

Teaching Perspective Taking: Why It's Important—How It Might Be Done

Todd Steen and Steve VanderVeen
Department of Economics, Management, and Accounting
Hope College, P. O. Box 9000, Holland, MI, 49422-9000
616-395-7580, steen@hope.edu, vanderveen@hope.edu

I. Introduction

In the mission statements of many Christian colleges is a phrase indicating commitment to the idea of preparing students to engage culture and change the world. To engage culture and change the world, however, requires the development of effective leaders (those who do the right thing) (Bennis and Nanus, 2003, p. 20). The ability to do the right thing, both in terms of effectiveness and ethics, is enhanced by the ability to take the perspective of others.

In the story of creation we can infer that God created us to live in community. At the same time, he endowed each of us with unique gifts (endowments, inclinations), talents (abilities), and experiences to share with others (see, for example, I Corinthians 12:4ff). In order for us to share knowledge with others, we must be able to take the perspective of others. Analogies supporting this proposition abound. For example, the Apostle Paul was better able to share the Gospel with both Jews and Romans because he was able to take their perspective. In order for us to learn from others, another story comes to mind: the proverbial “blind men” confronting the “elephant.” Living in community as both leaders and followers requires that we have the ability to understand the perspectives of others.

Current business theory indicates that perspective taking is an important skill for aspiring leaders to have (see, for example, Goleman 1995; Goleman, Boyatzis, and

McKee, 2002). This is particularly true for students at Christian colleges who feel called to the holy agenda of engaging and transforming culture in the pursuit of shalom, or the “webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight” (Plantinga, 2002, pp. 14; see also Wolterstorff, 2004). To pursue shalom requires that leaders engage culture and, if they follow a servant leadership model (Greenleaf, 1977), it means not only that they must lead, it also means they must lead by serving. To serve, to lead, and to engage culture requires the skill of perspective taking.

Serving, leading, and engaging culture requires not only the skill of perspective taking, it also requires a moral compass. Here, then, is the “rub.” Does providing future leaders, our students, with a moral compass in some way prohibit their ability to take the perspective of others? Does the socialization of Christian friends and intellectual training from a particular Christian perspective cause students to develop ethnocentric blinders? Is it possible that faculty who focus so much on teaching students the right answer fail to develop in them the skill to understand the answers that others can offer?

This paper examines the importance of perspective taking and how it might be done. The first section reports on a study measuring the importance of perspective taking. The second section reports on a study measuring the relationship between perspective taking and a type of Christian socialization that is present at Christian colleges. The third section focuses on a pedagogical strategy and tactics for teaching perspective taking and gives examples for a marketing management class and a labor economics class.

II. Measuring the Importance of Emotional Intelligence and Perspective Taking

We believe that perspective taking is an important skill for the development of true Christian servant leadership. This skill is related to the literature on both moral action and the literature on empathy. Moral action consists of four components: (1) moral sensitivity, (2) moral judgment, (3) moral motivation, and (4) moral character (for example, see Rest and Narvaez, 1994). Moral sensitivity includes sensitivity to the welfare of others and can be learned through socialization processes (Bebeau, Rest, and Yamoor, 1985). Sensitivity to the welfare of others is related to the concept of empathy.

The concept of empathy is consists of two dimensions: perspective taking (cognitive dimension) and emotional contagion (affective dimension) (Sparks and Hunt, 1998, p. 96). Interestingly, while college experiences have been found to have a significant impact on students' moral reasoning, vocational disciplines such as business and education have had less impact (McNeel, 1994, p. 34). We think this finding is related to students' inability to take the perspective of others. Perspective taking is related to moral sensitivity in that "the ability and willingness to assume cognitively another person's perspective would seem to facilitate the recognition of acts that harm others" (Sparks and Hunt, 1998, p. 96).

While the cognitive dimension of empathy finds support in the literature on moral action, the affective dimension of empathy finds much current support in the literature on emotional intelligence. For instance, emotional intelligence has been defined as:

the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions in us and in our relationships. EI describes

abilities distinct from, but complementary to academic intelligence or the purely cognitive capacities measured by IQ (Hay Group, 2005).

