

THE IMPORTANCE OF ETHICS FOR THE ACCOUNTING PROFESSION. THE CASE OF ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the differences between Kohlberg's ethics of justice and character's traits of a person in relation with ethical dilemmas. Kohlberg models ideal adult moral development as a process of increasing abstraction and autonomy while Gilligan's ideal moral adults are embedded in complex webs of caring relationships. Kohlberg pursues development of universal abstract moral principles while Gilligan's moral reasoning is contextual and grounded with a goal of taking ethical actions that preserve both the self and relationships with others. Kohlberg's cognitive moral development theory supports principled moral reasoning about short ethical dilemma cases, the method of ethics education commonly promoted in accounting. This approach to ethics education fails to develop complex problem resolution skills or explore societal and institutional causes and solutions to problems. Application of the ethics of care approach promotes satisfactory problem resolution, develops connected knowing skills, and encourages an expanded view of ethical problems. Our paper is a comparison between traits (self-esteem, attitude, personality) of accounting professionals (student and accounting professionals) and the ethical dilemmas which they met.

KEY WORDS: *ethics, reputation, self-esteem, attitude, personality, moral development, ethical behavior*

1. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Motto: "To me, it really seems visible today that ethics is not something exterior to the economy, which, as technical matter, could function on its own; rather, ethics is an interior principle of the economy itself, which cannot function if it does not take account of the human values of solidarity and reciprocal responsibility." – **Pope Benedict XVI**, September 2011

According to Oxford Dictionary¹, the term "ethics" means a set of "moral principles that govern a person's behavior or the conducting of an activity". In Western philosophy, there exist some schools of ethics which can be divided, very roughly, into three sorts. The first, drawing on the work of Aristotle, holds that the virtues (such as justice, charity, and generosity) are dispositions to act in ways that benefit both the person possessing them and that person's society. The second, defended particularly by Kant, makes the concept of duty central to morality: humans are bound, from knowledge of their duty as rational beings, to obey the categorical imperative to respect other rational beings. Thirdly, utilitarianism asserts that the guiding principle of conduct should be the greatest happiness or benefit of the greatest number.

¹ The Oxford English Dictionary, Third Edition, Volume V, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010, page 784

On the other hand, in the Eastern culture, there could be observed penury of ethics marked by the inconsistency of political doctrines. From the earliest times the Eastern Europe was distempered by regional conflicts, barbarian invasions, wars or political, racial and cultural exterminations. Perhaps these inconsistencies in assuring the continued development of human vision and culture had a negative role concerning the ethical behavior on these lands.

Being situated at the confluence of the Western and Eastern European cultures, Romania tries to implement nowadays the Western cultural model and of course its specific economic development. Even if the theory claim that applying this model a country will benefit by economic growth and sustainable development, we may emphasize that in case of Romania not all results are similar with those obtained by other countries. While many of our European partners consider we have a lack of professionals and technical expertise in this country, we rather than suggest that an explanation regarding this may be considered the way how people perceive the ethics and why they do not blame the unethical behavior.

Moreover we can often see how Romania is given as a negative example when it comes to discuss about ethics. Unfortunately in our country was perpetuated a bad behavior regarding honesty, which can be considered as a pathologic influence of the years spent under the domination of Eastern culture, especially the Ottoman.

An old story², related by V. Adăscăliței, suggests that Alexandru-Ioan Cuza, Lord and ruler of Romania between 1859 and 1866, often used to dress as a commoner and mingle with people. He wanted to know himself how the majority of people do live. So, one day, he put his hat and peasant-like coat, took two tubs of sour milk and went to the fair in Galați. It seems His Lordship learned that some merchants did not use the big “oca”, as a law decided at the time, and that people called “Cuza’s oca”. He sought, therefore, as a humbug peasant to sell milk at a grocer, who was said that wouldn’t be very, very honest because he sells using the “small oca”, and no one could catch up him cheating. After the peasant asked to receive oil instead milk, they’ve decided by mutual agreement that for six oca of milk the peasant should receive an oca of oil. “Good” received the grocer, blinking his eyes shifty. He took a big oca on the counter, the “Cuza’s oca”, and measured twenty-four oca-s of milk. He thought that has to pay instead of four oca-s of oil. But the grocer decided to use for measuring oil the small oca. “Find me the right measure, with the same oca” insisted the peasant. “No way, it’s full of milk. I will measure with this one”, said the grocer. “Well, that’s the smaller oca”, argued the peasant. “What your point, you miserable! The oca is oca and point!” yelled the grocer. After this the Lord revealed himself in the blue tunic with gilded epaulettes. The grocer was astonished and he dropped the oca from his hand. Lord Cuza condemned grocer’s bad behavior and punished him to bind the both oca-s on his neck and walk on the streets of Galati to inform people about his deceiving methods.

