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ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sense-Remaking: Unpacking Ethical Judgment Change in a Business Ethics Course

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Abstract

While business ethics (BE) courses have increasingly formed part of business school curricula, we still do not know much about how these courses can change students' capacity to deal with ethical issues. Drawing on a sensemaking perspective, we conducted an action research study with 66 business professionals enrolled in an executive training program at a French university. The aim was to investigate the processes underlying ethical judgment (EJ) change through a BE course. Participants were invited to pick a significant ethical issue they had personally experienced at work. They were then asked to make sense of it, in writing, at the beginning and at the end of the course, 3 months later. In comparing pre-course and post-course judgments, we concluded that the structure and contents of the respondents' initial judgment had indeed been modified. This change could be accounted for as the outcome of four 'sense-remaking' mechanisms, which we theorize as complexifying, reprioritizing, conceptualizing and contextualizing. Our study contributes to the literature on BE education by demonstrating the benefits of a sensemaking approach. It also offers an original process-based model of EJ, specifying the mechanisms at play in EJ change. Finally, it contributes to the field of sensemaking studies by introducing the concept of *sense-remaking*, shedding new light on the evolutive dimension of sensemaking.

Following calls from AMBA, AACSB, and EQUIS accreditation bodies,[1] ethics training has increasingly been included in business school curricula, as a potential safeguard against executive misconduct and a way of preventing corporate scandals (Baden, 2014; Brinkmann, 2011; Sims & Felton, 2006; Swanson & Fisher, 2009). Several empirical studies indicate a positive influence of business ethics (BE) teaching, showing improvement when comparing student reactions to ethical issues before and after a course (e.g., Gu & Neesham, 2014; Weber, 1990). Nevertheless, the question of the processes through which this improvement takes place remains (Warren & Smith-Crowe, 2008). This is the crux of this study, which aims to understand how ethical judgment (EJ) changes as a result of participating in a BE course.

EJ can be defined as 'a*n individual's personal evaluation of the degree to which some behavior or course of action is ethical or unethical*' (Sparks & Pan, 2010). It is generally viewed as a major influence on ethical behavior (Hunt & Vitell, 1986; Rest, 1986; Schwartz, 2016; Treviño et al., 2006; Warren & Smith-Crowe, 2008). Knowing how EJ can change in the context of a BE course could therefore be very helpful in assessing its effectiveness.

To explore this issue, we adopted a sensemaking perspective, considering that the formation of EJ relies on sensemaking processes (Brock et al., 2008; Mumford et al., 2008; Reinecke & Ansari, 2015; Sonenshein, 2007; Thiel et al., 2012). The sensemaking perspective proposes a process-based view that

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[1.] AMBA: Association of MBAs; AACSB: Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business; EQUIS: EFMD Quality Improvement System.

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describes how people author and read the world in which they take part (Weick, 1995). In essence, sensemaking takes place when the actors find their expectations unfulfilled, when they face ambiguous or confusing situations, or when they have to cope with high-stakes events. These conditions are characteristic of ethically charged situations (Sonenshein, 2007). Accordingly, sensemaking seems particularly well-suited to grasp the mechanisms underlying EJ formation.

Although this conceptualization of EJ builds on previous research (Helzer et al., 2022; Reinecke & Ansari, 2015; Sonenshein, 2007; Thiel et al., 2012; Waples & Antes, 2011), our objective is different. Most previous work focuses on how individuals come to an EJ regarding a given situation. In contrast, we aim to understand how EJ may change over time. Our central research question is the following: What are the sensemaking processes through which students might change their EJ about a specific issue or situation between the beginning and the end of a BE course?

In that view, we conducted an action research study with 66 business professionals enrolled in an executive training program at a French university. As part of this program, we led a BE course inspired by teaching strategies that foster personal experience, self-reflection, and interaction activities, as they were shown to be more effective than the mere teaching of ethical theories (Gu & Neesham, 2014; Schneider et al., 2010). This type of cooperative strategy differs markedly from hierarchical teaching methods, in which lecturers speak and students passively listen to them. It favors the autonomy of learners and the development of their reflexivity on their own experience, through discussion among themselves and with the instructor. This pedagogical approach builds on the seminal works of pedagogues such as Freire (1978), Rancière (1987) and, in the field of BE teaching, authors like Felton and Sims (Brinkmann & Sims, 2001; Felton & Sims, 2005; Sims & Felton, 2006).

At the beginning of the course, participants were asked to pick and describe an ethical problem that they had encountered at work. At the end of the course 3 months later, they were asked to provide a second account of the same issue. We compared the pre-course and post-course accounts and analyzed the differences to infer potential change processes. Our results identified four 'sense-remaking' processes at work, which we theorized as *complexifying, reprioritizing, conceptualizing, and contextualizing*. They also show that the structure of sensemaking in EJ after the course differed from the initial EJ.

Our study contributes to the existing literature in three ways. First, regarding BE education, we show how a sensemaking theoretical perspective can be used to gain a richer understanding of the impact of teaching, shedding light on how to build a BE course based on an emancipatory rather than a prescriptive approach. Second, we advance the sensemaking-based conceptualizations of EJ by offering a fresh understanding of EJ change through a process-based model. Third,

our study adds to the sensemaking literature by introducing the concept of '*sense-remaking*'. Sense-remaking describes the processes of sensemaking that unfold when people start reflecting on situations that have passed. As a new sensemaking-related process, sense-remaking opens up new perspectives, particularly in the field of experience-based education.

Theoretical overview

Business ethics teaching and ethical judgment

Business ethics teaching impact

Since the 1970s, the research field around BE teaching has flourished, showing a particular interest in its effectiveness (Collins et al., 2014). While the evidence related to this question is mixed, most empirical studies point to a positive influence of ethics instruction (Cloninger & Selvarajan, 2010; Dzuranin et al., 2013; Gu & Neesham, 2014; Lau, 2010; May et al., 2014; Wang & Calvano, 2015; Weber, 1990). Only a handful of studies report no influence or a minimal one (Nelson et al., 2012; Waples et al., 2009; Watts et al., 2017). Most studies suggest a two-dimensional impact, roughly corresponding to the first two stages of Rest's (1986) ethical decision-making process: moral awareness and moral reasoning. Some studies have also found improvement in other ethics-related variables such as EJ (Glenn, 1992), moral efficacy, moral meaningfulness and moral courage (May et al., 2014), ethical decision-making (Gu & Neesham, 2014), sensitivity to ethical issues (Gautschi & Jones, 1998), or students' understanding of the complexity of ethical issues (MacFarlane, 2001).

Most of these studies rely on the classical methodological apparatus of questionnaires, capturing the reactions of students with no or little business experience to fictitious scenarios or short vignettes (Lau, 2010; Nelson et al., 2012; Wang & Calvano, 2015). This raises the issue of whether the skills learned in the artificial context of the classroom will ultimately be transferred into an organizational environment. Most studies remain silent regarding the processes through which the perceived improvements took place. As Waples and co-authors (2009) underline, there is little evidence to suggest *in what way* BE teaching is effective. The question remains: Acknowledging that BE courses seem to increase a person's capacity to face ethical issues, how can this improvement be accounted for?

Business ethics teaching approaches

Various studies have shown that the impact of BE courses depends on content as well as teaching methods (Gautschi & Jones, 1998). Choosing a proper strategy is however daunting. As Waples and co-authors (2009) note, there are several conceptual approaches to teaching ethics (Aristotelian virtue,

consequentialist/deontological theories, Kohlberg's theory, ethical decision-making models, etc.) and various pedagogical methods (such as lectures, case analyses, experiential learning, self-reflection activities, or meditation techniques). Consequently, no best teaching strategy has emerged from the literature, and much progress is needed to clarify the available alternatives.

Several conditions have been identified as characterizing a productive learning environment. A much-cited article by Sims and Felton (2006) mentions that effective learning should be based on student experiences, and focus on self-directed learning and the autonomy of the learner's judgment. Non-traditional and experiential approaches (e.g., live cases, role playing, or using the internet to expose students to the benefits of ethical choices or the risks of unethical behavior) have been recognized as particularly effective, because they enable students to experience situations approaching those occurring in the workplace (Collins et al., 2014; Gu & Neesham, 2014; Nelson et al., 2012; Sanyal, 2000). An effective course should also be interactive, fostering the exchange of experiences, ideas, and opinions among students (Sims & Felton, 2006), and with the teacher.