In other words, to be an emotionally intelligent leader requires that one be able to feel what others feel. If one can feel what others feel (that is, be socially aware), be aware of one's own emotions, manage those emotions, and manage the emotions of others, one will be an effective leader (Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, 2002).

Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis

If it is true that being socially aware (empathetic) contributes positively to leadership effectiveness and perspective taking is related to moral sensitivity, we expect that there is a predictive relationship between both the cognitive and affective dimensions of empathy and employee assessment of leadership effectiveness. At least two studies support the direction of our hypothesis. For instance, Rosenthal (1977, as reported in Cherniss, 2000, p. 7) determined that people who were best able to identify others' emotions were more successful at work (affective dimension of empathy). In addition, a study of retail shoppers discovered that they value sales people who could listen well and understand what they desired and were concerned about (Pilling and Eroglu, 1994, as reported in Cherniss, 2000, p. 7) (cognitive dimension of empathy). Therefore, we hypothesize that, across a number of firms, level of perceived empathy will predict the level of perceived leadership effectiveness.

Methodology and Results

Because we are concerned with developing effective leaders who will engage culture and change the world, we looked initially at the literature on emotional intelligence for guidance. Unfortunately, the science on emotional intelligence is in its infant stage, meaning that scientifically developed scales for measuring emotional intelligence competences are not generally available. To develop such a scale, we initiated a five-stage process. First, we began by using questions generated from a personal emotional quotient test available on the World Wide Web (see Telecolonline, 2005). This test consisted of 51 questions related to the four general emotional intelligence competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.

Second, we converted the scale used in this personal emotional quotient test into a Likert scale.¹ We then tested this revised scale on 40 undergraduates. The resulting data was subjected to a factor analysis. Using a varimax rotation, four components with eigenvalues of at least 1.00 were discovered. The first factor related to a composite of emotional intelligence competencies. The second factor related to whether the leader could be trusted, the third factor related to whether the leader was persuasive visually and verbally, and the fourth factor related to whether the leader held herself/himself accountable. Using these results, and choosing only those questions with a correlation value of .70 or higher, the number of questions was reduced from 51 to 20.

In the third part of the process, we developed a survey using this 20-item scale. The survey was then distributed to employees of four organizations. The organizations were chosen due to convenience: the surveys were administered under the auspices of a

¹ A Likert scale is one in which each question is a statement and respondents are asked to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement on a 5-point scale.

“marketing audit” (Kotler, Gregor, and Rodgers, 1977) which was being performed by business undergraduates at a Midwestern Christian college as part of their normal course work.² In addition, the survey instrument was distributed to students to help assess the effectiveness of their team leaders in the marketing audit process. Ninety-six completed surveys were returned: six from day care center employees, 12 from golf course employees, 18 from a mechanical contractor, 33 from utility employees, and 28 from students.

Fourth, we subjected the data collected from the surveys to another factor analysis and varimax rotation, yielding four components with eigenvalues greater than 1.00. The factors indicated by this analysis were exactly the same as those found in the previous study. Again, only the questions that yielded a correlation of .70 or more were kept. Consequently, the number of questions on the resulting survey was reduced to 10 from 20 questions. Once again, the first factor related to a composite of emotional intelligence competencies. The questions relating to the specific emotional intelligence competence of empathy were as follows:

- He/She is attentive to the feelings of others (emotional empathy)
- He/She is sensitive to the others’ perspectives (cognitive empathy)

Finally, we combined these two questions to form a scale for measuring the perceived empathy of formal leaders. To test the internal consistency reliability, or homogeneity, of the items in our scale of our empathy scale, we subjected it to a Cronbach’s analysis. The Cronbach’s coefficient alpha splits the items on the scale into

² The fact that the survey was administered as part of a marketing audit explains why the Likert scale was chosen. The Likert scale allows for comparisons over time, or longitudinal studies (Cooper and Schindler, 2003, p. 253). Ideally, marketing audits are repeated every five years and the hope is that students can use pre- and post scores to see the effects of recommendations.

two halves and measures how well the two halves correlate by taking the average of all possible split halves. A score of 0.6 or lower is deemed unacceptable. The highest possible score is 1.0 (see Cooper and Schindler, 2003, p. 239 and Malholtra, 1993, p. 308). The Cronbach's coefficient alpha for our two-item measure of empathy was 0.93, suggesting that our two item measure of empathy was internally consistent and reliable.