If we try to understand the facts presented by this story we can see that our society learned to use cheating as a way for easily increase the earnings. But if we consider the reputation of a person, can somebody live without it or may be this gained back with money?

There were not allowed to cheat another person, even if that person is untrained and does not know so much about business. Why do some people use such techniques and do not have an ethical behavior? We would like to discover these responses further.

² Adăscăliței, V. (1978) *Cuza-Vodă în tradiția populară: antologie de literatură folclorică*, București: Editura Mihai Eminescu, page 75

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There has often been said by some that “the expression business ethics is an oxymoron” (Gaffikin, 2007) – it take into account contradictory terms due to the fact the business looks for optimizing or maximizing the results from its operational activities while ethics supposes another fundament for business practices. Anyway, while the more brazenly minded would seriously agree with this perspective, there has appeared a substantial recovery in the advantage of ethical considerations by professional business organizations and, of course, business leaders partly as a reaction of the requirements of organizations which have had to carry the costs of dramatic corporate failures and the unethical business practices of a minority of business professionals. As a matter of fact this subject has become an important industry which impress by several books published in this respect, another several courses, tutorials, some workshops and courses dedicated to this subject, a huge number of models registered and an ever growing number of debates and comments in mass-media.

The majority of people do not well understand what represents an ethical behavior but when it is necessaire to give a definition to ethics this is considered to be extremely difficult because ethics are given by personal, societal, cultural, and, of course, professional values all of which being problematic to enumerate. There exist people will emphasize the importance of the society’s concerns, but others will argue the importance of interests of self-determining people. Having such antagonistic perspectives have monopolized the entire discussion of ethics until some years ago. Nowadays the researchers admit that ethical belief systems appear as a result of community’s activity. This is considered a social or cultural situation which was called by Blackburn (2001) “the surrounding climate of ideas about how to live”.

One of the most notable paradigms on ethics is considered Kohlberg’s (1969) theory on Cognitive Moral Development (CMD), an important research developed on Piaget’s (1932) exploration on children’s moral reasoning development. According to Koumbiadis et al. (2008), Kohlberg had a keen interest in the way of “one’s moral thinking as opposed to one’s moral actions”. Also, Kohlberg’s research on CMD has been utilized mainly to develop the studies on the levels of human moral progression, from accounting students to accounting professionals.

Kohlberg’s theory on CMD was dimensioned in some “series of stages that begin in adolescence and extend through adulthood” under the description of pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional headings. On each heading, Kohlberg described two different stages. Also, Kohlberg was fair when he suggested that humans’ ability to have an ethical thinking within society was developed by making associations with others in one’s environment.

On the other hand, Lawrence Kohlberg demonstrated that ethical values through moral reasoning could be developed in the early years of childhood and they grow up slowly as individuals become mature into adulthood. In addition, Kohlberg’s six stages could be considered as structuring an invariant constructive cycle in which achievement of an advanced stage is directly linked by the obtaining of each of the previous stages.

Also, Koumbiadis et al. (2008) noted that Kohlberg’s moral development theory provides the theoretical base for most recent empirical ethics theories. Kohlberg’s theory states that usually humans use three general hierarchical approaches in order to conclude the ethical dilemmas. The ethical dilemmas could be divided into three levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional or principled. Each of these levels can be further broken down into more stages.

In addition, Kohlberg’s (1969) explained how people’s ability to reason in society was carried out by interacting with one’s surroundings. He illustrated that ethics and moral reasoning are learned early in

life and progress gradually as people develop into adulthood. According to Koumbiadis et al. (2008) there are presented six stages of moral development:

- 1) Stage one which is obedience and punishment orientation;
- 2) Stage two is naively egoistic orientation;
- 3) Stage three is good boy orientation, orientation to approval and to pleasing and helping others;
- 4) Stage four is associated with the authority and social order maintaining orientation, regarding the direction of “doing duty” and proving respect for authority and maintaining the given social order for its own sake;
- 5) Stage five is contractual legalistic orientation, duty defined in terms of contract, general avoidance of violation of the will or rights of others, and majority will and welfare, and
- 6) Stage six is conscience or principle orientation, orientation not only to actually ordained social rules but to principles of choice involving appeal to logical universality and consistency.