In several studies, classroom discussions are regarded as a more efficient means for developing EJ than the sole teaching of principles (Giacalone & Promislo, 2013). The teacher becomes an animator rather than a simple provider of knowledge. This approach follows the philosophy of inspiring pedagogues such as Freire (1978) or Rancière (1987), who consider that instructors' role is to nurture participants' autonomy.

Likewise, introspection and reflection on one's own and others' ethical traits, experiences, and errors have also proved to be effective (Brinkmann & Sims, 2001; Collins et al., 2014; Felton & Sims, 2005; Giacalone & Thompson, 2006; Gu & Neesham, 2014; Marsh, 2013; Nelson et al., 2012; Schneider et al., 2010). Several innovative teaching strategies involving self-reflection have been empirically tested. For example, Marsh (2013) provided a framework based on the self-examination of ethical experiences by outstanding real-life leaders (Marsh, 2013). Gu and Neesham (2014) experimented a teaching approach based on moral identity theory (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Blasi, 1984), structured around self-reflection tasks combined with a traditional teaching program. Schneider and co-authors (2010) conducted a controlled experiment in four companies that raised the 'social consciousness' of managers through exercises dealing with personal development and six weeks of meditation training.

Overall, these advances in the field of BE teaching point to what we call an 'introspective turn'. Their core is to challenge students on a personal level, not only on a cognitive level, although most admit the necessity of also exposing learners to some theoretical content to stir progress. They assume that an introspective strategy is likely to result in a more effective engagement, and possibly involvement, of students, and hence to a more durable change in their ethical skills. We concur with these approaches.

Ethical judgment

EJ should not be confused with moral judgment, which pertains to the rational element of ethical decision-making. It is usually presented as the 'moral reasoning' step in a multi-step process in which individuals have to juggle deontological and teleological perspectives on ethical dilemmas (Ferrell et al., 1989; Hunt & Vitell, 1986; Jones, 1991; Treviño, 1986).

EJ is a broader concept that includes, but is not limited to, cognitive elements. As presented earlier, we define EJ as '*an individual's personal evaluation of the degree to which some behavior or course of action is ethical or unethical*' (Sparks & Pan, 2010). Several authors have shown that EJ may also be shaped by additional factors such as emotion, intuition, or social influences (Haidt, 2001; Reynolds, 2006; Schwartz, 2016; Sonenshein, 2007). We submit that this broad conception, coupled with a sensemaking approach, provides the comprehensive framework we need to answer our research question.

Ethical judgment change: A sensemaking perspective

Sensemaking perspectives on ethical judgment

New conceptualizations of how people respond to ethical issues have emerged over the last two decades, in response to the criticisms leveled at rationalist models of ethical decision-making. One particularly fruitful framework draws from social psychology and views EJ as the product of sensemaking (Mumford et al., 2008; Reinecke & Ansari, 2015; Sonenshein, 2007; Thiel et al., 2012). Sensemaking is a complex process, through which people interpret, reinterpret, and enact[2] the world in which they live (Weick, 1979; Weick, 1995). Sensemaking primarily occurs when actors must determine what is expected of them. These situations typically arise when they are caught in a quandary: their expectations are not met; they face ambiguous, surprising, or confusing conditions; or they must deal with high-stake events (Louis, 1980; Maitlis, 2005; Weick, 1979). These circumstances may also cause intense or confusing emotions, since they relate to deeply entrenched ethical values (Kelman & Baron, 1974). They are characteristic of situations involving ethical issues (Sonenshein, 2007).

One innovative approach is the sensemaking intuition model (Sonenshein, 2007), which demonstrates that a sensemaking perspective enables the identification of subprocesses

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2. Enacting is acting on preconceptions about a part of one's individual experience or environment and then giving sense to it through acting on it.

through which a particular EJ is built. It views EJ as a contextual, socially constructed judgment, through a three-stage process: issue construction, intuitive judgment, and post hoc explanation and justification. Sonenshein's model is an important stepping stone for us, but one we intend to conduct further. Mumford and co-authors (2008) propose an alternative model of EJ construction, also based on sensemaking, and applied to scientists. They suggest a four-process framework: framing the problem, managing emotions, forecasting the likely outcomes of actions, and self-reflection. Thiel extended this approach to leaders (Thiel et al., 2012), and suggests another four-process model of EJ construction, which has however not been empirically tested.

Mumford's sensemaking-based model is relevant to our study, since it seems to have practical value. It has been used for training scientists in ethics and is implemented at various institutions (Mumford et al., 2008; Waples & Antes, 2011). A key principle of these courses is to build on an array of preset strategies, to help students make sense of their EJ and provide them with new tools likely to enhance their ethical decision-making skills. These strategies include recognizing circumstances, seeking help, questioning one's judgment, managing emotions, anticipating consequences, analyzing personal motivations, and considering others. Brock and co-authors (2008) found that Mumford's sensemaking training did change the participants' mental models, making them more complex than that of people who did not attend the training. Waples and Antes (2011) however note that if this framework has been empirically validated with scientists, it has yet to be tested with managers.

These studies correctly enrich prior work by emphasizing sensemaking to understand the formation of EJ. For our purpose, however, they share a common weakness – their normative bias. Their main objective is identifying the most efficient methods to help individuals develop a richer understanding of the ethical issues they face. They do not directly address the processes through which EJ evolves over time, from one sensemaking picture to a different one.

Application to EJ change

We propose drawing on Weick's fundamentals (Weick, 1995) of the sensemaking perspective, to develop a descriptive rather than a normative approach to EJ. In accordance with our research question, we view sensemaking as a process that underlies not only the formation but also the evolution of EJ. Three cardinal sensemaking properties seem particularly relevant for our objective.

The first is continuity – sensemaking is an 'ongoing' flow of interpretation that never stops or ends. Individuals unceasingly make sense of what is happening around them now, what happened in the past, and what may happen in the future. The second property is retrospection: individuals can bracket significant episodes in their lives, in order to make sense of them retrospectively. Third, sensemaking is oriented toward plausibility: individuals develop a narrative reduction of their situations of concern and generate a locally plausible story that is tentative and provisional (Weick et al., 2005).

These properties are constitutive of the phenomenon we intend to investigate. Continuity implies that making sense of a specific ethical situation experienced in the past continues to unfold over the duration of an ethics course. Retrospection implies that participants are able to make sense and then later remake sense of that episode. Plausibility implies that alternative plausible narratives of a specific episode may emerge over time. These developments form the base of our conceptual framework.

Methodology

Research setting

The objective of our study was to document the processes through which the participation of business professionals in an ethics course can influence the way they make sense of an ethical situation they previously experienced at work. It arose from a desire by one of the authors to improve an ethics course by breaking away from traditional lectures and trying to link the course more closely to participants' professional experience. The adapted course was designed to foster and capture participants' progress through self-reflective and interactive activity about their personal experience, incorporating some theoretical material.

Our method followed the tradition of action research (Eden & Huxham, 1996; Lewin, 1946; Whitehead, 1994), defined as '*a systematic form of inquiry undertaken by practitioners into their attempts to improve the quality of their own practice*' (Whitehead, 1994, p. 138). Action research has often been used in the context of education research (Corey, 1953; Eden & Huxham, 1996).

We conducted our research in the context of an ethics course taken by business professionals as part of a masters-level training program in project and business management. This program was offered by CNAM (Conservatoire national des arts et métiers or French National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts), a venerable and well-known Paris-based university that was established in 1794 and specializes in executive training. The study uses data collected from 66 participants[3] between the ages of 27 and 40 years and who came from various professional sectors, such as information systems, marketing, finance, human resources, law, and the military.

[3.] The original sample consisted of 79 participants; we could however not the data for 13 of them as they did not provide their second account.

Data collection

In educational action research, data collection is inseparable from course delivery, so that data is not only collected but created via the researcher's action (Von Glasersfeld, 2013). Data collection was therefore based on obtaining two accounts from the course participants, one at the beginning of the course and another at the end. We define an account as a discursive construction that interprets, justifies, or explains some aspect of reality as perceived by an individual (Maitlis, 2005).

Data production and data collection involved four steps: (1) an initial 'pre-course' account at the beginning of the course, in which participants were asked to recount in writing a personal ethical issue of their choice, drawn from their professional life; (2) the unfolding of the course (five 3-h classes over 3 months); (3) an end-of-semester workshop dedicated to sharing and discussing participants' ethical issue experiences; and (4) a 'post-course' account at the end of the course, also in writing, in which participants were asked to make sense again of the same personal ethical issue experience they had initially recounted.