Using the data generated from this scale as an independent measure, we estimated an equation to predict the formal leaders' perceived effectiveness. The dependent measure was captured in the statement: "The formal leader of this organization (team) is effective." We found that our measure of empathy was a significant predictor of perceived leadership effectiveness. The results are presented below.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.779(a)	.606	.602	.64762

a Predictors: (Constant), EMPATHY

ANOVA(b)

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	59.448	1	59.448	141.740	.000(a)
	Residual	38.586	92	.419		
	Total	98.035	93			

a Predictors: (Constant), EMPATHY

b Dependent Variable: The formal leader of this organization is effective

Coefficients(a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.340	.158		2.148	.034
	EMPATHY	.821	.069	.779	11.905	.000

a Dependent Variable: The formal leader of this organization is effective

According to the model, there is a highly significant positive influence of a leaders' perceived empathy on perceived leadership effectiveness. Thus, our hypothesis that, across a number of firms and student groups, perceived empathy will predict perceived leadership effectiveness was confirmed. Even when we split the sample between firms and student groups, the results held. In the following section, we examine how the socialization process can affect the ability to empathize among students. Specifically, we will examine how socialization at Christian colleges can predict the (in)ability to take the perspective of others.

III. Measuring the Importance of Perspective Taking and Christian Socialization

The previous section of the paper demonstrated that perspective taking and emotional empathy combine to be a very strong predictor of perceived leadership effectiveness. In this section of the paper, we show that there is a relationship between perspective taking and a type of Christian socialization that occurs at Christian colleges. As noted above, Sparks and Hunt (1998, p. 96) divide the concept of empathy into two dimensions: emotional and cognitive. Emotional empathy is “induced by the emotions of others,” while cognitive empathy is essentially “perspective taking.”

Like Sparks and Hunt (1998), we consider at least two dimensions of socialization: organizational socialization and professional socialization. Organizational socialization is “the process by which a person learns the values, norms, and behaviors that permit him [or her] to function as a member of the organization” (Van Maanen, 1976, p. 67). Professional socialization is a similar process; it is “the degree to which

people learn the norms and values of their profession” (Sparks and Hunt, 1998, p. 96). Professional socialization is believed to begin in college.

Sparks and Hunt (1998), while testing correlations between socialization and ethical sensitivity and perspective-taking and ethical sensitivity, inadvertently found a negative correlation (though not significant) between professional socialization (years of formal ethics training in college) and perspective taking. Because they found this negative correlation inadvertently, they offered no explanation for the finding. Yet we believe that the more years of formal ethics training students have in college, the more ethnocentric they may become because students are likely forming their own ethical framework that leads to the unintended development of ethnocentric blinders.

We believe that in a Christian college, another type of socialization takes place—Christian socialization. Christian socialization is the degree to which people learn the norms and values of living the Christian life. These values are transferred to students in a number of ways. For example, socialization can occur through interactions with Christian friends and in courses that teach students about ethics. Because Christian socialization may have an even more narrowing effect on students, we hypothesize that level of Christian socialization will predict the (in)ability of students to take the perspective of others.

Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis

We theorize that the amount of Christian socialization students engage in is negatively related to the perceived ability to take the perspective of others and that the level of Christian socialization can be used to predict the ability of students to take the

perspective of others. This is because ethics training from a particular Christian perspective and socializing with Christian friends tends to make people more confident that there is a right perspective to make moral assessments and this has the effect of giving them ethnocentric blinders. In other words, the more students become socialized to a Christian way of thinking, the less they will be cognitively empathetic. To test this relationship we will use the perspective-taking scale developed and tested by Sparks and Hunt (1998).