On the other hand, Sara Ann Reiter (1996) noted that in 1982, Carol Gilligan published *In a Different Voice* as a critique of Lawrence Kohlberg’s theories of cognitive moral development. Gilligan was offended by the absence of women within the samples from which Kohlberg had developed his theories, and thought that this deficiency might enunciate why initial research results showing lower moral reasoning levels for women. Gilligan’s studies of women’s moral reasoning revealed a different way of thinking about moral problems that is common among, but not exclusive to women. “This different moral voice, the ethics of care, may be enhanced by life experiences, but does not arise from any essential difference between male and female nature” (Gilligan, 1982).

Belenky et al. (1986) extend Gilligan’s “different voice” concept to the field of pedagogy. Extensive interviews with women are utilized to expand an earlier work on stages of learning. “Women’s ways of knowing” include connected, as well as separate, knowledge acquisition. Connected knowing is learning through personalization and identification with material, as opposed to separate knowledge achieved through questioning and debate. Belenky et al. (1986) maintain that both separate and connected knowing are valuable ways of learning. Application of Gilligan’s ethics of care perspective to situations, with its insistence on understanding the needs of others, enhances connected knowledge acquisition. Both Gilligan’s ethics of care perspective and Belenky et al.’s techniques for connected knowledge development can be used to enrich accounting ethics education experiences.

Prior research suggests that women are relationship-oriented and socially sensitive (Eagly, 1987) and, as a consequence, tend to be more empathetic and more sensitive to ethical issues than the men are (Toussaint and Webb, 2005). Thus, when both genders have not received business ethics directions, male undergraduate business students may be more inclined to act less ethically than their female counterparts. Since business ethics education is believed to improve one’s ethical judgment, male undergraduate business students without business ethics instruction may also have a lower level of moral judgment. However, business ethics education may enable male business students to account for the perspectives of multiple stakeholders and importance of ethical judgment on society.

Wang and Calvano (2013) noted that based on cognitive moral development theory, men should become more sensitive to moral issues from their learning and educational process in ethics education. Such training may exert more significant positive influences on males than on females because males may have a lower level of ethical judgment before the training take place. However, females may be more responsive to business ethics education than males due to their being more socially sensitive. Thus, business ethics education may improve female ability to make ethical decisions more significantly than males. Following this line of logic, we suggest that there is an

interactive effect of gender and business ethics education on moral judgments. That is, female students who receive business ethics instruction may have the highest level of ethical judgment.

From another perspective, Gaffikin (2007) argued that humans believe that ethical behavior is described by moral principles presented in the religious books. Almost all religions stated codes of conduct and instructions on how people should behave. Anyway, while we consider it sounds well and good, the historical perspective has proved that in most religions the resolution of this set of principles has been a subject to important debates and even has been materialized in practices which appear for the outside observers as having a little connection with the moral conduct. For instance, one of the commandments considered as being at the fundamentals of Christianity is “thou shalt not kill” but people throughout history have neglected this in times of various wars, the savage burning of witches and nowadays the capital punishment applied to many Christian countries around the world.

Indeed Christianity is not the single case. Hinduism is developed around a caste system which exposes specific groups of people to what an outsider considers there are extreme forms of prejudices and disadvantages. Islam religion has built a particular penal code, applied in the Muslim countries, which could be considered by an outsider as involving extremely severe forms of punishment of the criminals. In this respect, we may consider there are present probably similar obvious inconsistencies in other religious cults, which may suggest the links between moral behavior and religions are not automatically absolute. Withal, in the Western modern societies along with the ascent of humanism (considered as being a part of the post-Enlightenment modernist mind) there has weakened the influence of religion on societies. Also, the wealth of the religions has been secularized, a breakdown in the authority of organized churches – however, many people still behave by or sense the demand to keep their “moral principles”.

