Juan de Dios, Tlalpan, 14387 Ciudad de México, Distrito Federal, México.*

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This paper presents the findings of moral judgment competence from a comparative investigation between 112 public and 114 private workers in Mexico. The moral judgment competence was assessed by quantifying the C index, using the Moral Judgment Test (MJT) in both sets. The results showed no significant differences between both groups of participants, showing that the ability to deliberate and take moral decisions is equal in both work settings.

### Moral judgment, public workers, private employees, comparative study

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† Researcher contributing first author.

**Introduction**

The number of studies on organizational values on the public and private sectors has grown rapidly in recent decades, with greater attention on the differences and similarities between the ethics of government and business (Van Der Wal & De Graaf, 2006). In their context, public and private managers daily taking decisions about ethical dilemmas in their jobs. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to examine the difference in the level of moral judgment between public and private employees. What are the levels of moral judgment between the both kinds of workers?

Initially, the hypothesis of this research, there are differences of the level of moral judgment between public and private employees, was developed through the context of the ethical dilemmas of both workers, secondarily, by the perception of their actions, their taking ethical decision and mainly by the theoretical framework of moral reasoning.

This research made a comparison between two independent samples, taken in an instant and at the same time, 112 employees of the public and 114 of the private sectors. The Judgment Moral Test was applied in a single instant in both groups, obtaining the evaluation of the moral judgment by quantifying the C index. The proof of the main hypothesis was done using the Student's *t*-test for independent samples. The results rejected the hypothesis, the existence of the differences of the moral judgment between public and private employees. This document shows the results and specific derivations of this comparative study.

**Theoretical framework**

Public and private organizations have important differences in the actions and policies: measuring of the results, effectiveness and political development. About these organizations exist exaggerated prejudices, where the government and businesses observe each other in negative terms. These two kinds of workers are perceived as undesirable, both profit maximization and bureaucracy. In this debate, the traditional characteristics of public organizations (neutrality, predictability, loyalty, reliability) and private organizations (profit, courage, innovation, efficiency) are not interpreted positively, on the contrary perceived in terms of load and of side effects. Public organizations and their employees are presented as dysfunctional, ineffective, alienated, with a lack of training and subject to ineffective rules, known as bureaucracy. The ethics of bureaucracy is characterized by inefficiency and incompetence, and the bureaucracy is sometimes treated as a corruption. In turn, companies and their employees and managers are often described as avaricious people who only think about making money and ruthlessly pursue their own interests and those of its shareholders, who apparently do not care about the effects of their activities on the environment, public welfare, or even the lives of ordinary people (Van Der Wal & De Graaf, 2006).

The differences in the actions, decisions and behaviors of public or of private employees, indicate inequalities in their moral reasoning.

The literature on studies in ethics and decision taking is wide, O'Fallon and Butterfield (2005), in their review from 1996 to 2003 on the ethical decision-making point, found that the years of employment slightly influence in the ethical decision. Also, some research shows that having a managerial position is negatively related to ethical decision making and that the work experience is positively related to ethical decision making. Also, on the other hand, there are not significant differences between students from neither various university nor other areas that non-business students are more ethical than business students (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2005). Having established that, the ethics of a person reflects the sum total of his individual experiences and his beliefs. So, the process of making good ethical decisions is complex and influenced by the individual, organization, location and external factors, as well as interpersonal and organizational influences. A person tends to have certain theories about the world, about other people or themselves, which affect their ethical decision -making (Jepson, Hine, Noblet, & Cooksey, 2009).

Decision making involves moral reasoning in many complicated situations, moral dilemmas, about which must deliberate the bureaucrats. Forcing themselves to decide whether their loyalty is to their boss, organization, law or conscience. They must decide whether they usually condemn tactics such as lying, are praiseworthy in certain situations. They must decide whether the involvement of elected officials is democracy at work or a threat to the legal rules and procedures. They must also decide whether a personal moral code trumps the collective wisdom of the bureaucracy or the community (Gormley Jr., 2001).