Figure 1 replaces these steps on a timeline, and Table 1 provides a detailed presentation of each step. Note that if data was formally collected through the two written accounts, informal exchanges during the intervening workshop formed a background for the data analysis as well as the interpretation of the results.

Data analysis

We performed an inductive content analysis to generate theoretical elements (concepts and relations) from the data, inspired by the methods of Gioia and co-authors (2013). This analysis roughly followed the constant comparison principles of grounded theorizing (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It was carried out using NVivo software. Our analytic strategy was based on comparing the *judgments* in the two accounts, which we will henceforth call the pre-course (first, initial) account and the post-course (second, revised, renewed) account.

We proceeded in three steps. First, for each respondent, we compared the pre- and post-course accounts. The data showed that the structure of pre- and post-course judgments was different. We then created codes to reveal their constitutive elements. Further comparison led us to identify two categories that were present in the *renewed* but not in the *initial* accounts: *reflective* sensemaking about former judgments and actions, and *prospective* sensemaking for future situations.

In a second step, we checked for potential biases in the participants' responses. Our post-course data analysis indicates that no significant systematic course bias seems to be present. First, the evolution of the accounts was not uniform: pre-course accounts evolved in various and often contradictory directions. For example, 52 post-course accounts testified to a significant change in the appreciation of the original ethical issue, some of them playing it up, while others played it down, and 14 accounts exhibited no change at all. Second, the reasons participants gave for changing their EJ were varied and not limited to the theoretical content or the other academic benefits of the course.

We could then proceed to our third step, the processual analysis. Through an iterative comparison between initial and renewed accounts, we were able to identify four mechanisms accounting for the evolution from the former to the latter. We labeled them 'sense-remaking' mechanisms: complexifying, prioritizing, conceptualizing, and contextualizing. One to three mechanisms were present for each respondent. This finding suggests that these processes were neither mutually exclusive nor all present at the same time. Figure 2 displays the data structure (Gioia et al., 2013) that resulted from the inductive process through which these concepts were developed.

Findings: Sense-remaking processes from pre-course to post-course accounts

Figure 3 captures the model of sense-remaking that we suggest to account for the evolution of EJ during the course. It consists of three parts: initial pre-course
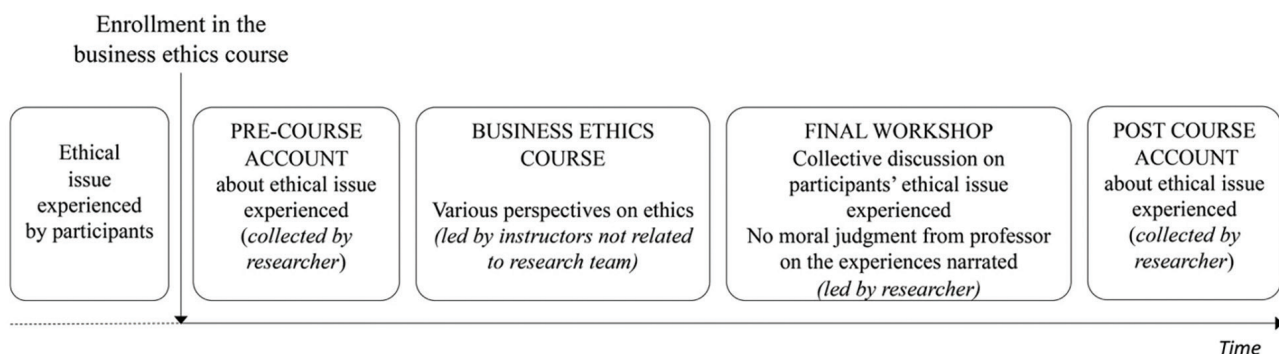

Figure 1. Action research steps.

Table 1. Details of action research steps

Step 1. Data collection: Pre-course account of a recent situation involving ethical judgment (session 1)	
Course background	*Guide for pre-course account*
At the first session of the business ethics course (a general introduction to the BE field), participants were asked to pick an ethical issue they had personally experienced in a professional context, to be discussed during the last session of the course. They had to write an account of 2 to 4 pages about this issue, and had to send it directly to the instructor of the final session before the following sessions. They were given a short guide to assist them with this introspective exercise. By completing this pre-course account, respondents were offered an opportunity to make sense of what they had experienced.	• Can you tell us about a situation that implied ethical issues with which you were recently confronted in your professional life? • Can you describe the events, the context, the stakeholders, and the issues at stake? • Can you describe your feelings, thoughts, and perceptions at that moment? • What was the ethical issue? • Why did you consider it an ethical issue?
Step 2. Interim course progress (sessions 2 to 6)	
Course background	*Session content (and instructors' speciality)*
After the pre-course accounts had been turned in, the business ethics course progressed as planned. All the sessions were conducted by instructors not associated with the research team. As is customary in executive training, the students returned to school twice a week (on average), either after normal working hours or on weekends, to take the other courses that made up the training program (classical business management courses such as project management, marketing, strategic management, and quality management). The BE course itself took place twice a month and consisted of lectures conducted by academics and professionals from various fields on a variety of topics.	• #2. Ethics and the law (professional lawyer) • #3. Ethics and CSR (economist) • #4. Organizational ethics, organizational deviance (professor of organizational behavior) • #5. Ethics and management (management consultant and former senior executive) • #6. Individual ethics, an existentialist perspective (professor of human resource management)
Step 3. The 'feedback of ethics experiences' workshop (session 7)	
Workshop background	*Posture of the facilitator*
The final session of the course consisted of a workshop dedicated to feedback on the ethical issues experienced in which the students shared their experiences concerning the contents of their pre-course account. This workshop was run by one of the authors of this paper who had reviewed the pre-course accounts. The objective of this last session was to create the conditions for a new sensemaking of the situations experienced, while respecting the individual freedom of each person, under the principle that 'much of the learning is drawn from one another's experiences' (Sims & Felton, 2006).	• He/she is a facilitator rather than an 'instructor'. • As a teacher-researcher in business ethics, he/she does not feel morally superior to the participants. • He/she does not indicate a specific course of action to resolve the ethical problems participants experienced. • He/she does not make any moral judgments regarding participants' responses and ensures that participants do not judge other group members. • He/she raises questions in order to stimulate participants' self-reflection and enable all participants to make sense of the ethical issues that they had chosen to discuss. • He/she helps participants to identify the relationships between their reasoning processes and the theoretical models and concepts presented during the course.
Step 4. Data collection: Post-course account of the same ethical situation	
The study ended with a final sensemaking exercise – the post-course account of about 2 pages – that followed the aforementioned final workshop. Students were given a new account guide to help them probe their original interpretations of their chosen situations. They were asked to reassess the situation they had described in their pre-course account; determine whether or not they believed their ethical judgment had changed since their pre-course account; describe the ways in which their judgment might have changed; and finally, provide specific reasons for these changes. This account contributed to the final grade of the module, along with the first account and student participation. To avoid desirability bias, we indicated to students that there were no right or wrong answers, and asked them to stay as close to their experience as possible.	*Guide for post-course account* • How do you analyze that situation today? • Have you noticed any evolution of your judgment since the moment the ethical problem emerged? • What do you think about your initial ethical judgment and the decisions and actions you undertook at that moment? • What led you to change (if applicable) your judgment since the situation occurred?