There arises the question of whether humans are innately good or bad which has not only disturbed religious scholars but also the philosophers as well (from the relevant field of moral philosophy). In this respect, the seventeenth century philosopher Thomas Hobbes introduced the concept of “psychological egoism” which states that humans are intrinsically nasty creatures. This could be considered, of course, as being hugely reductionist question – is there any possibility to generalize this percept to all people? In order to endeavor to defeat this deficiency, Hobbes proposed a solution by developing the concept of the social contract. This document represents an “agreement” concluded by people in a society for avoiding a social conflict. Everybody agrees to a legal contract not to engage in such actions of killing other people or stealing from others due to the fact it is in their own good and best interests. The social contract can be enforced by a neutral third party – for example, the government, Thus for Hobbes and his supporters strong governments are desirable.

Jeremy Bentham and Immanuel Kant may be considered another people who debated on ethics principles. Along with Mill, Bentham is the founder of a movement known as Utilitarianism and both of them had also a huge impact on economic thought and principles. According to utilitarianism a process is right if and only if it complies with the principle of utility, which means that it will be more productive of pleasure or happiness or better prevent pain or unhappiness than an alternative (Gaffikin, 2007). It depends entirely how right an action is on its consequences. So this would be the reason of why this theory is also addressed to as consequentialism (or as act-utilitarianism).

The value of the consequences of an action always determines if that specific act is right or not. By formulating of the rule-utilitarianism was stated that for an act (act-utilitarianism) are considered only the consequences, the actual act not being take into account. Therefore, this concept received some critiques due to this fact.

However, a cost-benefit analysis takes into consideration the value of all consequences. Due to the following of the best rule of conduct, rule-utilitarianism is concerned with computing the value of consequences. Therefore, this concept may not be useful in some particular cases. Anyway, researchers considered rule-utilitarianism as being a valid mean of testing the ethical behavior for decades.

Within a discussion about consequences and values, there is necessary to link the consequences by an individual. In this case we have to deal with two different positions: a Hobbesian position is interested by person's self-interest (psychological egoism) and the consequentialist positions, which would be more interested to have the consequences for all the parties concerned by a specific action. However, the pursuit of self-interest represents the repeal from the psychological egoism, which influences the economic thought. In addition this concept represents a fundament of ethical egoism, another perspective on ethics. Besides these, we have other variants of utilitarianism which test the pursuit of pleasure, self-interest or happiness and the honesty of individual's actions.

Assessing the actions in terms of the consequences, by pointing the end or the final result, utilitarianism may be considered teleological due to the purposive explanations in terms of final causes. Therefore, a moral action is done from a consideration of duty and ethics implies what these duties represent. On the other hand, Kant is considered a deontologist because his position was a deontological one regarding his believes in the right conduct and ethical duties. In deontology individual duties are emphasized and activities such as telling the truth, keeping promises or acting ethically receive more importance.

According to (Gaffikin, 2007), Kant stated two fundamental principles:

1. Always act on a principle that you are willing to have anyone else act upon;
2. Always be respectful to others (and yourself).

Both principles are a part of what Kant suggested as being the categorical imperative, which represents a mandatory moral law created as a method to guide free human action. This method is conditioned by implementing the universality test – an act of using our rationality to ask what would emerge if we “universalized” the matter we wanted to do; an appropriate example would be the possibility to assess what would happen if people stole each from others? The proper response is to not steal because it is supposed it is an action according to the fundamental of maximum which is considered as being the universal rule of conduct³.

Kant's deontological position was considered at times as being too rigid due to some absolutist concepts which stated the existence of a single moral “truth” applicable for all people which should obey it. If we would giving an example we may refer to a situation in which we should tell the truth but there could be inappropriate to tell the truth when it implies the safety or welfare of other people who may be involved. In this respect, sometimes would be necessary to lie for protecting other people interests or safety.

Being currently classified as normative theories of ethics, the deontological and teleological theories of ethics appear to be very different, both of them sorting the actions as wrong or right and exploring the possibilities to determine standards of wrongness and rightness. In this respect we may emphasize that they involve principles of ethical conduct.

Another philosopher contemporary with Kant was David Hume (1711-1776). He introduced the concept of “meta-ethics”, which is also a type of moral philosophy. Hume studied the moral language

³ Therefore this aspect is considered as rule of deontology.

and concentrated his researches on its sense and certainty. His studies investigated the nature of ethical concepts and propositions and enforced severe norms of deductive logic. The following types of questions are addressed by meta-ethics:

1. Semantic questions like the significance of moral terms such as right, good and ought;
2. Logical questions like the force of moral arguments;
3. Epistemological questions like the potential of moral knowledge and the purpose of this knowledge; and
4. Ontological questions like the presence of moral facts.

