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Educating Youth for Business Ethics

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Abstract: *The socio-political situation and economic liberalization led to the emergence of numerous businesses. Today's society's tendency towards quick profits has led to the need for an increasingly meaningful application of business ethics perceptions to maintain legal and moral standards. Young people represent a category familiar, in general, with the theoretical notions that define the conceptual framework of business ethics (by completing courses specific to the university curriculum in economic sciences) or, finding themselves at the beginning of their professional life, confused business ethics with loyalty and fairness professional. The work presented is a study based on a survey that had as a tool the questionnaire made in order to highlight the ethical behavior in business, the elements that define it, the factors that influence it, and the At the same time, the main unethical behaviors specific to the three categories present were identified in an organization – manager (as an individual), management team, employee. The results showed that there are reciprocal influences between the three behavioral types. The adoption of a moral commitment and the foundation of an ethical conception can be achieved through education or by observing a diverse code of ethical conduct through which to provide an answer and/or solutions to the problems related to organizational practices. The ethical profile of businesses is important in order to attract and positively involve all stakeholders, which leads to obtaining competitive advantages but also to the consolidation of a healthy economy.*

Keywords: *Ethics; Business; Ethical behavior; Young people; Education.*

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1. Introduction

Business ethics is the set of moral principles that guide the actions of a business to keep it within the parameters of the law and to support an organizational culture based on fairness and respect. Organizations respond to internal and external challenges with solutions aligned to their ethical principles, but trying not to conflict with the individual ones and those imposed by society (social, cultural, and political). In an attempt to succeed as a business (quickly and with high financial gains) many organizations violate certain ethical behaviors, however, most of the time they do not contravene the law, so they are dictated by the adoption of a certain organizational culture. However, the long-term success of the business is, on a certain level, conditional on the implementation of ethical behavior. We can talk about ethics both at the individual level and at the organizational level. Separately or as a result of the interaction, ethical problems can be generated that can be regulated by the norms of the code of ethical conduct that integrate the moral values as such, although, they become functional and credible only to the extent that they are associated with the business objectives. Code of ethics and ethical conduct acquired through education or experience ethical principles do not provide direct guidance on how to act in particular cases, they serve as a reminder of the types of values and principles on which business activity is based. Norms and rules play an important role in professional ethics and are one of the important features of professional practitioners and a successful business.

2. Problem Statement

Numerous works address the topic of ethics in business, each of which offers the opportunity to understand the issues related to both the object and the problem of ethics, its fundamental notions and characteristics, as well as those aimed at applied ethics. The definition of the concept of ethics in business leads to further interpretations of this issue, therefore the definition has been the subject of numerous studies. Thus, business ethics was understood as a set of principles and standards of organizational conduct, individual values or legal norms that guide the ethical behavior of an organizational group (Ferrell& Fraedrich, 2014; Joyner & Payne, 2002; Nistorescu, 2007) was identified in the study of moral issues appeared in business situations (Crane & Matten, 2010; Dittmer, 2013; Gulcan, 2011, pp. 56-82). The demarcation of ethics from notions such as morality, morality and legality is also found in numerous scientific approaches (Blodgett, 2011; Donaldson et al., 2002; Dinu, 2008;

Keller-Krawczyk, 2010; MacIntyre, 2008). Business ethics generate results both within the organization and in the business environment. However, achieving this climate is not easy to achieve due to the involvement in the equation of numerous components whose ethical behaviors can sometimes be in contradiction (Bowen, 2003). Codes of ethical conduct in business represent the basic tool of organizations in managing problems of this kind, addressing both the individual behavioral level (manager or employee) (Cameron, 2011; Elango et al., 2010; Karim-Abd et al., 2007; Robertson & Athanassiou, 2009) and the organizational level (Mureşan, 2009; Treviño et al., 2014; Tricker & Tricker, 2014). It regulates, in particular, behaviors or activities expected by business society, but which are not codified in the law (Simpson & Taylor, 2013), predominantly moral (Hendry, 2004), or on the contrary claims the need for state intervention through various regulations (Leisinger, 1995) supporting the social responsibility of organizations of business (Ben et al., 2010; Low & Ang, 2013). Educating young people to be prepared for the business world is, along with the code of ethical conduct specific to each organization, equally important (Caraiani et al., 2013; Crane, 2004; Crăciun, 2005; McDonald & Donleavy, 1995). The dynamics of contemporary society, the complexity of relationships that a business entails, and, also multiculturalism leave open the topic of ethics in business that can be addressed in numerous other specialized works.