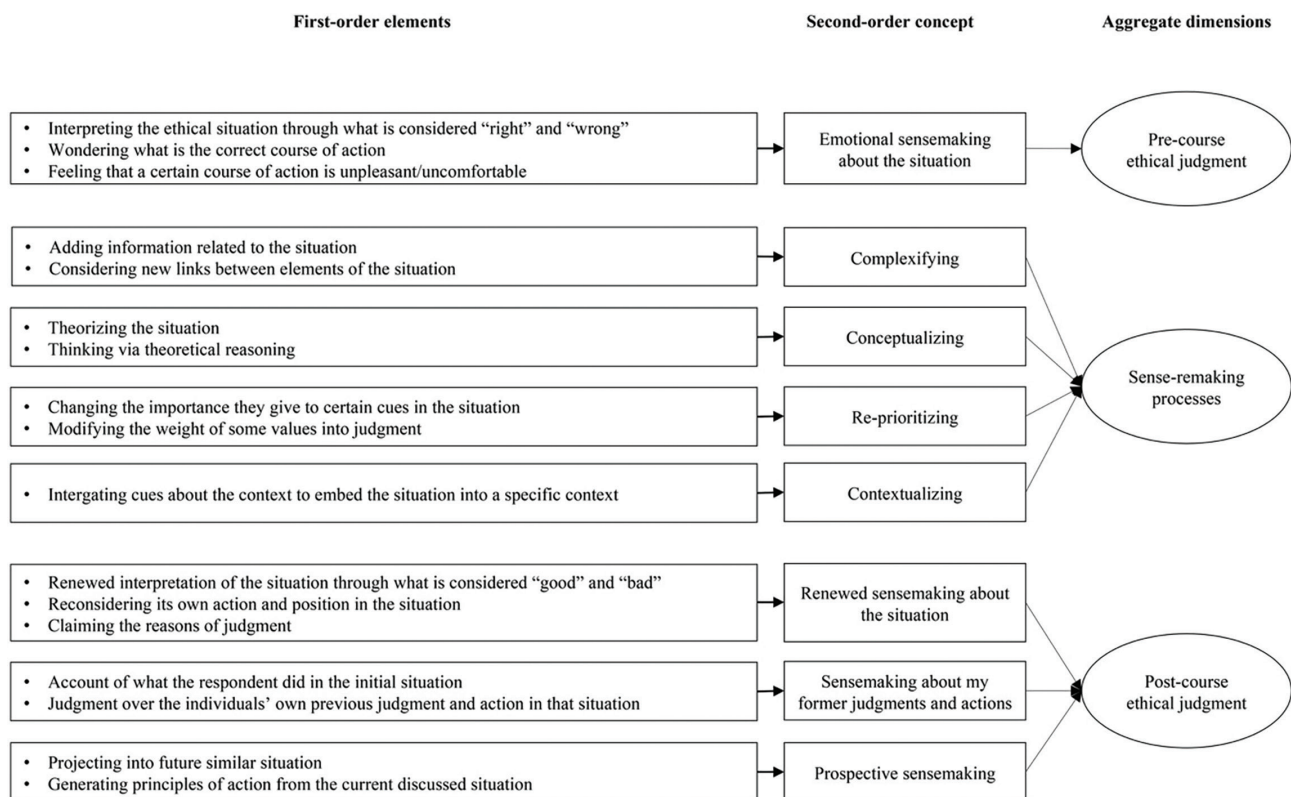CSR = Corporate Social Responsibility.

Figure 2. Data structure.

judgment is transformed by four sense-remaking processes, and eventually evolves into a renewed post-course judgment. We now turn to a data-based justification of this model.

The pre-course ethical judgment

In their initial or 'pre-course' account, participants mixed three components: the meaning they gave to what they considered salient elements of the ethical situation they selected, an EJ about this situation and their own role in it, and a justification for that judgment. These elements are interrelated and may sometimes be difficult to differentiate. Some respondents had a clear understanding of the situation they had experienced, and in these cases their EJs were also clear.

For example, one respondent mentioned: '*When I analyze my behavior, it appears that I transformed a situation for which I was solely responsible (i.e. for the error committed) into one where that responsibility was shared with the final user because they had validated the report. This behavior was clearly not ethical*' (R1, M, 27, project manager, IT).

In contrast, other respondents reported how they had struggled to clearly determine what was right or wrong, because they were torn between various ethical alternatives. For these respondents, the ambiguity of the situation was such that they were filled with a series of questions.

Do I have to keep a low profile in order to protect a colleague with whom I have a good relationship, but who could create problems for my career and call into question my managers' confidence in me? On the other hand, do I have to denounce him without proof, simply because my company trusts me? (R32, M, 40, account manager, IT).

Our data also reveals that the pre-course judgment was often laced with emotion. Several respondents recalled a particular feeling they had during the situation.

In the case of a tender, my boss asked me to favor one of the candidates. I had to rewrite my report, adding irrelevant elements and 'omitting' some that seemed important to me. […] I had the feeling that I betrayed the interests of my customer while presenting a skewed view of reality (R7, M, 45, project management support consultant, IT).

Various emotional states were expressed by words like 'unpleasant' (R7, R49), 'frustrated' (R6, R16, R46, R53), 'outraged' (R9, R21, R25), 'shocked' (R28, R55), 'guilty' (R9, R19, R26, R49, R56), 'disgust', (R44), 'disappointment' (R48, R53), or 'angry' (R21, R23, R26, R29, R49, R53).
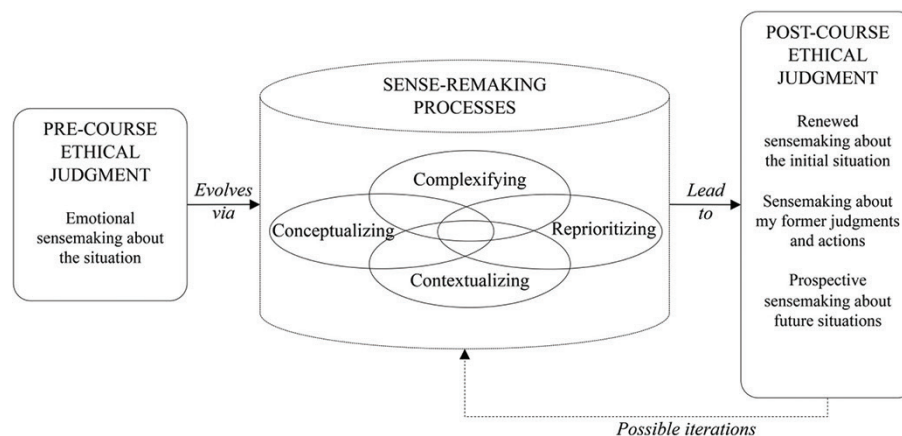
Figure 3. Model of sense-remaking underlying ethical judgment change during a business ethics course.

Table 2 presents data that illustrates the emotionally charged sensemaking of pre-course judgments. In all these instances, the pre-course account exposed the respondents' efforts to make sense of a situation that now struck them as more complex than anticipated.

The sense-remaking processes

We now present the four sense-remaking mechanisms we believe can depict changes between pre- and post-course accounts: complexifying, prioritizing, conceptualizing, and contextualizing. These processes are not mutually exclusive and can operate in conjunction with each other. For clarity, we will discuss them separately, as each has its own logic. We also illustrate each process in a vignette in which the initial and revised judgments are juxtaposed.

Complexifying

Complexifying is a sense-remaking mechanism through which the initial account is enriched with additional elements that had not been identified as relevant at the time of pre-course writing. It makes for a more complete and complex post-course account. This process fills in gaps or uncertainties that were overlooked at the beginning of the course.

For example, some respondents mentioned that their judgments had taken on new dimensions, including a fuller understanding of the issues at stake, relevant ethical principles, conflicts of interests, or consequences of their actions. They also noted a clearer understanding of constraints related to stakeholders, for example their families, careers, competitors, partners, or the families of people not directly involved in the situation.

On the day that I made the decision I didn't feel anything in particular. I thought that I was well within my rights, but didn't think about the consequences of my decisions and their impact on the company, *particularly in regard to how we had agreed to organize things. I only realized this after our workshop* (R63, F, 34, employee, fast food).

These additional elements often led respondents to modify their initial judgments.

Vignette 1. Complexifying by integrating new elements and reconsidering the situation

Bertrand (R35, M, 37, R&D engineer, telecommunications) is an engineer at a large telecommunications company. In his pre-course account, he explains that every year, the company offers its employees gift vouchers of up to €500. In 2013, Bertrand wanted to go on a trip with his family, but did not have enough money. He asked his colleagues to give him their vouchers so that he could use them for his family trip. In his first account, Bertrand claimed that the only issue at hand was the legality of his actions.

In his post-course account, he mentioned that his judgment had evolved, not so much in terms of the judgment itself, but rather in terms of the questions that he will ask himself when making future judgments: '*At that time, I just considered whether it was legal. In future, I will also consider whether or not [a decision or action] is ethical or not, and will analyze it at* Fin de la vignette 1 *multiple levels, notably the individual and the organizational levels*'.

In some cases, individuals admitted that in their first account they had not fully grasped every facet of the problem at hand, and expressed more nuanced interpretations of it. They questioned some of their former certainties, and the situation now appeared more arduous to them. One reason was that as time passed, they had started to formulate new questions or hypothetical scenarios concerning their past possibilities for action.

