

## Path models for predicting prudential judgment And legal ability of educational managers

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### Key words

Prudential  
judgment, legal  
ability, path  
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orientation

*This study investigated the nature of prudential judgment and legal ability through value orientations, with a random sample of educational managers in selected colleges and universities. Prudential judgment has three value orientations: goodwill, justice, peace and order. Legal ability has two indicators: legalistic and non-legalistic. The correlations of prudential judgment and legal ability were assessed. Consequently, path models for predicting prudential judgment and legal ability were created through causal path analysis. The findings of the study are breakthroughs in the educational managers' professional development in school legislation and decision-making skills.*

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### Introduction

Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is laden with complexities, uncertainties, and differences of beliefs and values. In morally and legally controversial issues like war (Tadros, V., 2017), death penalty (Ricard, 2003), corporal punishment (Pope, C., 2016), and human rights (Dallmayr, 2002), the exercise of prudential judgment has been summoned in global perspectives. The ethical underpinning of decisions and actions anchored on prudential judgment is oftentimes a noble yet controversial subject of discourse.

In essence, prudential judgment has developed from the Catholic tradition in reference to the virtue of prudence. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, prudence is defined as the "virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it" (CCC # 1806). Citing the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, following Aristotle, prudence is "right reason in action...It is not to be confused with timidity or fear, nor with duplicity or dissimulation. It is called *auriga virtutum* (the charioteer of the virtues); it guides the other virtues by setting rule and measure. It is prudence that immediately guides the judgment of conscience..." (The American Catholic, 2012). Accordingly, prudential judgment is the application of prudence in a particular case or given situation in making judgment which is considered as a virtuous action, attuned to moral principles, based on the social teachings of the church, or intended to avoid evil and achieve good.

*Prudence is one of the four cardinal virtues and can be practiced by anyone (Richert, S.P., 2016). Consequently, prudential judgment disposes a person to deliberate cautiously and correctly what*

*measures or means to take in order to realize the exigencies of a value or end (Peschke, 1996). Bettineli (2003) considers prudential judgment as the application of moral teachings to concrete circumstances in the conviction of what is right or acceptable. However, the moral dimension has to contend with the legal aspects, too. In this regard, legal ability is premised on factual or intuitive knowledge and application of laws and legislations (Drake & Roe, 1994). The law may dictate or allow courses of actions while conscience may demand that people be treated in ways that are right rather than merely legal. In some cases, the judgment might be perfectly legal and apparently the right thing to do, but the reason behind the decision may be flawed (Shaughnessy, 2003).*

Culled from the Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas (Knight, 2003) and writings of Peschke (1996) and Zagzebski (1996), prudential judgment manifests three types of value orientations, namely: goodwill, justice, and peace and order. The goodwill orientation refers to kindly feelings and acts of charity and benevolent support and concern for others. On the other hand, justice orientation relates to aptness in judging what is right, just and equitable, and in seeking the truth. Lastly, peace and order orientation influences one to rest on what is truly good and to preserve the course of things, in the concord and union of appetitive movements and desires.

To satisfy the rudiments of both natural law and human law would involve hard decisions with high stakes and serious consequences. In the task of school administration, for instance, the educational manager is confronted with varying degrees of moral and legal dilemmas which call for prudential judgment and legal ability. School legislations and administrative cases illustrate difficult and complex situations that practically impinge on educational goals, legal precepts and moral justifications. Apparently, prudential judgment and legal ability have high premium in school administration.

Philippine schools share the same experiences with foreign counterparts in having the educational locus of control challenged by militant school constituencies, rising moral and ethical demands and expectations, and prevailing legal trends (Drake & Roe, 1994; Sarmiento, 2000). As such, it becomes imperative for educational managers to exercise prudential judgment and to acquire the legal ability to boost administrative authority (McNergney & Herbert, 1994) and minimize, if not totally avoid, the pitfalls of litigations arising from inappropriate decisions and actions. This is a fundamental and relevant concern in school administration which hitherto has lagged behind due to lack of empirical knowledge and resources. Hence, this present study is sought to analyze and predict the prudential judgment and legal ability of educational managers. Empirical studies on prudential judgment and legal ability are nil. Thus, this research addressed an obvious research gap. The extant literature closest to the present study deals with research on concepts and notions about judgment and decision-making

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The present study was aimed at the analysis and prediction of the prudential judgment and legal ability of educational managers. Specifically, it was designed to:

- 1) Determine the relationship, if any, between prudential judgment and legal ability; and
- 2) Construct causal models of prudential judgment and legal ability