3. Research Questions/Aims of the research

The purpose of the research was to highlight the ethical problems in business that appear at the individual and corporate level, respectively, to identify the impact they cause and to establish the role that the education of young people has in removing or minimizing it.

Table 1. Research design

Aspects	Main objectives	Secondary objectives
Individual/collecti ve ethical behavior	Highlighting some particularities of ethics in business	Individual behaviors
		Collective behaviors
		Establishing the ethical/non-ethical boundary
Respondents' views on the main	Establishing the main issues of business	Identifying ethical issues at the individual level

ethical issues	ethics	Identification of ethical issues at the organization level (manager/administrative structure)
Respondents' attitude towards business ethics	Establishing the impact of ethical issues on the business environment	Impact on the individual/organization The role of the educational environment The role of code of ethics regulations

Source: Authors' own conception

a. General hypotheses

H.1. Business ethics is promoted in all companies in Romania

H.2. Individual ethics influence corporate ethics

H.3. The manager and management team dictate the ethical behavior of the organization

H.4. The factors that influence the application of ethical practices in the business environment do not depend on the ethical system adopted by the company.

H.5. The ethical climate of organizations can be improved by developing educational programs.

b. Statistical hypotheses

H0. At most 60% of respondents know the concept of business ethics

H1. More than 60% of respondents know the concept of business ethics

H0. At least 90% of respondents believe that they have violated known ethical norms

H1. Less than 90% of respondents believe that they have violated known ethical norms

H0. Business ethics are observed according to individual ethical perceptions

H1. Business ethics are respected differently according to individual perceptions of ethics

H0. At least 30% of respondents inform themselves about ethical conduct in business

H1. Less than 30% of respondents inform themselves about ethical conduct in business

4. Research Methods

The chosen research method is the survey because it represents the simplest and fastest way to collect data, and the tool used to achieve the objectives is the questionnaire. It included a set of questions that would allow the identification and analysis of how young people report to the ethical aspects proposed for research. It consists of 6 questions aimed at the respondent profile (age, education, income background civil and professional status) and 16 questions grouped according to the assumed objectives. The order of the questions was established logically, following a structure from general to concrete, specific to a "funnel" type questionnaire. For certain questions, the testing of the respondents' preferences was carried out in a graded manner (by ranks) using the ranking of the answers (unimportant-very important). Some questions derive from the main ones, but can only be answered in the case of choosing a certain answer option (for example, choosing the employee option leads to two questions that complete this answer, i.e. the legal form of the entity and the position held). Its structure, shape, and size has been adopted for easy browsing and a quick response time. The questionnaire was preceded by a short motivation for the respondents to know the purpose of the research. It was made online with the help of the Google Drive® platform, which facilitated its dispatch, but also the subsequent processing of the collected data, including the graphic presentation.

As the type of survey, the online one was used, because it presents some advantages over the other types (by mail, by phone, personal/intercepted) in terms of time and costs. The medium of dissemination was social networks (Facebook and Twitter) and WhatsApp groups. The respondents complete the questions themselves, unassisted, having the explanations related to each one at their disposal. They are also assured of data confidentiality and the purpose of their processing. The sampling method chosen is non-random. A confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of ±5% were considered for sample validation. Its representativeness was determined starting from the theory of the statistical significance of the differences between the weights of the different strata at the level of the researched population and the same weights obtained at the level of the sample. The determination of the statistical significance of the

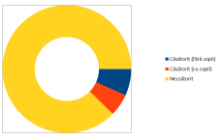
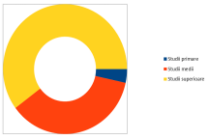
respective differences was achieved by applying a statistical test based on the t-Respondent distribution, which relies on the following hypotheses: H0: $\pi = p$ and H1: $\pi \neq p$ i.e., in the case of accepting the hypothesis H0, the differences between the two percentages are considered statistically insignificant, and the sample can be considered valid. If hypothesis H1 is accepted, it means that the differences are large enough to be considered significant from a statistical point of view, which is why the sample cannot be validated, requiring the application of a recovery method.