Another was a new awareness that they had not seized all the intricate relations between the elements on which they had based their prior judgment (people, context, time-related pressures, deadlines, authority issues, and others). '*But then I asked myself a lot of questions, like: Were my expectations vis-à-vis my team justified? What was my room for maneuvering? What could I do differently?*' (R13, M, 27, CRM consultant, IT).

Table 2. Data supporting pre-course judgment dimensions

Facets	Data supporting interpretation
Assessing the extent to which a course of action is right or wrong	At first, the ethical issue seems to be the following: can we act in a way that contradicts our individual values? It is a moral dilemma when you put yourself in the customer's shoes: actually, as a customer, I would not have accepted such a price that easily. It's not that it is particularly expensive, it just seems a little bit excessive compared with the service. If I perceived this pricing odd as a customer, why should I implement it as an employee? In terms of morality, the pricing tends towards the bad rather than the good. (R6, M, 28, electronic document manager, bank)
	Does meticulous work remain a value in itself, an absolute value, regardless of whether you accept the objective of the job or not? Can work, considered as a process, a succession of well-done tasks, and not as a means to achieve a goal, become the meaning in itself, a factor of motivation, a self-sufficient stimulus? Is it possible for me to concentrate on the work to be handed in to my bosses and to gain satisfaction out of it, while forgetting the ultimate objective of my actions? Can the process be considered good if it serves a bad purpose? Those are the questions I have at the moment… without clear answers. (R8, F, 35, project manager, transportation)
Wondering about the correct course of action	I had a dilemma: deep inside myself I wanted to warn people that they were under surveillance. But on the other hand, I was afraid that these individuals would bring it up to management, who could in turn punish the technician who had given us the information. (R27, M, 35, computer engineer, IT)
	But then I asked myself many questions, such as: Were my expectations about my team justified? What was my scope for alternative choices? What could I do differently? (R13, M, 27, CRM consultant, IS consulting)
	Even if on the other hand you may feel guilty for not being able to offer places to your sisters, who moreover do not have significant financial means. Feelings of guilt. Questions about right and wrong. Do we have the right to do this, or not? Are we really not going to have enough places for everyone who registers? (R56, F, 35, oil industry)
Feeling that a certain course of action is unpleasant or uncomfortable	I had to refer the matter to the manager, but my first reaction was to feel apprehensive about denouncing this situation. On the one hand, this was because I was convinced that the manager was going to accuse me of having incited a conspiracy with the complicity of a colleague when I observed this. On the other hand, it was because fundamentally, denouncing someone's actions probably contradict my education and my values. (R51, F, 35, executive assistant, publisher)
	One night, I see Robert putting a box of prestigious wine in the trunk of his car on the company parking lot. […] The 'presents' he accepted can be considered as corruption, as they contribute to not applying objective criteria when choosing a supplier, but to base the choice on the value of favors provided by the supplier's salesperson […] Some days after that, Robert asked me to issue an order to buy a lift truck from this company. I did so, but felt some discomfort. (R60, M, 40, engineer, finance)
	My uneasiness was deeper regarding the problem of 'petty bribery', precisely because it was a long-term problem. (R60, M, 40, engineer, finance)

In giving more salience to additional aspects of the original situation, these respondents saw it in a new light, notably realizing it was connected to a web of factors, rather than being the result of a simple causal relationship.

Reprioritizing

In some instances, respondents did not fundamentally alter the basics of their prior account, but modified the weights they had given to the factors considered in their pre-course judgment in a reprioritizing process. They now viewed a few elements as less important, while giving more value to others, leading to a revised hierarchy in their relevance. The essence of reprioritizing is to assign new levels of importance to each cue retained in a former account of a situation.

This revision involved the impact of emotions. Over the duration of the course some respondents seemed to loosen the

Vignette 2. Reprioritizing via a focus on legal elements

Fred (R25, 28, project manager, telecommunications) has recently been hired as a project manager by a telephone infrastructure company. His pre-course account is about one of his first projects, which dealt with installing an antenna on the roof of a school. In order for students' parents to ultimately approve the project, his manager told him that he would need to increase the size of the chimney so that the antenna would be hidden. In his pre-course judgment, Fred expressed all the ethical issues the situation raised for him: '*I was indignant and told my manager about it. […] This way of working was absolutely against my convictions*'.

In his post-course account, Fred seemed less concerned about certain issues than he had previously been: '*Sure, I did something unethical, but I did so in order to reach clear objectives, which had been authorized and were completely legal*'. Here, Fred is changing his perspective and placing greater emphasis on its legal dimensions. This enables him to provide a clear, reframed view of the situation.

grip of their original emotions, even when they recalled that these emotions had been particularly prominent at the time. They developed what they considered more objective interpretations of their respective ethical issues, confessing that emotions had to a certain extent obfuscated the clarity of their judgment.

One benefit is that by refocusing on what they now perceived as the main elements of the issue, they refined their prior judgment through a clearer picture of what was right or wrong in it. The following excerpt shows how emotions could be given less weight in the act of sense-remaking.

I think that I've finally taken a step back from my experience. I'm no longer angry, even though I had been during the weeks after leaving the company. I think my judgment slightly changed over time. I previously took the problem with my manager very personally, thinking that he didn't like me. Now, looking back, I think it's linked to his personality and that the problem wasn't in fact with me. The same thing could have easily happened to anyone else. He's known to have a temper (R49, F, 33, office manager, real estate).

Conceptualizing

Conceptualizing is our model's third sense-remaking mechanism. It consists of developing an abstract view of a situation by recasting it through the lens of general theoretical principles as well as a higher-level description thereof. Conceptualizing results in new cognitive frames to interpret the situation. It helps respondents reduce its ambiguity. Renewed accounts show that the theoretical principles studied in class could be useful tools in this process. They provided a new basis for making sense of what really happened. At the end of the course, individuals sensed that they were no longer alone in their interpretations. They could rely on a universal body of knowledge that they considered valid, general, true, or simply better than their original insights, and which could help them come to a more robust foundation for their EJ.

In the process of conceptualizing, respondents formalized the fundamentals of the ethical issue at stake as well as their prior interpretation of that issue. They could, for example, more distinctly see the difference between a legal issue and an ethical issue.

I later learned that he had been chatting online with 12- to 16-year-olds! And we've seen during the course that there can be an overlap between ethics and legality. In my case, the ethical problem also had a significant legal dimension (R21, F, 34, data center manager, IT).

Likewise, some respondents seemed able to clearly reformulate the ethical issue they had faced, citing some benefits of the course.

The sessions on ethics confirmed my initial thoughts and reactions. In fact, the only difference between then and now is that now

I can name his [the colleague's] behavior. In my opinion, this person did not – at that time – demonstrate socially desirable ethical behavior […] (R20, F, administrative employee, public administration.)

Similarly, other respondents were able to recast their initial understanding from a managerial issue to an ethical one. '*I thought that I was dealing with a human resources problem, but the business ethics course I attended made me understand that it was actually an ethical issue*' (R15, F, 32, buyer, public service).

Globally, the process of conceptualizing was one of transition between the more intuitive arguments of the pre-course accounts to the more rational arguments of the post-course account. The evidence shows that by the end of the course many respondents had come to a more explicit view of their ethical issue. They could use a stronger rationale to support or refute their pre-course EJ.

Vignette 3. Judgment change via conceptualizing

Max (R5, scientific advisor, physics research) supervises doctoral students. In his pre-course account, he mentions how he was embarrassed when a manager asked his opinion about a former student that he was considering recruiting. Max responded that the recently minted PhD was average: he could not recommend him for innovative tasks requiring autonomy and strong analytical skills, but would do so for development tasks that required the strict application of standards and guidelines.

In his post-course account, Max specified that if given the choice, he would take the same course of action, adding that the ethics course had reinforced his initial decision. As a matter of fact, by analyzing the situation through a more systematic stakeholder perspective, he concluded that all the stakeholders were winners: the young doctor would be able to work on tasks that he was comfortable with, the industrialist would be able to recruit somebody according to his needs, and the research center would benefit from both. In his second account, Max was therefore able to provide clear justification for his judgment by formally analyzing the Fin de la vignette 3 consequences of his decision for each relevant stakeholder.