Methodology and Results

Sparks and Hunt (1998) measured the perceived ability to take the perspective of others using a Likert scale in conjunction with the following statements:

- When discussing a point of disagreement with someone, I try to see his or her point of view
- Generally, I find it easy to see things from the other person's perspective
- I am good at putting myself in other peoples' shoes
- I am usually able to understand why people do and say the things they do (Sparks and Hunt, 1998, p. 99)

We adopted the Sparks and Hunt (1998) survey and scales in an attempt to replicate their findings and test our hypothesis. Thus, to their survey we added our own questions for measuring Christian socialization. We attempted to capture the concept of Christian socialization using the following two statements:

- A majority of my friends are Christians
- I have learned a lot in my ethics classes at _____.

We administered the modified Sparks and Hunt (1998) survey to 55 business undergraduates in a Midwestern Christian college. We subjected both the Sparks and Hunt scale for measuring perspective taking and our scale for measuring Christian

socialization to the Cronbach's coefficient alpha test for internal consistency reliability. Our results indicate that both scales are deemed moderately reliable: the Sparks and Hunt (1998) perspective taking scale had a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of 0.72 and our Christian socialization scale had a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of 0.69. (A Cronbach's coefficient alpha of 0.72 is somewhat low for a four-item scale.)

Using the data generated from this Christian socialization scale as an independent measure, we estimated an equation to predict the ability of students to take the perspective of others. We found that our measure of Christian socialization was negatively related, but only significant at the 10% level. The results are presented below.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.240(a)	.058	.040	.89430

a Predictors: (Constant), Christian socialization

ANOVA(b)

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.588	1	2.588	3.235	.078(a)
	Residual	42.388	53	.800		
	Total	44.976	54			

a Predictors: (Constant), Christian socialization

b Dependent Variable: Perspective taking ability (4 item scale)

Coefficients(a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	5.747	.591		9.730	.000
	Christian socialization	-.202	.112	-.240	-1.799	.078

a Dependent Variable: Perspective taking ability (4 item scale)

However, given that the Sparks and Hunt four-item measure was only moderately reliable, we reduced that scale to only two items, even though scales with fewer items are usually less reliable. Using only the two statements “Generally, I find it easy to see things from the other person’s perspective” and “I am good at putting myself in other peoples’ shoes”), the Cronbach’s coefficient alpha increased to a more reliable 0.85 in the estimated regression equation. This yielded the following results.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.281(a)	.079	.061	1.09636

a Predictors: (Constant), Christian socialization

ANOVA(b)

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.446	1	5.446	4.531	.038(a)
	Residual	63.706	53	1.202		
	Total	69.152	54			

a Predictors: (Constant), Christian socialization

b Dependent Variable: Perspective taking (2 item scale)

Coefficients(a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	6.323	.724		8.731	.000
	Christian socialization	-.294	.138	-.281	-2.129	.038

a Dependent Variable: Perspective taking (2 item scale)

Thus, using a scale with higher reliability, we found a predictive relationship between level of Christian socialization and perspective taking ability. We remain confident that our theory that the more Christian socialization students have, the less able they will be able to take the perspective of others is confirmed. We feel that we have a legitimate concern that Christian friends and intellectual training from a particular Christian perspective may help students develop ethnocentric blinders. This may occur because students may be taught by and make friends with people much like themselves in terms of the characteristics of moral action: (1) moral sensitivity, (2) moral judgment, (3) moral motivation, and (4) moral character (for example, see Rest and Narvaez, 1994). We wonder, then, if we, as faculty, are focusing so much on teaching students the right answer that we fail to develop in them the skill to understand the answers that others have to offer. In other words, we may be focusing too much on a good thing. While we are giving students a biblical foundation for moral action that will help them engage culture and change the world, we may also be taking from them some of their potential to lead cultural change.

