

Business professor merges workplace research in class

Dan Moshavi is mad about his organizational behavior research at Dominican, and that's a good thing for his students.

Moshavi, recipient of the [Barowsky School of Business](#) Outstanding Teacher Award in 2015, specializes in this area of management, which deals with the complexity of human behavior in organizations and the roles that leaders, managers, and employees play in influencing that behavior. His particular interest in attitudes and emotions in the workplace is regularly incorporated into the classroom.

"I've become convinced that emotional engagement is one of the most important facets of student learning and performance," Moshavi says.

Moshavi knows what he is talking about. He has presented his organizational behavior-related research in a [TED Talk](#), plus more than [15 publications](#) and 40 conference presentations. He also appeared as a [guest on KGO Radio](#) in San Francisco on April 24 of this year to discuss the social psychology of the candidacy of presidential candidate Donald Trump.

Moshavi has wrapped his hands-on, engaged learning techniques into valuable lessons for students dealing with the ambiguous nature of the business world.

"I believe that engaged experiences that focus on attitudinal and emotional awareness nurture capabilities that can lead to new solutions and opportunities for action," he says. "Students learn to become more flexible and embrace surprise, allowing them to cope with the unpredictable — clearly valuable skills for today's managers."

For example, after a recent class, Moshavi introduced a typical change-related work issue first-hand to his students. Following an exam, Moshavi purposely walked into the next class acting distressed and upset, and scolded students for their test scores. He told the students they shared a mutual responsibility for the poor performance and that he was throwing out the syllabus and completely rethinking the structure of the class.

In actuality, Moshavi was creating a cause-and-effect lesson that supports his research. After his rant, he told the truth (that their exam performance was fine) and explained his intention.

"We did this little exercise so they could better understand what radical change feels like. After all, blowing up the structure of the class mid-semester feels pretty extreme to a student. However, every day in organizations, radical changes are made because firms or groups or individuals are underperforming," Moshavi says. "It was a rich and powerful discussion about change and emotion because their own emotions were front and center."

Through such faculty/student collaboration, it is Moshavi's aim to help students become better diagnosticians and determine the driving force behind 'people problems.'

"I can still clearly remember the first day Dan introduced the concept of emotional Intelligence in our class. His lesson was so intense, he was so knowledgeable and passionate about this topic and about the potential implications in human organizations, marketing, or even just in social interactions that I spent the whole evening thinking about that," says recent [Dominican MBA](#) graduate Adriano Pasculli de Angelis, who is working alongside Moshavi to present on the topic at a national conference this spring.

Some of Moshavi's most recent research focuses on attitudes and emotions in the physician-patient relationship. He believes that managing employee emotions is one of the most important things to consider when initiating any kind of organizational change.

"There's a lot of uncertainty among employees and therefore a lot of emotion, including anger, fear, anxiety and frustration," Moshavi says. "We tend to think about emotions as either positive or negative, but

in fact, emotions are quite complex. Anger is a great example. Most of us conceive of anger as a negative emotion, but it has some significant upsides. There's solid evidence which suggests it can increase optimism, enhance creativity, and make people more willing to accept risk."

There is also evidence that suggests Moshavi is making an impact on his students.

"Dan was my true mentor, someone I truly admire and respect, someone I will consider my professor forever because he taught me an incredible amount of very advanced knowledge," says Pasculli de Angelis, a businessman from Italy who came to Dominican to earn his MBA. "I think when he's in class, he doesn't want only to make it a lesson. I believe his true aim is to transfer experience, knowledge, and inspire students to go out there and change the world and that's something very motivating."

January 26, 2016