## Methodology

The prudential judgment of educational managers was assessed in terms of their value orientations of goodwill, justice, peace and order. The legal ability of the subjects of study was assessed based on their knowledge and ability, or lack of knowledge or inability, to apply school legislations and legal precepts in the school cases and situations given. The respondents were categorized as legalistic or non-legalistic according to their knowledge and application of the law in school cases. The instrument on Legal Prudence Situational Test was floated to a random sample of 290 educational managers. The data gathered was subjected to statistical treatment and thereby analyzed. The path models for prudential judgment and legal ability were developed based on the hypothesized predictors, to wit: gender; age; educational attainment; civil status; length of service and experience; size of school; and legal adviser. Multiple regressions were used to provide estimates of the magnitude and significance of hypothesized causal connections between sets of variables (Pedhazur, 1982). The correlations are decomposed for interpretation of effects (Duane & Hauser, 1975). The path coefficient measures the extent of the effect of a variable on another in the path model (Everitt & Dunn, 1991). The input path diagram is drawn beforehand to represent the predicted causal connections. The output path diagram shows what is actually found in the statistical analysis (Webley, 1997). Path model analysis is used to identify the determinants of prudential judgment and legal ability.

## Results and Discussion

The correlations of prudential judgment (PJ) value orientations and legal ability (LA) were determined using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Accordingly, the following correlations were computed: PJ- goodwill and PJ-justice; PJ- goodwill and PJ- peace and order; PJ- justice and PJ- peace and order; PJ- goodwill and LA- non-legalistic; PJ- goodwill and LA- legalistic; PJ- justice and LA- non-legalistic; PJ- justice and LA- legalistic; PJ- peace and order and LA- non-legalistic; PJ -peace and order and LA- legalistic; LA- non-legalistic and LA - legalistic.

Prudential judgment is significantly correlated with legal ability ( $r = .743$ ). The three factors of prudential judgment (goodwill, peace and order, and justice) are also significantly correlated with the two factors of legal ability (legalistic and non-legalistic). Table 1 shows the significant inter-correlations of the factors of prudential judgment and legal ability.

**Table 1. Inter-correlations of Prudential Judgment and Legal Ability**

	Factor 1-A Prudential Judgment (Goodwill)	Factor 2-E Prudential Judgment (Justice)	Factor 3-C Prudential Judgment (Peace and Order)	Factor 4-B Legal Ability (Non-Legalistic)	Factor 5-D Legal Ability (Legalistic)
Factor 1 -A Prudential Judgment (Goodwill)	1.0000				
Factor 2 -E Prudential Judgment (Justice)	.4211*	1.0000			
Factor 3 - C Prudential Judgment (Peace and Order)	.4661*	.3962*	1.0000		
Factor 4 -B Legal Ability (Non-Legalistic)	.4783*	.2841*	.1300*	1.0000	
Factor 5 -D Legal Ability (Legalistic)	.3281*	.2938*	.5400*	.1351*	1.0000

\* significant ( $p \leq .05$ )

All the factors of prudential judgment and legal ability have significant relationships, at .05 level of significance. This means that the manifested inter-correlations among the factors are not due to chance even though the strength of the relationship ranges from moderate to weak. The correlation between PJ-peace and order and LA- legalistic is moderately strong, followed by PJ-goodwill and LA non-legalistic. A weak but nevertheless significant correlation is that of PJ-peace and order and LA non-legalistic.

The prediction of prudential judgment and legal ability was done through path analysis. The predictor variables were first subjected to simple correlation analysis so as to determine what variables are significantly correlated. As shown in table 2, not all variables are significantly correlated at .05 levels.