IV. Teaching Perspective Taking

Using a scale that combined emotional empathy and cognitive empathy (perspective taking), our hypothesis that perceived empathy will predict perceived leadership effectiveness was confirmed. In addition, our hypothesis that level of Christian socialization will predict the (in)ability of students to take the perspective of others was also confirmed. We believe our findings are poignant in the context of Christian higher education. This is because we believe the goal of Christian higher

education is to help students engage and transform culture in the pursuit of shalom, or the “webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight (Plantinga, 2002, pp. 14). If students are to become servant leaders, then they need to develop the skill of perspective taking.

We now turn to addressing how we as faculty at Christian colleges might better teach the ability to take the perspective of others. We focus the discussion on strategies and tactics for teaching perspective taking and give examples for a marketing management class and a labor economics class.

Teaching Perspective Taking in a Marketing Management Class

One pedagogical strategy for enhancing the skill of perspective taking is “perspectival learning.” The “perspectival” learning strategy can teach students to see phenomena not only from various points of view, but also from various worldviews. It does this by asking students to think about the assumptions, concepts, models, and theories used by decision-makers. By “seeing phenomena from various perspectives” (VanderVeen and Smith, 2005), students learn to “identify, frame, and readdress issues” (Eyler and Giles, 1999, p. 99). Not only are students then able to think critically, they are able to think logically, for each theory has its own internal theoretical logic and external theoretical application. To implement the pedagogical strategy of “perspectival” learning in a marketing management class, the following tactics can be used: case studies in a strategic marketing management text to see things from different points of view, case studies in a business ethics text, a consulting project, and a movie to see things from different worldviews.

Appropriate case studies allow students to see phenomena from different points of view. For instance, the cases in *Strategic Marketing Management* (Kerin and Peterson, 2004) typically have points of view from among the following: upper management, lower management, consultants, marketing people, sales people, finance people, market research people, advertising people, etc. Although colleges and universities use the Kerin and Peterson text in a variety of ways, it can be used specifically to enhance the skill of perspective taking. For example, when considering these conflicting points of view, students can be asked to consider the following questions: (1) What assumptions is Person A making? Is this assumption appropriate? (2) What theory is Person A using? Is this theory appropriate, given the assumptions? (3) How is Person A applying this theory? Is this application appropriate?

In addition to implementing “perspectival” learning through strategic marketing management case studies, “perspectival” learning can be implemented through small cases and exercises from a book on business ethics called *Just Business* (Hill, 1998). This allows students to see things not only from different worldviews: Christian, a-Christian, and non-Christian, but also from different Christian points of view, such as “accommodating” (“Christ and culture”), “transforming” (“Christ transforming culture”), or “separating” (“Christ against culture”), following Niebuhr’s (1951) seminal framework. Hill, for example, takes a Christian worldview and a transforming point of view, arguing Christians must engage culture and that business and communication phenomena must be judged according to a holiness, justice, and love framework. Hill’s book facilitates, then, a discussion that goes much deeper than what is possible with the

Kerin and Peterson text. Such a discussion not only teaches perspective taking, it also grounds perspective taking in the notion of shalom.

A third medium for implementing perspectival learning in a marketing management course consists of examining the movie *The Big Kahuna*.³ This movie presents students with three points of view of what it means to engage in the selling function, each of which correlate with different underlying assumptions about who God is. One character (Larry), believes one should use conversations about Jesus to sell industrial lubricants, while his opposite (Bob) believes one should use conversations about industrial lubricants (or dogs, or family) to make converts for Christ. The third character (Phil) is either confused or ambivalent, and says that to be human (as opposed to being a marketing rep!), one should just talk to people, as if one could do that without having an agenda. The movie, then, not only exposes students to three different points of view, but three different worldviews each with assumptions about who God is and what it means to be a “marketing rep.” Like Hill’s book, the movie can be used not only to teach students about Christian, a-Christian, and non-Christian worldviews, but also to teach students about various Christian points of view (accommodating, transforming, separating). Furthermore, it allows faculty to ground perspective taking in shalom. For example, faculty could ask students to consider how Bob’s role would be different if he were trying to transform culture in the pursuit of shalom. By exposing students to these different worldviews, students better understand the characters in the movie and why they act the way they do, and are forced to examine their own deeply held beliefs about marketing and sales.