Meanwhile, in the field of private company employees are designed models of dishonesty, by respecting the property, compliance with rules and truthfulness (Scott & John, 2003). Also, organizational ethical dilemmas can focus on the treatment of employees in marketing, accounting, finance, natural environment, emerging technologies and international business, and many organizations have a formal management programs ethics and codes of ethics to guide decision -making. However, those responsible for such programs and committees are not perceived as effective in institutionalizing ethics as channels of culture, leadership and communication (Jepsen, Hine, Noblet, & Cooksey, 2009).

According to the theory of Kohlberg's moral reasoning, people, knowing what is right, this motivates them to act accordingly (Krebs & Denton, 2005). The ability to make decisions and people's moral judgments is conceptualized as moral judgment competence. Same as it is based on internal principles and individuals act according to such judgments (Kohlberg, 1964). In this research the moral judgment competence is measured by the index C with a range of 1-100, indicating the percentage of the variation of the total response of an individual, which reflects the quality of their moral reasoning about the described behavior. The index C meets the criteria of evaluating skills and is independent of the person's moral attitudes, such as: a moral task is not falsifiable, has a gradual learning curve and smoothed curve of forgetting (Lind, 1999). For this reason, the index C is known as a pure index of moral competence (Lind, 2004; 1999).

The moral judgment of people transits through six different normativities of reciprocity and justice (Kohlberg, 1958). The pre-conventional level, with stages 1 and 2, the conventional level, with 3 and 4, and post-conventional level, with 5 and 6. Morally, refers conventional adherence to social norms, means conformity and maintaining them. Furthermore, the prefix pre and post, to the conventional term, referring to the way in which social norms reason, assessing only the consequences of its execution or by deliberation and execution of them, respectively (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977).

Thus, workers, in stage one of moral judgment, perform an exclusive appraisal award or punishment, avoiding looking for one or the other. In stage two, an employee will only accept the exchange of interest only with a predominant authority of your organization. In the three he recognizes the group's interest and seeks its acceptation. The four represents the organizational and social conventionalism, where the worker shows to agree with the social system and freely accepted rules. The five stage represents a social contract morality, law and social welfare in the long term, such as dignity, is what recognizes the employee at this stage. The sixth, the worker accepts a morality of universal principles that transcend any organizational or social contract law (Kohlberg, 1958, Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977).

The development of these six stages has shown a transcultural universality because its convergence is verified using several methods related to decisions between different cultural groups (Gibbs, Basinger, Grime, & Snarey, 2007).

Moral judgment is based on the role - taking opportunities and socio-moral perspective (Schillinger, 2006). Collectively, states that the affective and the cognitive structures are inseparable but distinct, where the affective depends of energy and the cognitive is determined by the structure (Piaget, 1974, Kohlberg, 1958; Lind, 2004). In this cognitive-affective parallelism, there is a correlation between the index C and moral stages: negative or very low for stage one -two moderate for three and four and high positive for the last two, five and six (Lind, 2004).

Then, the question is: the moral judgment of people in the role of public employee has a different behavior than private?

Considering the index C as a quantification of such competence, is there any difference between the respective indices C? So, the main hypothesis of this study was to assess, whether the moral judgment competence in two groups of participants, employees of a public and private company workers were different. It also asks about moral stages of the participants, which established a sub-hypotheses or secondary hypothesis, if the moral judgment competence as assessed by the index C is different between public and private workers, then the six moral stages of both groups of participants will be different, because the stages are directly related to the index C.

## Method

This research was cross-sectional and compared two independent samples. The quantification of the level of moral judgment competence between public and private employees was completed using the index C.

This is as dependent variable of the kind of employees as independent variable: The six moral stages, in addition to age, education, years of education, level of academic achievement and labor antiquity. In this research, demonstration of the main hypothesis and secondary hypotheses was performed using the t-test for equality of means for independent samples, also considering the Levene test for equality of variances.