The questionnaire is addressed to the population between the ages of 18-40, with no restrictions regarding gender or origin. 327 responses were received. 13 of them are not being validated. The investigation took place between January 23 and March 7, 2022.

5. Findings

The profile of the respondent is very important in the analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaire. Since the study is aimed at young people, we considered that they can fall into the 18-41 age range. However, there is a preponderance of respondents between 18-21 years old (37%) and 31-41 years old (41%), which somewhat limits the interpretation because people aged 22-30 years are not well represented and they, in our understanding, represent young people who are either at the end of an educational cycle or in the first years of professional activity, a moment of formation of the specific organizational ethical character. The other components of the profile are logically related to this characteristic, age, i.e. professional status (employed-59% and pupil/student-26%) and marital status (unmarried -79%). The analyzed sample is distributed evenly between the two sexes, who come almost equally from the two rural and urban environments. The respondent is an educated person (53% higher education and 32% secondary education) who works 61% in private organizations and 28% in state ones, occupying 32% executive positions and having a maximum of 6 years of experience in the same organization. Among those with higher education, only 29% took at least one course in which the topic of business ethics was touched upon.

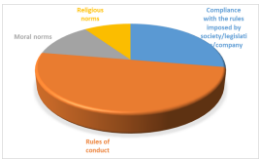
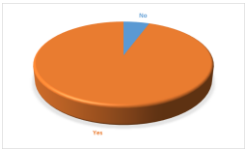
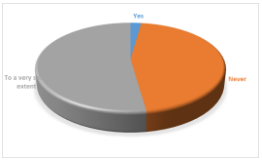
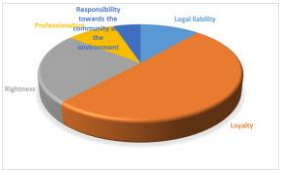
Table 2. Profile of the respondent

Characteris-tics	Items	%	Graphic representation
Sex	Women	45	
	Men	**52**	
Age	18-21 years	37	
	22-30 years	19	
	31-41 years	**41**	
Civil status	Married (With	6	
	children)	5	
	Married (No children)	**78**	
	Unmarried		
Area of origin	Rural	38	
	Urban	**49**	
Studies	Primary studies	3	
	Secondary education	32	
	Higher education	**53**	
Professional status	**Employee**	**59**	
	Unemployed	2	
	Household	1	
	Pupil/student	26	

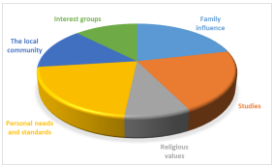
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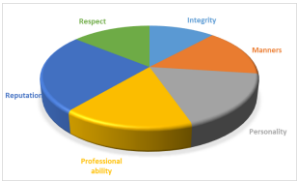
To achieve the assumed objectives, the analysis followed the interpretation of the answers grouped by issues, highlighting the aspects that point to ethical behavior, the factors that influence business ethics, ethical problems, and the way to solve them.

Table 3. Individual ethical behavior

Characteris-tics	Items	%	Graphic representation
ethics means	Compliance with the rules imposed by society/legislation/company	26 **47**	
	Rules of conduct	12	
	Moral norms	9	
	Religious norms		
the importance individual ethic perceptions	No	5	
	Yes	**84**	
exceeding ethical limits	Yes	2	
	Never	41	
	To a very small extent	**47**	
business eth-ics	Legal liability	11	
	Loyalty	**49**	
	Rightness	23	
	Professionalism	9	
	Responsibility towards the community and the environment	5	

factors that influence professional ethical behavior	Family influence	**19**
	Studies	**19**
	Religious values	8
	Personal needs and standards	**19**
	The local community	13
	Interest groups	11
the elements of individual professional ethical behavior	Integrity	10
	Manners	13
	Personality	15
	Professional ability	14
	Reputation	**21**
	Respect	12