One of Hume's concepts of meta-ethics can be noticed as "murder is wrong". According to Hume's beliefs, it is not reasonable to "prove" this assertion due to the fact it is not an empirical observation, but a moral conviction. Because Hume was a Jacobinic empiricist, as well as the positivists were, he made the difference between moral and factual statements. In the same manner, the positive accounting theorists claim the difference between "ought" and "is" statements. Thus, when someone says that murder is wrong, there is only claiming that humans reprobate the murder. Hume's moral beliefs are psychological rather than logical or empirical. Therefore, Hume suggested, referring to the later positivists, they are far away from meaningless or trivial. On the other hand, this position was further adopted by the positivist philosopher A. J. Ayer. He considered the moral language as being truly pointless and the moral philosophy was seen as a type of logical and linguistic mistake, taking into consideration that moral knowledge doesn't exist in fact. This kind of discussion is referred by Ayer as "emotivism".

According to Gaffikin (2007), the relationships between the various theories of ethics can be represented in the following diagrammatic form:

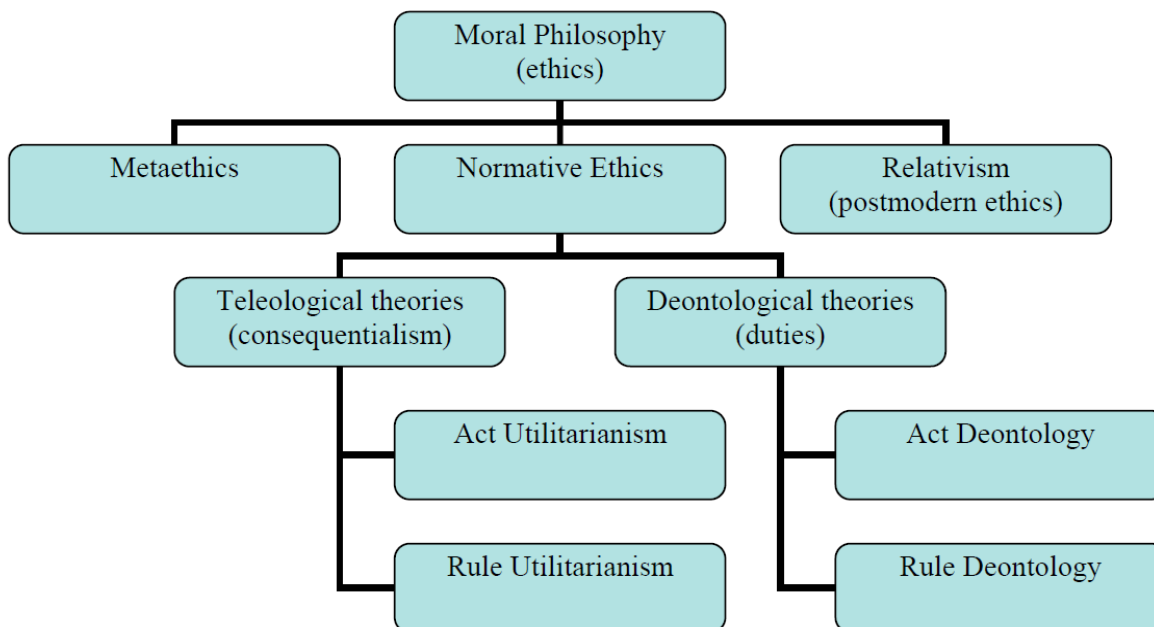


Figure 1 - Theories of Ethics

3. METHODOLOGY

While many researches on assessing the ethical awareness of individuals has been conducted in last decades (Rest, 1973; Kohlberg, 1976; Victor & Cullen, 2003), a few researches has been conducted on this aspect in Romania, and no other research, as far as it can be found, is available on topic pertaining to the link between appetite for ethical behavior and the psychological traits of a person (attitude, self-esteem and personality).

In this respect, we should consider a sample of students and staffed accountants which will offer us a hypothesis testing for our study on matters. A cross-sectional survey outline was the most suitable option for this type of quantitative research due to the fact that these types of procedures, according to Creswell (2005), permit of researchers to “compare two or more groups in terms of attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or practices. The group comparisons may compare male with female...or they may compare other groups within the company’s settings”. Cross-sectional studies have been disposed to assess groups in former accounting researches by Shimin in 2008 and Albrecht, Shamsub, & Giannatasio in 2007.