### Participants

Participants were 112 employees of public sector and 114 private sector employees. Also, it was a non-probability sample, since the choice of respondents was not random, as the participants were appointed by the head of human resources of each organization. Table 1 shows the characteristics of workers in the public and private sectors, with the first group of the following: An average age of 43 years, with a little work experience over 17 years with a recorded schooling of the 11 years on average and school performance averaged 8.19 out of 10. On the other hand, the 114 private sector workers had an average age of 32 years, with a work experience of 7.5 years, with a school of just over 10 years, with an average of 8.45 school performance.

**Table 1**

Participants

Group statistics					
	Employee	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error of the mean
Age	Public	111	43.23	8.153	.774
	Private	114	32.13	10.169	.952
Labor antiquity	Pública	108	17.1944	9.24336	.88944
	Privada	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	.
Experience in months	Pública	109	22.85	8.481	.812
	Privada	111	7.48	7.674	.728
Years of education	Pública	108	11.4954	3.67900	.35401
	Privada	111	10.6712	3.89025	.36925
Academic achievement	Pública	96	8.1948	.58154	.05935
	Privada	43	8.4488	.61967	.09450

*Note:* The average of labor antiquity in the private organization could not be calculated, this variable was not answered by these participants. As such, we observed differences in the age of 11.1 years, in the labor antiquity of 15.37 months, 0.82 in the school years, and 0.25 in average achievement. But the difference is not significant in years of education nor academic achievement.

On the other hand, Table 2 shows the t-test for equality of means between groups of public and private workers, accepting only matching stockings school years studied, as it was obtained a p-value of 0.109, more than 0.05, assuming equal variances with the corresponding p-value of 0.304.

**Table 2**

Independent Samples. Test for public and private workers

		Levene test for equality of variances		T test for equality of means						
		F	Sig.	t	Fd	Sig. (bilateral)	Difference of means	Std. error of the difference	95% Confidential interval for the difference	
									Inferior	Superior
Age	Equal variances assumed	8.618	.004	9.021	223	.000	11.103	1.231	8.677	13.528
	Equal variances not assumed			9.047	215.132	.000	11.103	1.227	8.684	13.521
Experience in months	Equal variances assumed	1.591	.208	14.096	218	.000	15.365	1.090	13.216	17.513
	Equal variances not assumed			14.083	215.015	.000	15.365	1.091	13.214	17.515
Years of education	Equal variances assumed	1.062	.304	1.610	217	.109	.82420	.51193	-.18479	1.83319
	Equal variances not assumed			1.611	216.827	.109	.82420	.51153	-.18402	1.83242
Academic achievement	Equal variances assumed	1.513	.221	2.333	137	.021	-.25405	.10890	-.46940	-.03869
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.277	76.416	.026	-.25405	.11159	-.47628	-.03181

*Note.* In both groups, the public and private workers, equal variances not assumed, because the p value is greater than 0.05, in: Experience in months (p value = 0.208), the years of education (p value = 0.304) and academic achievement (p value = 0.221). Equal variances assumed only in age (p value = 0.004). In addition, only accepted matching stockings school years studied, since it was obtained a p value (0.109) greater than 0.05, by t-test for equality of means assuming equal variances with the corresponding p-value (0.304).

## Materials and procedure

The instrument applied was the Moral Judgment Test MJT, theoretically and empirically validated by Lind (2008), which quantifies the moral judgment competence through the index C, which is quantified by a partition of the sum of squares similar to a MANOVA (Lind, 1999). MJT items form a multivariate experiment with design 6 by 2 by 2 orthogonal dependent. This questionnaire is constituted by two stories by way of moral dilemmas, rank according to the resolution of the dilemma, by six arguments in favor and six against the decision made by the protagonist of each dilemma. Where, each argument is one of the six moral Kohlbergian stages, each one questioning the level of acceptance about the arguments, pro and against, on a scale from -4 to +4 (Lind, 2008).