Source: Authors' own conception

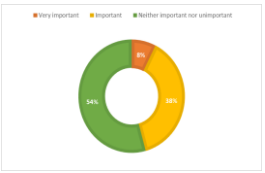
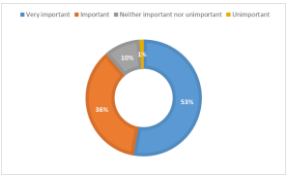
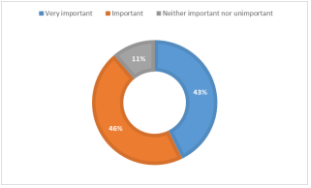
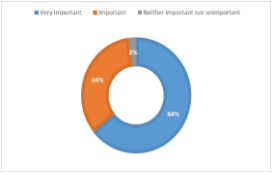
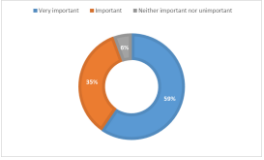
For the respondents of our study, ethics means the rule of conduct (47%), and business ethics is associated with loyalty (49%) and fairness (23%). Professionalism (9%) does not represent for them a guarantor of ethical behavior, being probably understood only as a high level of knowledge and practical skills necessary for the position held. Professionals are educated to think only in terms of their science, while the loyal ones (which do not exclude professionals!) show obedience to the employer's decisions and support his interests beyond professionalism, but not fairness.

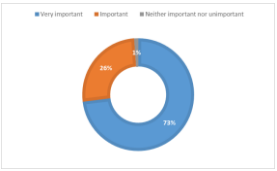
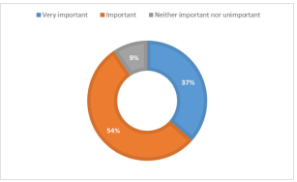
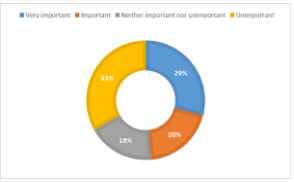
Among the elements of individual professional ethical behavior, reputation (21%) and personality (15%) stood out. We believe that their choice is because people, in general, pursue their success as professional prestige and financial success, which gives them a certain reputation that is directly supported by their personality. Also, reputation was understood only in its positive context, as a result of personal and professional value, as an authority in a certain field that supports and guarantees ethical values.

Social pluralism induces numerous influences on ethical professional behavior, but the strongest come from the closed family environment. Family, personal needs and standards and studies are considered the most important factors (19%). This evidence can be attributed to the fact that individual resistance is accentuated by belonging to an environment defined by its own ethical and moral norms, which must integrate with another, professional, with different values and rules, perhaps even in opposition, but which based on the tacit or explicit consent of each member. The level of education raises personal standards and can create the false impression of

superiority, thus of the possibility of being creators of norms, not just their object. However, compliance with the norm finds its foundation in the fact that it is the result of freely consented agreement regarding common standards either in the business community or in the organization.

Table 4. Coordinates that influence ethical behavior in business

Characteristics	Items	%	Graphic representation
Internal environment (collective)	Very important	7	
	Important	36	
	Neither important nor unimportant	51	
Management	**Very important**	**47**	
	Important	32	
	Neither important nor unimportant	9	
	Unimportant	1	
External environment (competition)	Very important	38	
	Important	41	
	Neither important nor unimportant	10	
External environment (Partners)	**Very important**	**57**	
	Important	30	
	Neither important nor unimportant	2	
The field of activity of the company	**Very important**	**53**	
	Important	31	
	Neither important nor unimportant	5	

The socio-political context	**Very important**	**65**	
	Important	23	
	Neither important nor unimportant	1	
Legislation	Very important	35	
	Important	**52**	
	Neither important nor unimportant	9	
Cultur-al/religious in-fluences	Very important	27	
	Important	18	
	Neither important nor unimportant	17	
	Unimportant	**31**	

Source: Authors' own conception

The ethical behavior of a company is dictated, according to the respondents of the study, mainly by the external environment (partners, competition). You cannot promote ethical behavior if you work in an environment that does not take this aspect into account. Obviously, anchoring in this environment is supported by the management (management team). The socio-political context and legislation are seen as very important elements because a society in which the rules can be circumvented very easily, which through the representatives of the political class promotes corruption, can only generate the development of businesses based on ethical behavior.

All companies, regardless of their field of activity, must be defined by ethical behavior. That is why the choice as very important for the company's field of activity is considered as a gradual differentiation of value between fields of activity (for example, ethical behavior in a facility that provides medical services is more important than that in a bakery). Religious/cultural influences are what define organizational culture, so it is surprising to choose *not important* (31%), but this aspect is somewhat counterbalanced by the preference for *very important* (27%) and *important* (18%).