We have chosen a sample of students in accounting at Bucharest University of Economics Studies and staffed accountants both in professional services companies and those pertaining to others fields (telecommunications, FMCG, etc.). A sample list consisted in 155 subjects, students and professionals, was selected from our contact list from LinkedIn and Facebook networks.

A stratified random sample technique was utilized in order to collect information from the two groups of accounting majors, students and staff accountants. Such a technique of sampling was selected because variability on a characteristic of the studied sample may exist. The researchers first separated, from a representative sample for each group, the population into subgroups pertaining to certain characteristics (e.g., gender, status of employment), and then a particular number of respondents by following a simple random sample was selected from each subgroup. In this case we may have, for instance, more female participants from the student group than the staffed accountants. According to Creswell (2005), “stratification assures that the stratum desired will be represented in the sample in proportion to its existence in the population”.

The ethical questionnaire was the instrument used to gather data. This consists of 18 questions and utilizes a two-dimensional boarding to recognize the ethical behavior. The objective of the questionnaire in this research was to determine if there is presented a link between appetite for ethical behavior and the psychological traits of a person (attitude, self-esteem and personality). Additional elements may exist as possible restrictions to this research, such as an individual’s religion, culture, and type of organization where a professional may activate.

The questionnaire also asked the respondents to read a fictive scenario regarding coworkers who frequently remove resources (e.g., paper, stationary, small goodies, pens, etc.) from their office for their home personal use and are usually unfriendly when there somebody needs help in his professional duties. The participants set the answers by indicating either “yes” or “no” and were asked if they would like to confront or avoid such an individual.

The choices included: a) Should the office rules and policies in force be broken?, b) What is the difference between what need to be done as part of your duty or what you know your peers feel you need to do?, c) What level of self-esteem do you consider you have?, and d) What is your overall position regarding unethical behavior? The final part of the questionnaire implemented a Likert scale ranging from completely false (1) to completely true (5). All respondents were asked to focus on what proposals can be made by several counsels on how to decrease the level of unethical behavior among workmates and fraudulent reporting, and, of course, changing the attitude of a person regarding ethics. The choices comprise: 1) documenting the findings, 2) meeting with a manager, 3) assembling and collecting all apposite papers, and 4) do nothing.

Our survey was disseminated via e-mail to all the persons included in the sample, there being 135 surveys administered. A total of 3 questionnaires were eliminated because they presented some incomplete answers. As a result, only 76 surveys samples were used in the process of data analysis, representing 56% of those questioned. Table 1 shows a summary including the number of questionnaires sent via e-mail and the number of questionnaires used for the data analysis.

Questionnaire Response Summary
135 e-mailed Questionnaires
4 Questionnaires partly filled-in – 3%
55 No answer was reverted to the researcher – 41%
76 Complete utilizable questionnaires (a response rate of 56%)

Table 1- Questionnaire Response Summary

Table 2 shows the frequency distributions of the demographical characteristics of the questionnaire’s respondents. The sample consisted of 76 respondents. Of the 76 responders, 41 or 53.9% represented men and 35 or 46.1% represented women. The second question asks for completing the status of employment (student or employee). Of the 76 answerers, 49 or 64.5% represented students and 27 or 35.5% represented the staff accountants or professionals.

When there was need to respond if they had already an ethical dilemma, 62 or 81.6% of the responders reported they had an ethical dilemma compared to 14 or 18.4% of the answerers who didn’t have an ethical dilemma.

Demographic Characteristics of the Questionnaire's Respondents *			
Demographic Variable		N	%
Gender	Male	41	53.9%
	Female	35	46.1%
Status of employment	Student	49	64.5%
	Staff accountant	27	35.5%
Do you consider you have always had an ethical behavior regarding your professional activity?	Yes	62	81.6%
	No	14	18.4%
What level of self-esteem do you consider you have?	Poor	0	0%
	Fair	20	26.3%
	Good	53	69.7%
	Excellent	3	3.9%

Table 2 - Demographic Characteristics of the Questionnaire's Respondents

* Nota bene: N=76.

4. RESULTS OBTAINED

The purpose of our research was to explore the ethical perceptions of students and staffed accountants, and to demonstrate there is a link between ethical behavior and psychological traits of a person (attitude, self-esteem and personality).