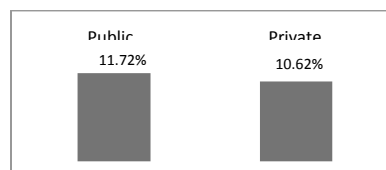
## Results and discussion

Graph 1 shows the comparison of mean C index among participants, public sector workers and private. Showing a higher moral judgment competence in public sector workers, as these reported a value of 11.72 points out of a hundred, higher than the private sector, as these were worth 10.62 points, giving a difference of 1.1 in favor of the first.

Confirming, first, that there are more than a resemblance to a difference between the ethics of government and business (Van Der Wal & De Graaf, 2006), particularly as it relates to moral judgment between the two types of workers. Additionally, contrary to other studies, they find a very low moral judgment of bureaucrats in relation to employees of private enterprise and that such differences are significant (Robles, 2012).

## Graphic 1

Comparison of the average C index between public and private workers. 112 public and 114 private employees, showing a slight difference of only 1.1 on 100 by the first ones



*Demonstration of the hypothesis.* Table 3 shows the rejection of the fundamental hypothesis of this investigation, the existence of differences of moral judgment as assessed by the index C, between public and private workers. From the independent samples t test, the difference of only 1.1 for public workers was not significant and the null hypothesis was accepted, demonstrating that the means of the public and private workers C index are equal. Thus, it is concluded that the ability to deliberate and make moral decisions of public sector workers is equal to private.

With the rejection of the fundamental hypothesis is confirmed assertions Van Der Wal and De Graaf (2006), which are prejudices exaggerated on bureaucracy and private business employees.

Well either perception or dysfunctionality daily practice, rules ineffective against the operability and effectiveness, moral reasoning is the same between the two types of workers.

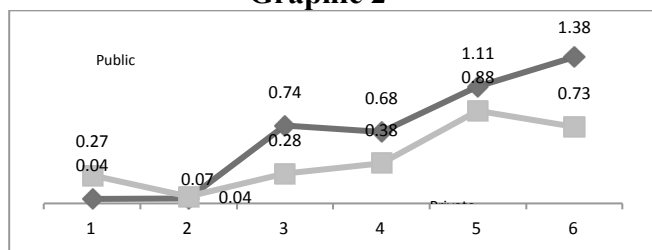
**Table 3**

Test for equality of means of the index C between participants from the public and private sectors

C index	Levene test for equality of variances	T test for equality of means								
		F	Sig.	t	Fd	Sig. (bilateral)	Diferencia de means	Std. error of the difference	95% Intervalo de confianza para la diferencia Inferior Superior	
C index	Equal variances assumed	1.011	.316	.867	.224	.387	.011054	.012751	-.014073	.036181
	Equal variances not assumed			.866	.222391	.387	.011054	.012759	-.014089	.036197

Note. In the Levene test, SPSS reports a P value of 0.316 > 0.05, accepting the null hypothesis, then assume equal variances between the two groups of participants. Thus, the test T reports a P value of 0.387 > 0.05, therefore the null hypothesis is accepted and established that the means of the index C of both groups of participants, public and private workers are equal.

**Graphic 2**



Graphic comparative six moral stages between the public and private sectors. Public sector participants obtained a value in stage three ( 0.74 ), four ( 0.68 ), five ( 1.11 ) and six ( 1.38 ) greater than those for the private sector ( 0.28, 0.38, 0.88 and 0.73), only in the one ( 0.04 ) was lower than the private ( 0.27 ) and the public in the two ( 0.07 ) was almost equal to the private ( .04 )

The resulting stages mean that public workers are morally more conventional , show greater adherence to social norms (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977 ) that the private company .

Similarly, bureaucrats have more postconventional reasoning, deliberating on social standards and analyze their execution (Kohlberg, 1958, Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977) more strongly than private workers.

*Demonstration of sub-hypotheses.* The secondary hypothesis of this research was that there is a difference of six moral stages between public and private workers. Table 4, through T Test for equality of means and respective p values indicates an acceptance of equal variances to the five moral stage between the two groups of participants, only six rejects Stadium equal variances. Thus, it is accepted that the averages agree stages one, two and five; contrary, reject that the means match in stadiums three, four and six. From here, we demonstrate partially sub-hypothesis, establishing that the moral stages differences between public and private workers are moderate. This means that participants have a fairly similar reasoning regarding the various normativities of reciprocity and justice.