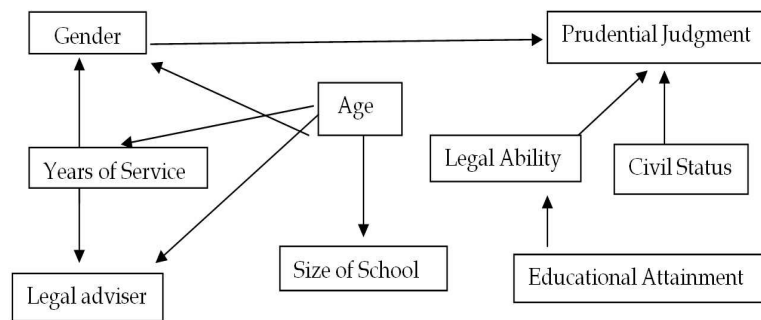
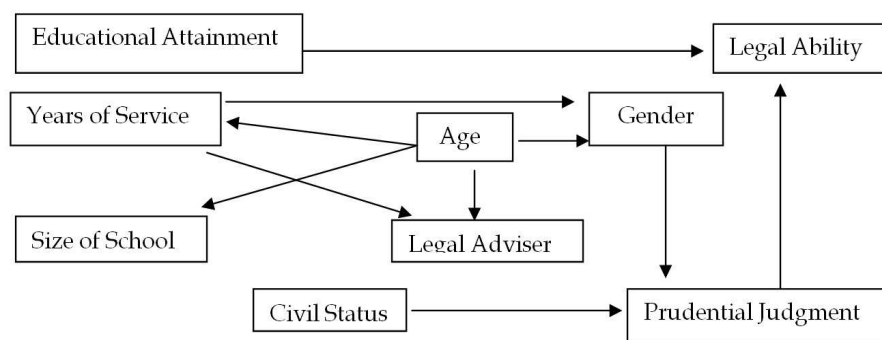
**Table 2. Inter-correlations of Variables**

	age	civil status	years of service	legal adviser	gender	educational attainment	size of school	prudential judgment	legal ability
Age	1.0000								
civil status	.0117	1.0000							
years of service	.7031*	-.0019	1.0000						
legal adviser	.2481*	.0907	.2704*	1.0000					
gender	-.1559*	.0542	-.1664*	-.0719	1.0000				
educational attainment	.0280	.0183	.0165	.0285	-.0410	1.0000			
size of school	.4873*	.0386	.5281	.0806	-.0147	.0735	1.0000		
prudential judgment	-.0656	-.1873*	-.0515	-.0828	.1287*	-.1034	-.0155	1.0000	
legal ability	.0381	-.0893	.0551	-.0249	-.0828	-.2131*	-.0220	.5584*	1.0000

\* significant ( $p \leq .05$ )

In stratifying the correlations of the variables, there is significant relationship between age with years of service, legal adviser, gender, and size of school. Civil status is significantly correlated with prudential judgment. There is also significant relationship between years of service with legal adviser and gender. There is significant correlation between gender and prudential judgment. Educational attainment is significantly correlated with legal ability. There is significant correlation between legal ability and prudential judgment.

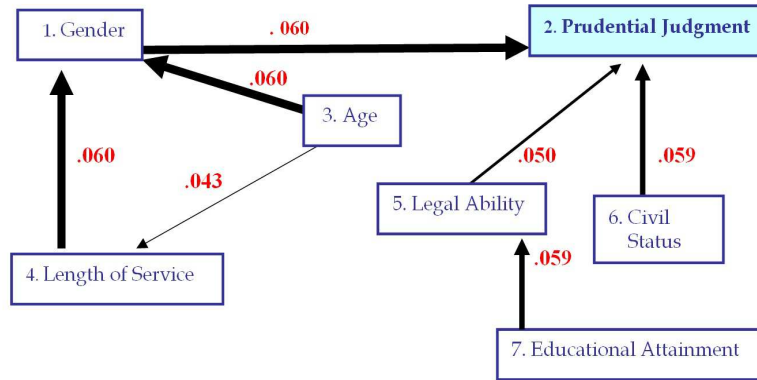
The significant relationships were considered as causal paths in the path models for prudential judgment and legal ability. Figures 1 and 2 chart out the hypothesized path models predictive of prudential judgment and legal ability. The input diagrams constructed for prudential judgment and legal ability were based on the results of the inter-correlations of the determinant factors.

**Figure 1. Input Diagram of Hypothesized Causal Connections in Prudential Judgment****Figure 2. Input Diagram of Hypothesized Causal Connections in Legal Ability**

The actual measure of the causal paths is reflected by the path coefficient as determined by computing the beta weight. Figures 1 and 2, map out the significant paths and causal connections in prudential judgment and legal ability, respectively. The output diagrams indicate the path coefficients and the probability estimates for each path. The size of the arrows suggests the extent of importance of the correlation, thus, the thicker the arrow the higher is the path coefficient.

Figure 3 shows the path model for prudential judgment. The dependent variable is prudential judgment and the independent variables are age, educational attainment, gender, civil status, years in service, and legal ability.