To accomplish this, we evaluated if a relationship appeared among the assessed variables by using Pearson's correlation, which was adopted as the best method of analysis in our case. In this respect, we used Pearson's correlation in order to help us to determine if any relationship appeared between the level of self-esteem and the ethical perceptions of students and staff accountants (dependent variables). We assume that any variations of students and staff accountants were statistically analyzed and reported in each case.

Table 3 shows a short description of the responders on the means and standard deviations computed for the study's variables derived from the questionnaire. Furthermore, in this part we intend to discuss the statistical tests used for data treatment and data analysis. Also, we have to present the conclusions of the three studied hypotheses by launching a discussion of the research results.

Category Variables	Student		Staff accountant	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self-esteem	2,94	0,870	3,61	0,680
Attitude	3,03	0,821	3,46	0,370
Personality	3,40	0,690	3,76	0,460

Table 3 - Variable Means and Std. Deviations of both categories of participants

Nota bene: N=76

A total number of three different hypotheses were descended from our questionnaire and they were examined in this research using Pearson's correlation (see Table 4). We would like to emphasize that such test was suitable for this research since all tested hypotheses for a relationship among the variables of students and staffed accountants and participation to ethical courses.

Variables	Having an ethical behavior	Self-esteem	Attitude	Personality
Self-esteem	0.341**			
Attitude	0.116	0.395**		
Personality	0.488**	0.378**	0.537**	

Table 4 - Pearson's correlation

Nota bene: N=76. In case of (**), the correlation is considered to be significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis 1

Pearson's correlation was conducted to determine if a statistical significance could be found. The R-values became highly significant at the level of 0.01. The three hypotheses are presented above in Table 4. The null hypothesis was expressed as H1 and it is enunciated below. Hypothesis 1 implied a close looking to see if there was a relationship between the self-esteem of accounting professionals and the propensity for having an ethical behavior.

H1: There is no relationship between self-esteem of accounting professionals and the propensity for having an ethical behavior.

Hypothesis 1 reveals that there was a statistical significance reported with an R-value of 0.341 among the self-esteem of accounting professionals and their propensity for having an ethical behavior. We were 95% confident that a statistical relationship existed. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected that there were no relationship between self-esteem of accounting professionals and the propensity for having an ethical behavior.

Hypothesis 2

Pearson's correlation was conducted to determine if a statistical significance could be found. The R-values became highly significant at the level of 0.05. The null hypothesis was expressed as H2 and it is enunciated below. Hypothesis 2 implied a close looking to see if there was a relationship between the attitude of accounting professionals and their propensity for having an ethical behavior.

H2: There is no relationship between attitude of accounting professionals and the propensity for having an ethical behavior.

Hypothesis 2 reveals that there was no statistical significance reported with an R-value of 0.116, which was greater than 0.05. We were 95% confident that a statistical difference did not exist among the attitude of accounting professionals and the propensity for having an ethical behavior. Hence, the null hypothesis was accepted and the alternative hypothesis was rejected that there was a statistical relationship between these variables.

Hypothesis 3

Pearson's correlation was conducted to determine if a statistical significance could be found. The R-values became highly significant at the level of 0.01. The null hypothesis was expressed as H3 and it is enunciated below. Hypothesis 3 implied a close looking to see if there was a relationship between the personality of accounting professionals and their propensity for having an ethical behavior.

H3: There is no relationship between personality of accounting professionals and the propensity for having an ethical behavior.

Hypothesis 3 reveals that there was a highly statistical significance reported with an R-value of .488 among the personality of accounting professionals and the ethical dilemmas which they met. We were 95% confident that a statistical relationship existed. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected that there was no relationship between personality of accounting professionals and the propensity for having an ethical behavior.

Also, from the questionnaire respondents' point of view, self-consciousness is the most important element (26% agreed) which influences the ethical behavior. In addition, the respondents agreed that ethical behavior can be influenced by self-esteem, attitude, personality, other work-colleagues, tax body (ANAF), professional body (CECCAR, CAFR, ANEVAR, and CCF) and other elements, as we can observe in the following chart.