**Table 3**

T test for equality of means of the six stages between participants from the public and private sectors

Stage	Levene test for equality of variances	T test for equality of means								
		F	Sig.	T	Fd	Sig. (bilateral)	Diferencia de means	Std. Error of the difference	95% Confidential interval for the difference Inferior Superior	
Stage 1	Equal variances assumed	.305	.581	-1.303	.224	.194	-.22513	.17282	-.56569	.11542
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.303	.223.664	.194	-.22513	.17273	-.56552	.11525
Stage 2	Equal variances assumed	.036	.850	-.136	.224	.892	-.02115	.15567	-.32791	.28561
	Equal variances not assumed			-.136	.223.203	.892	-.02115	.15572	-.32803	.28573
Stage 3	Equal variances assumed	.002	.964	3.011	.224	.003	.45814	.15218	.15825	.75802
	Equal variances not assumed			3.012	.223.421	.003	.45814	.15209	.15843	.75784
Stage 4	Equal variances assumed	.201	.654	2.043	.224	.042	.30138	.14754	.01064	.59211
	Equal variances not assumed			2.044	.223.018	.042	.30138	.14743	.01085	.59190
Stage 5	Equal variances assumed	1.765	.185	1.419	.224	.157	.23214	.16364	-.09033	.55461
	Equal variances not assumed			1.420	.222.486	.157	.23214	.16349	-.09005	.55434
Stage 6	Equal variances assumed	6.301	.013	3.757	.224	.000	.65805	.17515	.31289	1.00321
	Equal variances not assumed			3.765	.212.377	.000	.65805	.17476	.31356	1.00254

Note. The t test and the Levene test show that in both groups, public and private workers, equal variances are accepted in stage one to stage five because their p-values ( 0.581 , 0.850 , 0.964 , 0.654 , 0.185 ) are greater than 0.05, only the p-value ( 0.013 ) of stage six is inferior than 0.05 and equal variances is rejected . Thus, accepting that the means coincide stages one, two and five, because their values p ( 0.194, 0.892, 0.157 ) are

higher than 0.05. Conversely, we reject that the means match in stadiums three, four and six, as their p values (0.003, 0.042, 0.000) are less than 0.05.

### **Conclusions**

The conclusion of this investigation, on the equality of means of moral judgment between public and private workers, shows that the ability to take decisions and make judgments about what is good or bad is the same in both roles. Showing empirical evidence, supporting the view that the public and private sectors share basic values and norms, therefore moral behavior is very similar (Van Der Wal & De Graaf, 2006).

Regardless of public or private context, efforts should be an ethical and moral or ethical education (Mobleix, 2004) in order to develop and improve the ability to perform moral evaluations in the organizational context is critical for such capacity, both for the individual's moral behavior that influences its own to identify and be receptive of good or bad behavior of others (Leavitt and others, 2010).

Although there are some discrepancies to observe the different social justice normativities for both types of workers, such differences are minor. This finding contradicts results of other research, which shows that the moral judgment of private workers is significantly higher than the public (Robles, 2012).

It follows that the results of moral judgment are observed peculiarities are not generalities, and that this judgment is not static in any environment, but depends on its distinctive details (Van Vught, Hendriks, Stams, & Van Exter, 2011), which wonders about employment flexibility of the different stages of moral judgment in unequal contexts (Krebs & Denton, 2005).

On the other hand, it is possible that some populations due to cognitive distortions obstruct proper assessment and in some cases the moral judgment competence is under-or over assessed, furthermore such competition is independent of public or private role, of age, intelligence and type of education (Van Vught, Hendriks, Stams, & Van Exter, 2011). This investigation showed that the differences in age, educational achievement, and work experience, between public and private workers, did not involve a difference of moral judgment in the two types of workers.



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