Contextualizing

Contextualizing is a process in which respondents replaced their ethical issue in a broader context than the one obtained in their pre-course account, thereby remaking sense of it. This process is typical of respondents who grew increasingly uncomfortable with an initial account blindly based on general, rigid, or abstract principles. As the course developed, these respondents realized that their account did not adequately reflect the practical and unique aspects of the situation (such as ignored external factors, neglected constraints and requirements, and overlooked individual personalities and interactions). The contextualizing process enabled them to alleviate the dissonance between the reductive simplicity of their first account and what they had come to perceive as a more challenging reality.

The data shows that in their post-course account, many respondents softened the strictness of their prior sensemaking framework. They recognized that ambiguity was at the core of ethical issues and paid more attention to the particulars of the original situation. As the following quote illustrates, some of them went as far as allowing themselves what they saw as legitimate exceptions to their general principles. They justified these infringements by the idiosyncrasies of the situation, remaking new sense of it. *'It is ethical to be strict regarding risk prevention. However, we have to be less strict when considering our experience with the production quality of this supplier. The production quality has always been satisfactory and has never endangered personnel security […]. Moreover, when one considers the social and economic environment, this supplier employs a number of people, and its business is highly dependent on our orders. Finally, our relationship with them has always been good, and we have worked together for a long time. So, even if the scientific results are "average," what we experience obligates us from an ethical point of view to continue working with them'* (R2, M, 31, engineer, automobile manufacturing).

Vignette 4. Judgment evolution via contextualizing

Eveline (R12, F, 30, developer, supply chain) is an employee at an IT company that develops software for retail companies. In her pre-course account, she describes an uncomfortable situation she experienced with Paul, a new hire on her team. Shortly after his recruitment, Eveline realized that Paul did not have the competencies required for the position. Feeling that Paul's incompetence would hurt the whole team, Eveline decided to discuss the situation with the project manager. In her pre-course account, Eveline wondered if this was the best solution, if it was ethical, if she should have spoken with Paul beforehand, and so on. She described her doubts as such: *'I didn't know how to handle it, neither with Paul nor with the director. I didn't want to create any problems for Paul, but also did not want the project to fail'*.

In her post-course account, Eveline expressed considerably fewer doubts about the situation. In the meantime, Paul had taken part in a mentoring program aimed at helping him to overcome his initial difficulties. Eveline explained then that her decision to talk with the project manager was the right one, even if it had meant Paul being fired: *'Of course, it would be sad if nothing changes and he's ultimately fired. But if this does happen in the end, I still think that I did the right thing, as some steps were taken after talking with the project manager – but still, nothing has changed. If my colleague is fired, it will enable him to reflect on his career and to then find a new position more suited to his skills'.* Here, Eveline moves from a perspective where she is mainly considering 'not harming' Paul to a more contextual perspective in which she considers the specificities of the situation: Fin de la vignette 4 Paul remains incompetent despite the chances given to him.

The post-course judgments

After discussing the processes that transformed pre-course judgments into post-course ones, we now turn to an examination of the post-course judgments. These are the written accounts respondents submitted when asked to comment on the same ethical issue that they had initially reported in their pre-course account. Our analysis shows that by and large the content and structure of the accounts differed between the two sets, revealing a renewed judgment after the course. The post-course judgment comprises three components, in various degrees: (1) renewed sensemaking about the original ethical situation; (2) reflective sensemaking about the participant's own role in this situation; (3) prospective sensemaking regarding potential future ethical challenges.

Renewed sensemaking about the situation

Many of the post-course judgments contained renewed sensemaking about the situation that was being judged. For most respondents, this meant they had changed their minds about how to deal with the situation they had previously described. In what follows, we will describe the four possible trajectories that we identified for this type of sense-remaking.

Increased ethical concerns

In some cases, the post-course accounts revealed that some individuals had become more aware of ethical issues in general than they previously had been. *'Now I see ethical problems everywhere, and it's difficult to know what attitude to have. It's a kind of ethical awakening'* (R19, F, 28, employee, public administration).

Other participants, recalling specific situations, realized that they had failed to recognize ethical aspects, for lack of ethical knowledge.

At that time, I didn't know that I was dealing with an ethical problem; I felt guilty but also powerless to cope with these situations. I was then just starting my professional life…I was told that 'this is business'. Guilt had no place in business affairs (R19, employee, public administration).

From the data, this new ethical awareness can be attributed to two factors: individuals were now trained to identify ethical issues more accurately, using concepts rather than general feelings. They also recognized that emotional influences may have prevented them from seeing through their initial situation and deal with it appropriately. *'[I realized later that] I had been blinded by my own ambition and my desire to succeed at any price!'* (R13, M, 27, IT consultant).

In the context of their post-course judgments, it was clear that these respondents had become more aware of their ethical responsibilities. Some were reconsidering what they saw as their prior unquestioned compliance with orders from their chain of command.

Decreased ethical concerns

Surprisingly, EJ could also evolve in a way that led to a *decrease* in ethical concerns. In this case, the ethical issues were judged to be less serious than they originally had been thought to be. '*Retrospectively, now that I've taken the business ethics course, I am sure I would reconsider my judgment and be less severe*' (R6, M, 28, electronic document manager, bank).

At times, individuals justified this 'downgrade' by admitting that, in retrospect, they now felt less guilty about their past decision:

The last session made me realize that not firing a colleague simply out of kindness is not a solution. […] I then realized that keeping him on board at all costs was not a solution. Even if the decision to fire an employee is never an easy one, I doubt that it would leave me with a guilty conscience. So, it's no longer an ethical problem. A difficult decision, yes, but not an ethical one (R10, F, 33, IT manager, corporate and investment banking).

At other times, respondents seemed to look at things from a different perspective and relativized certain issues. '*It's not that I agree with the practice of accepting gifts from suppliers. But I do feel myself being less severe in judging people who get involved in these 'ordinary little malpractices*' (R60, M, 40, engineer, banking).

Reinforcement of initial judgment

Several respondents used their post-course accounts to provide details about how their initial judgments had been reinforced. In these cases, the course seemed to have helped them articulate their problem more clearly, enabling them to justify their initial decisions with solid arguments.

Concerning the ethical issue that I presented previously, my new analysis would lead me to make the same decision […]. The ethics course reinforced this decision, as my analysis of the various stakeholders show that all of them were winners: the young doctor would be able to work on tasks that he is comfortable with, the manager would be able to hire somebody according to his needs, and the research center would also benefit (R5, M, scientific advisor, physics research).

We assume that these respondents gained more confidence in their EJs as the course progressed. Our data shows that post-course judgments were often more strongly justified than pre-course ones.

No change in ethical judgment

Several respondents mentioned that the course had not changed their initial judgment. Nevertheless, even in these cases, some of them felt they had acquired the tools for expressing that judgment more clearly: '*Retrospectively, my judgment has changed very little […]. However, I am able to better*

conceptualize the situation that I experienced' (R59, 34, IT project manager, consultant).

Individuals' sensemaking of prior actions and judgments

When people reconsider a past situation in which they were involved, they can retrospectively make a new assessment of the appropriateness of their role in it. Several outcomes may arise. Some respondents considered that their initial judgment was correct, and that they had acted in a way with which they were still comfortable. In their view, they did or thought the right thing. In contrast, while they stuck with their initial appraisal of the situation, other respondents started questioning their own actions or thinking.

The evolution of this judgment relates mainly to me questioning my own actions during the conflict. I [still] have the same negative judgment about my colleagues' attitude during this situation that I experienced [then] (R64, F, 26, administrator, banking).

They could then regret that they acted in certain ways or they could recognize that their earlier perceptions were wrong.

Our data shows significant evidence of such soul-searching, at times quite markedly. For example, some respondents confessed that their pre-course judgments had been too intuitive and thus inadequate:

'*I realized that my judgment had been trivial*' (R35, M, 37, research manager, telecommunications). Others, having become more adept at deciphering the processes they had

Vignette 5. Sensemaking about one's own prior judgments and actions

In her pre-course account, Emma (R15, buyer, public administration) explained that she had lent a considerable amount of help to an employee that had recently been hired in her department. Despite this, the new employee still failed to perform well. When her manager asked Emma for her opinion as to whether or not the new employee should be retained after a trial period, Emma did not initially want to give her opinion or be involved in such a difficult decision, claiming that it was not her responsibility (i.e., she was the new employee's colleague, not their manager). However, when Emma discovered that the new employee had complained about her and blamed her for not explaining things clearly enough and for not spending enough time with her, Emma felt so upset that she finally decided to tell the manager that she had a negative opinion of the new employee.