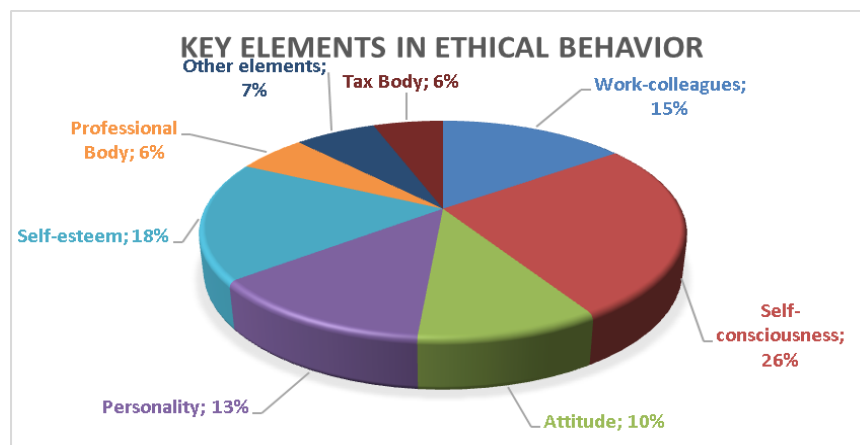


Figure 2 - Key elements in ethical behavior

There should be emphasized that these variables which can influence the ethical behavior cannot be all measured and, regarding self-consciousness, this one is considered an acute sense of self-awareness. Because self-consciousness represents a preoccupation with oneself, it is view in opposition to the philosophical state of self-awareness, which is considered as being the awareness that one person exists as an individual human being, besides there are some writers who use both terms synonymously. In fact, a nasty feeling of self-consciousness would happen when a person realizes that he or she is being watched or observed, that feeling which tells you that “everyone is looking” at oneself.

Usually, psychologists differentiate between two types of self-consciousness, private and public. On the first hand, private self-consciousness represents a propensity to introspect and explore a person’s inner self and feelings. On the other hand, public self-consciousness is recognition of the self as it is perceived by other persons. Thus, the second type of self-consciousness may result in self-monitoring and social anxiety. Both, private and public self-consciousness, are considered as personality traits that are comparatively stable over the time, but they are not correspondent. Only because a human person is high on one measure, it doesn’t mark that individual is high on the other.

Self-consciousness may affect persons in different degrees, as there exist persons who are constantly self-monitoring or self-involved, when other persons are totally heedless about themselves. In contradistinction to self-awareness, which from a philosophical point of view is being conscious of oneself as a human, self-consciousness, being exceedingly aware of one’s appearance or manner, would be considered as a problem at times.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Our paper has investigated the importance of ethics for the accounting profession in Romania. Given the results based on quantitative and qualitative researches we could find and analyze how ethics are perceived by Romanian accounting professionals.

The quantitative research established that a relationship prevailed for two hypotheses, H1 and H3, of traits of accounting professionals and the ethical dilemmas which they met. Overall, accounting professionals are more likely to be aware of the relevance of having an ethical conduct as a result of the more collapses of some large corporations during the crisis, the cascade effect of these misfortunes on the global economy, and the judicial consequences of committing a financial fraud.

We should emphasize that this study had also some limitations. The paper only made a comparison between the relationships and traits (self-esteem, attitude, personality) of accounting professionals (student and staff accountants) and the ethical dilemmas which they met. It would be possible that comparing gender, employment status, different traits and having participants who took an ethics course may obtain a different outcome. Anyway, based on our results and conclusion of this study, it is suggested that business school programs, especially accounting and finance, should insist to underline ethical and moral issues in their respective activities and to continue to develop the personality and self-esteem of their students. In our opinion, accounting professors should consecrate more time to uplift students’ understanding of ethical issues in order to prepare them for the profession and to try to increase their self-esteem and self-confidence by encouraging them to express their opinions.

The accounting professional is someone who is not only able to report financial information, but can also influence the company’s management decisions so that the way he operates is extremely important. Specialization seems to be the challenge ahead. This fact appears in the context of

reducing the number of members and professional offices, and the consolidation in offices of professionals, in order to provide a full range of services.

Accounting profession should focus more attention to efficiency and risk monitoring, without neglecting its formal side, under conditions of independence, confidentiality and professional transparency. Thus in the last decade interest in accounting ethics grew up. However, despite increased interest on ethical practices some important weaknesses persist regarding the rules, principles and values, which are presented in a segmented manner.

In conclusion we can suggest that the violation of ethics in accounting profession will always have repercussions both on the users of accounting services and on the accounting profession, by lowering its credibility among the public.

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