

Amsterdam Business Research Institute

**Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Business Ethics**  
Course Manual

Academic year 2024- 2025



<b>Course title</b>	Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Business Ethics
<b>Coordinator(s)</b>	Dr. Marc van de Wardt
<b>Study period</b>	April 2025 – May 2025 (Period 5)
<b>ECTS</b>	5 ECTS
<b>Tuition</b>	€1250 20% discount on early bird registration: €1000

**Course objectives:**

Upon completion of the course, students will have:

- A general understanding of the most common ethical dilemmas faced by companies nowadays.
- A general understanding of several foundational concepts from the behavioral social sciences (cognitive biases, heuristics and personality) and understand their relevance to (un)ethical business practices.
- A general understanding of the ethical implications of AI applications and identify remedies for designing fair models.
- Further developed the skill to critically evaluate the course literature and apply these perspectives to (un)ethical business practices, including gender inequality, leadership and AI.
- Further developed the skill to critically evaluate how research methods from other ABRI course are applied to the behavioral social sciences and AI.
- Further developed critical academic skills like discussion skills, research proposal writing and presentation skills.

**Course content:**

This course is organized by the multidisciplinary department of Ethics, Governance and Society and aims to introduce students to several key concepts, theories and research discussions in behavioral social sciences and artificial intelligence (AI). By integrating these disciplines, graduate students will gain a comprehensive understanding of the most common ethical problems faced by companies, their consequences and underlying causes.

The course begins with a lecture showing the intimate relation between ethical decision-making and categorization. The ethical decision making by managers includes decisions about ethical issues inside of the business organization, ethical issues concerning the behavior of the organization in the marketplace and also ethical decisions in which the

business organization is interacting with public authorities and the broader environment in which the business organization operates.

In the second week, we turn to the field of behavioral social sciences, focusing on insights from personality psychology to learn more about how personality traits and moral values relate to ethical business outcomes. We will apply these concepts and models to business leadership. For instance, which personality traits can be considered “nightmare traits” if present among leaders and what can companies do to mitigate the impact of such individuals? And what is the role of the moral values of both leaders and followers in co-creating ethical leadership?

In the third week, still within the field of behavioral social sciences, students will explore the link between cognitive biases, heuristics and decision-making, on the one hand, and (un)ethical business outcomes, on the other hand. Consider, for instance, how gender stereotypes (an example of the categorization processes in the first week) affect hiring procedures, or how the mechanisms of loss aversion and risk-seeking may not only lead to suboptimal business strategies when companies are confronted with gains or losses, but also to strategies with unethical outcomes like fraudulent accounting practices. Besides individual-level determinants of decision-making and (un)ethical behavior, we will also consider the role of the social environment. Under what conditions are cognitive biases activated? For instance, does a competitive setting in itself introduce unequal outcomes for men and women’s performances within companies?

In the fourth week, we will apply this knowledge on cognitive biases and the antecedents of moral decision-making to the challenges posed by artificial intelligence (AI). Here we will particularly focus on the ethical dimension of profiling. Both public management institutions and private companies rely on profiling algorithms for very different purposes. This raises ethical questions. Based on which (biased) assumptions are these models developed? How can we ascertain that they do not discriminate? Moreover, algorithms may be designed with the precise aim of exploiting cognitive bias among potential customers. Consider how news allocating algorithms create echo chambers, thereby exploiting and further reinforcing confirmation bias.

In the fifth and final meeting, students will present their brief research proposals and receive feedback from their peers and the course lecturers.

**Involved lecturers:**

Dr. Katharina Brutt, prof. dr. Klarita Gërkhani, dr. Giuseppe Greco, dr. Florian Heine, and dr. Marc van de Wardt

**Assessment:**

To pass the course, students need to prepare discussion questions for the first four meetings, serving as a basis for the class discussion (20%). At the end of the seminar, students will write a brief research proposal (2000 words) that links to the topics tackled during the course and that could help them in further developing their PhD project (60%). In the final meeting, students will present their research proposals (20%). The deadline for the essay is May 23, 2025 (by 17.00 via Canvas).

**Schedule of the sessions and rooms:**

Session 1 – 4 April, 13.30-16.30, (VU Campus)

– **Ethical dilemmas faced by companies**

Session 2 – 11 April, 13.30-16.30, (VU Campus)

– **Personality and moral values applied to leadership**

Session 3 – 15 April, 13.30-16.30, (VU Campus)

– **Cognitive bias and heuristics applied to gender bias**

Session 4 – 2 May, 13.30-16.30, (VU Campus)

– **The ethical dimension of AI**

Session 5 – 16 May, 13.30-16.30, (VU Campus)

– **Presentation of research proposals**

**Literature:** (in the order of the sessions):

The complete reading list for each session is still to be announced. Yet, I can already tell that each session will discuss around 4 research articles or book chapters which students can download for free through their VU accounts. Students could also be asked to prepare by doing a brief experiential exercise like a personality test. Examples of journal articles that will be discussed include:

- Bordalo, P., Coffman, K., Gennaioli, N., & Shleifer, A. (2019). Beliefs about gender. *American Economic Review*, 109(3), 739-773.
- Correll, Shelley J. and Stephen Benard (2006). Biased estimators? Comparing status and statistical theories of gender discrimination. *Advances in Group Processes* 23: 89–116.
- Gërkhani, K., J. Brandts and A. Schram (2024). Competition and gender inequality: A comprehensive analysis of effects and mechanisms. Forthcoming at the *American Journal of Sociology*.
- Ashton, M. C., & Lee, K. (2007). Empirical, theoretical, and practical advantages of the HEXACO model of personality structure. *Personality and social psychology review*, 11(2), 150-166.

- Egorov, M., Kalshoven, K., Pircher Verdorfer, A., & Peus, C. (2020). It's a match: Moralization and the effects of moral foundations congruence on ethical and unethical leadership perception. *Journal of Business Ethics, 167*, 707-723.
- de Vries, R. E. (2018). Three nightmare traits in leaders. *Frontiers in psychology, 9*, 871.
- Graham, J., Haidt, J., & Nosek, B. A. (2009). Liberals and conservatives rely on different sets of moral foundations. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 96*(5), 1029.
- Paulhus, D. L. (2014). Toward a taxonomy of dark personalities. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 23*(6), 421-426.