Figure 3. Output Diagram of Causal Connections in Prudential Judgment



In the path model in figure 3, gender, civil status, and legal ability have direct effects on prudential judgment. Based on its beta coefficient of .060, gender has the greatest influence on prudential judgment, followed by civil status ( $\beta = .059$ ) and legal ability ( $\beta = .050$ ). On the other hand, the following variables have indirect effects on prudential judgment: age, years of service, and educational attainment. In contrast, school size and having a legal adviser do not have significant effects on prudential judgment; hence these variables were excluded from the path diagram in figure 3.

Path analysis results particularly show that the length of service as administrator indirectly affects prudential judgment through the causal path to gender. In the case of age, its indirect effect on prudential judgment is through the causal path to years of service, then through gender. Lastly, the indirect effect of educational attainment on prudential judgment is through the causal path to legal ability.

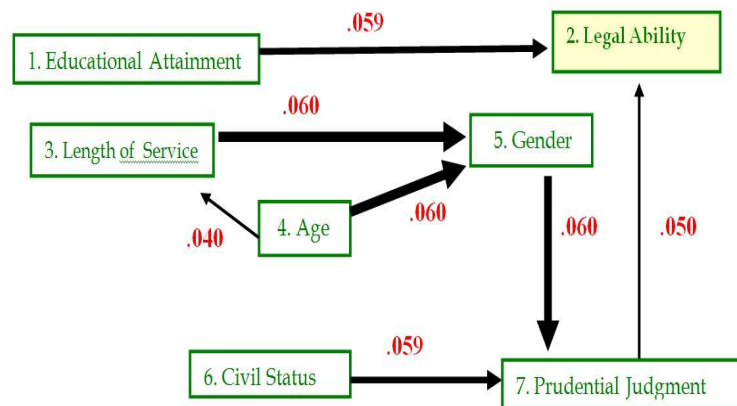
The structural equations and the computation of the direct, indirect, and total effects of the predictors are given in table 3.

Table 3. Computation of effects on prudential judgment path model

Path	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Equation
gender→PJ	.06	None	
age→gender	.06	.0026	$P13 = p43 \times p14$ $= .043 \times .060$ $= .00258$
age→PJ	None	.0042	$P23 = (p43 \times p14 \times p21) + (p13 \times p21)$ $= .043 \times .060 \times .060 + .060 \times .060$ $= .000155 + .0036$ $= .0002 + .004$ $= .0042$
age→service	.043	None	
service→PJ	None	.0036	$P24 = p14 \times p21$ $= .060 \times .060$ $= .0036$
service→gender	.06	None	
legal ability→PJ	.05	None	
civil status→PJ	.059	None	
educ'l attainment→PJ	None	.003	$P27 = p57 \times p25$ $= .059 \times .050$ $= .0029$
educ'l attainment→LA	.059	None	
			<b>Total Effect</b>
age→gender	.06	.00258	$P13 = .06 + .00258$ $= .0625$

The path model for legal ability is depicted in figure 4. The dependent variable is legal ability and the independent variables are age, educational attainment, gender, civil status, years in service, and legal ability.

Figure 4. Output Diagram of Causal Connections in Legal Ability



In the path model in figure 4, educational attainment and prudential judgment have direct effects on legal ability. Based on its beta coefficient of .059, educational attainment has the greater influence on legal ability. On the other hand, the following variables have indirect effects on legal ability: gender, civil status, age, and length of service as administrator. School size and having a legal adviser do not have significant effects on legal ability, hence, these variables were excluded in figure 4.

The results of path analysis show that gender and civil status indirectly affect legal ability through the causal path to prudential judgment. In the case of length of service, its indirect effect upon legal ability is through the causal path to gender, and then through prudential judgment. The indirect effect of age on legal ability is through the causal path to length of service, and then through gender, and through prudential judgment. The causal paths between gender and prudential judgment, years of service and gender, and age and gender have the highest path coefficient (.060). This is followed by the causal path between educational attainment and legal ability (.059), civil status and prudential judgment (.059), prudential judgment and legal ability (.050), and the lowest which is the causal path between age and years of service (.040). The greatest indirect effect on legal ability is caused by gender (.003). This was computed by multiplying the path coefficients of each path from gender to legal ability (.060x.050). The total effects of age on gender (.0624) refer to the sum of its direct and indirect effects (.060+ .0024).