In her post-course account, Emma said that she regretted her decision to say negative things about the new employee. In doing so, she conducted a clear analysis of the psychological processes that she had experienced: '*I acted impulsively because I was afraid that the criticism against me would prevent me from being promoted. I put my personal interest before my colleague's. I knew that getting this job was important to her because she had just bought an apartment. I gave myself a clear conscience through various justifications: my negative judgment was objective, my manager asked me to give it, I was not the only one to have a negative opinion of the new employee, and so on*'.

experienced, could even identify unconscious influences: *'Analyzing this situation from an ethical perspective sheds light on the process that I consciously and unconsciously experienced* (R3, 45, M, employee, finance).

In the minds of these respondents, sensemaking about the chosen ethical issue and sensemaking about their prior judgments and actions regarding the issue intermingle. Together, they provide a more coherent picture of the situation – a picture that can be either quite similar or remarkably different from their initial pre-course account.

Prospective sensemaking

A third category of sense-remaking emerged in the post-course accounts that was not present in the pre-course ones. Without being asked to do so, some respondents spontaneously discussed how what they had learned by remaking sense of their experience could be appropriate for them in future. In other words, their post-course sensemaking enabled them to develop *prospective* sensemaking.

In some cases, they described how they had developed useful new knowledge by inferring abstract concepts from various situations they had experienced, distilling operational rules or principles for the future. Respondents could for example uphold ethical principles they had overlooked.

I learned that one should always take responsibility for one's errors and should never allow oneself to be influenced by external elements. If we think that a small lie doesn't hurt, we're wrong, as a small lie can result in multiple lies whose consequences can be uncontrollable. You should always face reality, whatever the consequences (R57, M, 34, IT engineer, telecommunications).

In other cases, they positioned these situations as guides for future circumstances that might be similar. *'If this case occurred again, I am sure I would not make the mistake of trying to personally acquire one of the vehicles from the deal!'* (R23, M, 52, commander, military). Some of them specifically exemplified general principles for future use: *'In future, the solution may be to avoid participating in projects with objectives I do not believe in'* (R8, F, 35, project management consultant, transportation).

Some of these future-oriented participants expressed that they became more effectively equipped to face ethical issues, indicating that they felt better prepared to act ethically and to resist negative influences.

The ethics course helped a lot, in that I could understand the ethical approach and that such an approach is possible even in the workplace, which I did not think was possible. My judgment has become more accurate, and I think I will now be able to make a decision when confronted with an ethical issue, even if I have to say no (R19, F, 28, employee, public administration).

Table 3 presents additional data that illustrates the various dimensions of post-course judgments.

Discussion

Our research focused on how EJ can change between the beginning and the end of a one-term BE course presented to business professionals in a reflective (non-prescriptive) approach. Based on the sensemaking theoretical perspective, it enabled us to identify the processes through which the initial account of a past real-life ethical issue participants experienced can evolve by the end of the course, resulting in a modified post-course EJ.

Our findings point to three contributions: One concerns BE teaching, another provides a process-based view of the concept of sensemaking, and the third one tries to capture the essence of our findings through the new concept of *'sense-remaking'*.

Sensemaking and business ethics teaching

Our study contributes to research on BE teaching by considering two major questions at the core of the field: the impact of teaching and the methods to be used. Regarding the first question, we note that most previous studies concentrate on *whether or not* BE courses improve participants' attitudes and reasoning (Gu & Neesham, 2014; Lau, 2010; May et al., 2014; Wang & Calvano, 2015; Weber, 1990). In contrast, and building on the generally positive answer to this question, we used a sensemaking approach to highlight the *processes* through which an ethics course can influence students' EJs.

Regarding teaching methods, we confirm previous scholarly observations that sensemaking proves to be a useful theoretical perspective for BE teaching. Our approach differs from the prescriptive and the often top down bent of current research (Mumford et al., 2008; Waples & Antes, 2011), instead favoring learners' autonomy. We do not provide students with a predetermined sensemaking model likely to guide them in forming an EJ in the face of a specific ethical issue. Instead, we draw on the interactionist foundations of sensemaking (Koenig, 2003) to make students reflect on their previous ethical experience and freely share their experiences. The key is to let them develop and possibly renew their own judgments regarding prior ethical issues of their choice, providing them along the way with theoretical and other resources on which they can draw at will.

This approach seems promising for BE teaching. Our action research shows that most participants went through a cognitive change during the course, as attested by the four sense-remaking processes we identified. It addresses a common criticism leveled at traditional BE teaching, that it is somewhat artificial and too removed from the constraints of business life (Nelson et al., 2012; Wang & Calvano, 2015). Letting participants reflect on their ethical experiences at work arguably better prepares them to deal with other real-life ethical issues, in

Table 3. Data that supports the post-course judgment dimension

Theme	Data that supports interpretation
Renewed sensemaking about the reference situation	'I consider that keeping this provider without penalty seems to be a good ethical decision'. (R2, M., 31, engineer, car industry)
	'At that time, my position was more ambiguous than today. I thought that a slight ethical misconduct was desirable, as far as it was possible to obtain a kind of compromise among the stakeholders: my employer, the applicant companies and my client. Over time and gradually, I moved away from any obligations toward this client. I presented a distorted vision of the candidates' offers to him'. (R7, M, 45, project management consultant, IS consulting)
	'I realized that even if my behavior toward my team was not exemplary, my contacts – my client and the general manager of my company – were not ethical either'. (R13, M, 27, CRM consultant, IS consulting)
Sensemaking about the individual's previous judgment and action	'I was young and my ambition to be integrated and to be recognized as a performing member of the company led me to behave this way. I am very critical toward myself and I don't want to make this mistake again, because it goes beyond the professional sphere. Cases of conscience affect personal life. I sincerely think that my behavior at that time was unethical. I abused my authority, I abused my team, I profited from the goodwill of my colleagues and I did not listen to them…' (R13, M, 27, CRM consultant, IS consulting)
	'I still believe that I should have talked about my problem with my supervisors and proposed a backup solution, and we would not have lost as much time. For me, we could have had the time to make the people concerned validate the procedures and rules of the site. I should have explained so to my superiors. My reaction was not adapted, which I regret'. (R9, M, 62, IS project manager, military)
	'When analyzing the reasons for this inaction, I note that I did not want to project a bad image of myself by putting an end to an advantageous job for a father with a large family. I got caught in a spiral where I felt more and more guilty, which prevented me from making the right decisions I was responsible for. I let things develop without taking a decision, whereas this was my role as a team leader'. (R21, F, 34, data center manager, IT)
Prospective sensemaking about future situations	'I think I can talk about ethical emancipation! It will be useful to me in the way I deal with future issues and moral dilemmas, while making things more simple'. (R6, M, 28, electronic document manager, bank)
	'In the future, when I find myself confronted with an ethical issue, I will evaluate my options before taking a decision, while taking into consideration not only whether they fit my convictions, but also whether they are disadvantageous to me or not'. (R17, M, 38, project manager, audiovisual)
	'Thanks to the open-mindedness I gained during the course and the capacity to identify situations where ethics are at stake, I would not do the same thing again – but we learn from our mistakes'. (R18, M, 32, quality manager, boilermaking)

concrete organizational settings. As Freire (2021) explains: 'Thinking critically about practice, of today or yesterday, makes possible the improvement of tomorrow's practice'. Our data confirms Freire's dictum. Sensemaking helped participants to develop their capacity to conceptualize their learning. It also apparently stimulated their will to make use of it in future settings.

This last point is important. One persistent issue in BE teaching concerns the staying power of course-induced behavioral changes. Prior research has shown that individuals may not evolve in their EJ ability in a durable way without questioning their previous EJs and decisions, along with a willingness to engage in a deep personal transformation concerning their moral values and identity (Giacalone & Thompson, 2006; Gu & Neesham, 2014; Schneider et al., 2010). Our findings support this assertion, with the additional comforting insight that the observed changes may be more than passing, as testified by the richness and depth of the post-course accounts. By pulling

together a renewed judgment of a previously experienced situation, a reflective judgment of one's previous judgment and actions, and prospective sensemaking regarding future situations, these accounts set a strong base for more ethically conscious future behavior.