Depending on the answers received, they were able to identify a series of ethical problems that were grouped according to the component that generates them-the manager (as an individual), the management team, and the members of the organization (individual approach). We believe that they are mentioned according to the experience of each respondent in different social or professional contexts or from the information circulated in the mass media. Most of the behaviors listed are also considered unethical by law and societal norms. Business ethics is dictated by the morality and fairness that characterizes the person in charge, and which, in the view of the respondents, indicates the ethical directions that govern the organization. Although there are many laws to establish basic ethical standards in the business community, ethics is also largely dependent on the management team, which through l*ack of decision-making transparency, incorrect recruitment, and salary practices, through lack of trust (confidentiality)* affects employee-relations employer and maintain a fertile climate for unethical practices. At the individual, and employee level, the *desire for quick promotion and financial gain* is identified as the main unethical element because it attracts a set of behaviors that reflect negatively on the organization.

Table 5. Ethical issues

		Identified ethical issues (in order of weight)
LEVEL	Manager (individual)	Conflict of interest Immorality Verbal coercion The personality Discrimination Harassment of employees
	Management team	Lack of decision-making transparency Lack of privacy Differentiated compensation Incorrect staff recruitment practices Lack of an ethical code adapted to socio-economic conditions bureaucracy Failure to respect the natural environment Marketing policy Cases of tax evasion, underground economy Lack of a healthy organizational environment/organizational culture
	Individual	Desire for immediate gains/advancement The personality

	Covering the errors of colleagues
	Using company resources for personal purposes
	Not knowing the information contained in the company's code of ethics

Source: Authors' own conception

6. Discussions

The ethical values of the manager and the managerial team of a company constitute its scaffolding, and the members of the organization constitute the binder in building organizational ethics, even if there are certain deviations at the individual level. It is observed that the macro realities (external environment) shape the micro realities (internal environment) generating behaviors.

The importance of business ethics goes far beyond employee loyalty, manager morality, and fairness, or promoting an organizational environment based on moral principles. It leads to building a reputation in the business community which determines both short-term and long-term profitability. Thus, companies are incentivized to be ethical as the field of socially responsible and ethical investment continues to grow. Even if in many businesses there are, at one level or another, at one time or another, unethical behaviors, the tendency is to reach consistency in respecting ethical perceptions because this aspect generates a positive public image. However, the ethical operation of a company is directly relate to the shaping of ethical individual behavior and the creation of an organizational system based on an ethical code.

All the unethical problems identified by the respondents can be correct through education. That is why specific non-formal and informal learning courses are recommended not only for students/master's students from faculties with an economic profile (present in many curricula in Romanian educational institutions) but also for those from other specializations. The values, skills, and qualities acquired during the educational course can be strengthened through internships and mentoring that offer the possibility of contact with several environments that include different values and ethical dimensions and that have the potential to contribute to their moral development. Thus, learning from the perspective of ethics ensures the competitiveness of the individual in a business environment exposed to increased competitive pressures and offers him more opportunities in his career.

At the organizational level, the development and permanent adaptation of ethical codes clearly articulate the requirements related to

ethical professional development in organizations. Knowing and implementing them leads to greater efficiency in the fulfillment of responsibilities and an ethical approach to decisions aimed at ensuring the viability of the business.

Through the obtained results, the formulated null hypotheses cannot be reject.

The assumed *limits* of the research: 1. in the case of a large number of respondents, the sample will be limited, and for this reason, the error will not be respected and the data will not be extrapolated; 2. the research is open for an age gap between 18-41 years, and the results can be influenced by the specific peculiarities of much narrower intervals.

7. Conclusions

Team dictate the ethical behavior of the organization according to their own under the direct influence of the company's external environment (partners, competition, socio-political context). Personal values, basic beliefs, and attitudes that influence the ethical behavior of the individual can contribute to sustaining viable communities. Education and the establishment of a code of ethics that provides a structure, a framework of principles, rules, and specific policies are safe ways to develop an ethical climate based on responsibility and moral commitment. By behaving to a high ethical standard, companies can strengthen their drive to succeed internally, and build long-lasting, solid reputations and financial success.

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