Gender has been cited in literature and research as a differentiating factor in decision-making (Smith, 1999; Karakowky, 2001). In this present study, the male respondents are more justice-oriented as compared to their female counterparts but the latter are more oriented towards peace and order and more inclined to be non-legalistic. To probe into these gender-related differences in prudential judgment and legal ability profiles, the reasons can be helpful. It was observed that the reasoning of the female school administrators readily compromised

justice with mercy. Most of the women preferred to forgive, settle amicably, and give another chance to the offending student or teacher, rather than render drastic sanction. On the other hand, the men were more detached from feelings and rendered more objective judgment as governed by the school policies and mandate of the law. These observations are aligned with the results of studies in psychology and neuro-science that the female brain is predominantly hard-wired for empathy while that of the male brain is for understanding and building of systems (Cohen, 2004). As empathizer, women intuitively figure out how people are feeling, and how to treat people with care and sensitivity. Being predominantly systemiser, men explore how things work, or what are the underlying rules controlling a system. In psychological tests, women are better at decoding non-verbal communication, picking up subtle nuances from tone of voice or facial expression, or judging a person's character (Geary, 1998). Scientists claim that males have more activity in mechanical centers of the brain, whereas females show more activity in verbal and emotional centers. These gender differences influence leadership behavior (Cohen, 2005).

The structural equations and the computations of the direct, indirect, and total effects of the predictors of legal ability are shown in table 4.

Table 4. Computation of effects in legal ability path model

Path	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Equation
educ'l attainment→LA	.059	None	
age→length of service	.04	None	
age→LA	None	.0002	$P24 = (p54 \times p75 \times p27) + (p34 \times p53 \times p75 \times p27) = .060 \times .060 \times .050 + .040 \times .060 \times .060 \times .050 = .00018 + .0000072 = .00019$
gender→LA	None	.003	$P25 = p75 \times p27 = .060 \times .050 = .003$
service→gender	.060	None	
service→LA	None	.0002	$P23 = p53 \times p75 \times p27 = .060 \times .060 \times .050 = .00018$
gender→PJ	.06	None	
civil status→PJ	.059	None	
civil status→LA	None	.003	$P26 = p76 \times p27 = .059 \times .050 = .00295$
PJ→LA	.05	None	
age→gender	.06	.0024	<b>Total Effect</b> $P54 = .06 + .0024 = .0624$

The study yielded interesting and relevant findings. It provides evidence to support that prudential judgment and legal ability are significantly and positively correlated. Thus, the educational managers who exercise prudential judgment are also likely to possess legal ability. Consequently, the three core value orientations of prudential judgment (i.e., goodwill, justice, peace and order) are significantly correlated with the legalistic and non-legalistic approaches of resolving school cases. The findings of this study are real breakthroughs in the professional development of educational managers on school legislation which can boost administrative authority (McNergney & Herbert, 1994), strengthen the links between morality and legality in



decision-making (Knights, 2003), and encourage further research on the subject under investigation.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In the exercise of prudential judgment and legal ability by the educational managers, there was interplay of both cognitive and affective elements like personal and organizational value systems, knowledge and understanding, beliefs, emotions and sentiments, experience and training, and heuristics. Moreover, prudential judgment and legal ability can be predicted using path models. Gender, civil status, and legal ability can primarily predict prudential judgment while age, educational attainment, and length of service as administrator are secondary predictors. Legal ability can be predicted directly by educational attainment and prudential judgment, and indirectly by gender, age, length of service as administrator, and civil status.

Certainly, the enhancement of prudential judgment and legal ability can contribute to decision-making skills, implementation of school legislation and proper handling of school cases. To increase the utility value of the study, the following strategies are recommended: a) design a training program on prudential judgment and legal ability to help educational managers become more competent in administrative decision-making and school legislation; b) incorporate the principles and practice of prudential judgment and legal ability in the study of educational management and school leadership; and c) conduct seminar-workshops to enhance the value-orientations of prudential judgment, and harness legal ability.

### **Research Limitations and Direction for Further Research**

As starting point, the study is an eye opener that prudential judgment and legal ability are essential components of administrative decision-making. It is imperative that decisions concerning school matters are arrived at through careful deliberation and weighing of consequences, with due consideration of the moral, ethical and legal aspects involved, and impelled by positive value or desirable purpose.

There is a need, however, to extend the scope of the study into a bigger sample of educational managers covering both rural and urban schools. Aside from the school context, other areas and professions can be investigated as well. It is relevant to delve and probe into the exercise of prudential judgment of church leaders, political leaders, policy makers and legislators, economists and technocrats, healthcare managers and reformists, businessmen and industrialists, etc. Moreover, the path models predicting prudential judgment and legal ability can be validated, and other variables can be considered as probable predictors.

It would be interesting to conduct further research on the nature and implications of prudential judgment, and likewise ascertain the factors that affect or influence its value orientations.

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