³ In *The Big Kahuna* Larry (Kevin Spacey), Phil (Danny DeVito) and Bob (Peter Facinelli) are three Midwestern businessmen at crucial stages of their lives. (www.hollywoodjesus.com).

Finally, in addition to analyzing marketing management cases, ethics-related cases, and characters in a movie, perspectival learning can be implemented through consulting projects such as performing a "marketing audit" (Kotler, Gregor, and Rodgers, 1977, pp. 25-43) for a local organization. This type of project exposes students to various constituents reflecting various points of view, including Christian, a-Christian, and non-Christian worldviews.

Teaching Perspective Taking in a Labor Economics Class

Perspective taking can also be taught in a labor economics class, which serves either as an elective or a required course for many business and management majors. The study of labor economics brings the power of microeconomic models to bear on human behavior in a number of areas relevant to the labor market. Topics such as discrimination, immigration, and labor unions provide ample possibilities to integrate perspectival learning into the curriculum.

Although many classroom situations are not diverse with respect to race and ethnicity, most have both a substantial number of men and women. This facilitates the use of perspective taking in a variety of ways. For example, when looking at models of labor supply, it is useful to examine the influence of family ties on an individual's supply of labor to the market. Students can be asked how they would model individual labor supply behavior if they were a husband, a wife, or a single parent. This exercise can suggest to students that economic models need to carefully consider family structure, while simultaneously enhancing the development of perspective taking. Another method is to have students examine data on wages by gender or employment rates by gender in

specific professions. Students can then develop theories to explain where these differences come from based on the perspectives of either men or women. Students can be required to argue “the opposite side” from their gender point of view, and then also have the opportunity to read different authors’ perspectives on these matters.

Another topic that allows the teaching of perspective taking is that of immigration. The class can be broken down into groups representing all the different parties in the immigration process: immigrants, businesses in both the sending and receiving countries, workers in both the sending and receiving countries, and consumers in both the sending and receiving countries. After an examination of the economic “winners and losers” from immigration, these groups can negotiate and design what they believe would be appropriate policy solutions, each while taking the perspective of their assigned group.

A final example of teaching perspective taking in labor economics involves the study of labor unions. Most students have little knowledge of and little affection for unions. As students who are studying to become managers, they tend to take the management view of labor-management relations in almost every case. Setting up bargaining exercises or allowing students to form their own “union” for a day can enhance their ability to take the perspective of workers. Often times this exercise leads them to a view of labor-management relations as a realm of conflict or countervailing power. It is then useful to have students view the website of a Christian labor organization such as the Christian Labour Association of Canada (www.clac.ca) to be able to see the perspective of a labor organization based that is based on the goal of cooperation.

Overall, the teaching of perspective taking in a labor economics class should help students in developing their own sense of calling and vocation. Seeing the perspectives of others and their needs can lead students to incorporate these concerns when making career choices and actually carrying out their jobs. A useful resource for students in this area is Lee Hardy's *The Fabric of This World* (Eerdmans, 1990).

V. Conclusion

Perspective taking is an important skill for students to develop if they are to become leaders that can engage culture and change the world. This paper examines the importance of perspective taking and how it might be done. We find that perspective taking is a crucial factor in the effectiveness of leadership, and that Christian socialization may hamper students' abilities to take the perspective of others. Finally, we suggest some strategies and tactics for teaching perspective taking in management and economics classes. For Christian faculty in the fields of business and economics, it is crucial for us to consider our teaching methods and whether they enhance this important skill of perspective taking. In order to do this, we need to develop better assessment tools that measure whether our pedagogical strategies and tactics are leading us to the goals that we desire.

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