Admittedly, this outcome should be considered with caution. Previous studies have shown that this type of self-questioning is particularly difficult to achieve, as individuals are poor judges of themselves and tend to perceive themselves as more ethical than they really are (Messick & Bazerman, 1996; Tenbrunsel et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, this study demonstrates that the process of ethical progress can be stimulated by joining three transformative ingredients: self-reflection on one's experience, exposure to clarifying ethical concepts, and the benefits of sharing and discussing other people's experiences. Our findings do not stand alone and can also be viewed as a complement to existing BE teaching methods that seek to induce sustainable

transformation of individuals, such as personal development and meditation exercises (Schneider et al., 2010), or identity-based exercises (Gu & Neesham, 2014).

Ethical judgment change unpacked via sensemaking

Although we built our sensemaking perspective on prior work (Sonenshein, 2007; Mumford et al., 2008; Thiel et al., 2012), we took it one step further. A key contribution of our study is the development of an original processual model to grasp EJ change over time. This model specifies four sense-remaking processes: complexifying, conceptualizing, reprioritizing, and contextualizing. Overall, it corroborates some of the processes previous studies identified and complements them in several ways.

At first glance, our sense-remaking processes seem to partially overlap with the sensemaking strategies Mumford and co-authors (2008) as well as Thiel and co-authors (2012) developed: framing, regulating emotions, forecasting, self-reflection, integrating information. However, a closer scrutiny demonstrates a number of differences.

As discussed earlier, complexifying means that participants incorporated and articulated new cues (Weick, 1979; Weick, 1995) in their final account that they had not considered in their initial round of sensemaking. Its function is to take into account the intricacies of the ethical issue under consideration more finely. This enrichment includes the different ethical principles at stake, the prevailing conflicts of interest, the various consequences of actions, the diversity of the stakeholders impacted, and similar factors. It can be related to the concept of information integration, which Thiel and co-authors (2012) defined as a process in which additional information is integrated into mental models. Although helpful, Thiel's concept remains too general for us. It describes broad sensemaking processes that can be applied to any situation. In contrast, complexifying relates more specifically to ethical issues. We propose that it is therefore more directly useful for BE teaching.

What we called conceptualizing means developing an abstract view of a situation by considering it through theoretical principles and established schemas. It provides new frameworks to bring order to the sometimes baffling number of cues that can emerge from a complex situation (Vidaillet, 2003; Weick, 1979). Conceptualizing can therefore be related to framing, which Mumford and co-authors (2008) describe as defining the exact nature of the problem at hand, namely recognizing that a situation involves significant ethical aspects. The difference now goes the other way. Conceptualizing allows a broader and more comprehensive conception of ethical issues than framing. It takes into account that a situation can both involve several ethical problems and be connected to influential non-ethical dimensions. Accordingly, in dealing with real-life situations, conceptualization seems to us to be a more adequate concept than framing.

Our model of sense-remaking also includes a new concept: What we called reprioritizing has not been identified in previous research. Reprioritizing means revising the salience of certain elements of the pre-course account, recasting some as less and others as more important than previously believed. This process eventually leads to a new hierarchy among these elements. It can also be related to the concept of cognitive frames (Weick, 1995) mentioned above, but there is an important addition. People who face ethical dilemmas often have to deal with conflicting commitments, and need to set or reset priorities (Nizet et al., 2021) to find an acceptable outcome. In the context of EJ, which involves a maze of heterogeneous elements, the process of reprioritizing is therefore particularly relevant and should be highlighted.

Our last process, contextualizing, is also based on the construction of revised cognitive frames. It means amending a judgment by considering the ethical issue under inspection in a broader view than before, taking into consideration concrete elements that had been ignored, instead of relying solely on preconceived or general principles. Through this process, some contextual elements gain a new status and become fundamental characteristics of the situation under judgment. This inductive kind of reasoning sharply contrasts with the top-down environment of many BE courses, where students are trained to apply theoretical principles to a given context. Our results add weight to a growing perspective in BE which, in contrast with normative conceptions, considers ethics as always situated and contextual in character (Clegg et al., 2007).

Sense-remaking: a new concept to highlight reconstructive processes

Finally, our study allows us to contribute to the field of sensemaking by proposing the concept of sense-remaking. Most work on sensemaking centers on people making sense of a situation as it unfolds (Reinecke & Ansari, 2015; Weick, 1979; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). In contrast, we asked participants to make sense of ethical issues that were part of their past experience and had stopped unfolding. The difference is significant.

In our study, sensemaking is not based on an experience in progress, but on the recollection of a personal experience from the past that cannot be changed. Given this difference, we propose the concept of sense-remaking to describe the sensemaking process through which people retrospectively make sense of a situation that is in the past. Few authors have studied sensemaking from such a perspective. One exception is a study by Boudes and Laroche (2009) that addressed how sensemaking was collectively reconstructed through reports

after a major crisis. This suggests that sense-remaking can be useful for investigating situations other than those of BE teaching. Overall, we posit that sense-remaking represents a novel sensemaking-related process (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014) albeit one specific to recollection processes. That specificity alone warrants further research.

Remarkably, this decoupling of experiencing and making sense of a situation is compatible not only with the retrospective aspects of sensemaking, but also with its future-oriented dimensions (Gephart et al., 2010; Weick et al., 2005). As we saw, the post-course account generated prospective sensemaking when participants projected themselves in future situations. We now view prospective sense-remaking as a legitimate answer to the call of Weick et al. (2005) for restating sensemaking in ways that make it more future-oriented. This leap forward can for example be elicited by a sort of 'now what?' question. Paradoxically, the future-oriented aspects of sensemaking are not directly linked to a current situation. Rather, they evolve from earlier changes in cognitive schemes that lead to further sensemaking processes. Here lies another avenue for future inquiry.

Finally, we pointed out that the literature repeatedly mentions real-time sensemaking as often based on intuition and infused with emotion (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Sonenshein, 2007; Weick et al., 2005). This was largely verified in our pre-course accounts, although they were not produced in real time. In contrast, it is worth recalling that our post-course accounts exhibited less emotionally driven sensemaking and more rational reasoning than the pre-course accounts. Researching this issue may have fruitful managerial implications in fields other than pedagogy, for example in strategic management, where emotions have been shown to be influential (Brundin et al., 2022).

Conclusion

Our study has revealed that a sensemaking perspective on EJ could improve understanding of the mechanisms through which a BE course can change students' judgment. It focused on the processes underlying this change and proposes a new model to account for them. Our conclusions must however be considered in their context, pointing the way to new directions.

Being inductive, this study did not seek to measure the relative weight of the processes underlying the various forms of sense-remaking. It also did not devise control groups to systematically isolate the factors that could influence these processes, and determine the direct effect of the course on the findings. It is very likely that the changes we observed in EJ were generated by the course as well as by a conjunction of factors beyond the classroom content alone. These include interaction with other people (classmates, lecturer, colleagues, family members), gaining experience (personal or professional) over the duration of the course, individual reflection, off-course conceptual inputs, personal traits or previous experience with other ethical issues. Further research can reveal to what extent course and non-course elements influence the sensemaking mechanisms at play. It would then be possible to draw on specific sets of these influences to design stronger courses that will be more likely to yield lasting EJ change.

Our study was conducted with an audience of adults in executive education who have work experience. What we attempted with this population may not be as productive with younger learners with little or no work experience. Another limitation is that our course was given in the depersonalized context of a university environment, where participants could freely engage about ethical matters that sometimes verge on the personal. It may not be replicable in a corporate training setting, where participants are entangled in webs of power and career considerations that may stifle the spontaneity of interpersonal exchanges.

Nevertheless, we believe the course was a catalyst for the observed changes. It forced participants to engage in a reflective process by writing about past experiences and discussing them. In our view, it is reasonable to credit some influence of the course on the processes set in motion. One may even surmise that the course at least partially fulfilled its mission, if only for a limited time: bringing practicing managers to a higher level of appreciation of ethical issues in the workplace, as well as fostering a willingness to act accordingly in the future.

There is no absolute consensus on the efficacy of BE education. Nonetheless, we concur with authors like Baker (2014, p. 520), who reminds us that 'attitudinal changes are possible, especially those specifically related to moral behavior, given the appropriate type of instruction and reinforcement'. We also understand that no classroom experience – whether or not it is buttressed by experiences outside the classroom – can guarantee that students will permanently change their ethical behavior, particularly in the context of today's cutthroat business environment and floating ethics. Yet, as educators, we believe in the power of instruction to change minds, and hopefully behaviors. In this respect, we hope that the pedagogical approach in this action research can inspire innovation in all types of teaching.

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