

ROLE OF ETHICS IN TEACHING INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract: : The article approaches the concepts of ethics and management of ethics in teaching institutions, as a part of public institutions. The research methodology uses instruments such as analysis, synthesis, comparison, after a broad study of the professional literature in this area of interest. This paper represents a first stage for a future research regarding the way that ethics is implemented in teaching institutions from Romania.

JEL classification: I23, I29

Key words: ethics; management of ethics; teaching institutions; public institutions; implementation

1. INTRODUCTION

The article presents the importance of ethics and the need for a sound management of ethics, in general, but also in the area of public teaching institutions. In order to understand the way that these instruments could be applied in certain domains, we need to review the literature targeting this subject. This theme is very complex and in many cases, ethics in public institutions is not considered as having the same value as accountancy, finance, budgeting or a simple management.

Objectives of the article are: a better understanding of concepts (ethics and management of ethics) and importance of their implementation in different domains, even in public institutions, but also a better highlighting of methods used to change the image of institutions, through management of ethics.

As a research methodology, we use basic instruments, because this article represents a first step to a further applied research. So, we use analysis, synthesis, observation, comparison and correlations in order to achieve the main objectives of this study, referring to ethics in teaching institutions from Romania.

2. ETHICS AND MANAGEMENT OF ETHICS

The entire research regarding ethics in teaching institutions or other public organizations seems very interesting, but first, we have to understand very well what concepts like ethics, managements of ethics mean. If we want to be able to give solutions for public managers in this matter, we have to ask the correct questions and these are: What is ethics? What is managements of ethics? Which are the instruments used by managers in order to implement ethics? Who are the actors involved in this process? Better questions, better answers! (Adams, 2009).

According to Romanian Dictionary (2009), ethics can be defined as “a set of rules in relation to which a human group adapts its behavior to distinguish what is legit and acceptable in achieving goals”.

Petrick and Quinn (1997) define the term ethics as “the study of individual and collective moral awareness, judgement, character and conduct”.

MacKinnon (2012) formulated a definition of ethics, after a little experiment in which she asked her students to answer the question “What is ethics?”. Her definition was: “Ethics or moral philosophy asks basic questions about the good life, about what is better and worse, about whether there is any objective right and wrong and how we know it if there is.”

So, after analyzing her research, we can conclude that ethics is something very personal, subjective and dependent on a lot of factors, such as religion, family, law, the group to which we belong or an entire culture. The ethical set of rules has a common basis, but people are not born with ethical values, this behavior is formed during years of education.

Ethics is not an exact science, because what seems to be ethical or moral for a person in one culture, is not acceptable for other cultures. We can give here a lot of examples (whistle-blowing, hara-kiri, euthanasia and so on).

The relation between culture and ethics (business ethics) is presented by Shakeel, Khan and Khan (2011):

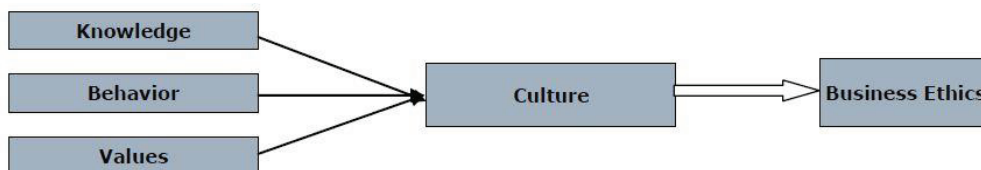


Figure no. 1 Relation between culture and ethics

Source: Shakeel, Khan and Khan (2011), Impact of culture on business ethics, Far East Journal on Psychology and Business, vol 3, no.2, May 2011

This domains has a lot of definitions, meanings and approaches in the international literature and has a great applicability in numerous sectors, like education, medical system, law, business, everyday life, sociology, environment, tourism, food sector and so on.

The question that arise is: why is ethics important? Why should ethics be studied and implemented in real life, passing beyond the numerous theories and concepts about it, that make it difficult to apply it, without a proper experience and knowledge.

Ethics is of a great important for a lot of domains and should be studied, because ethics is like character in psychology, it is formed, you are not born with a character, you are not born bad or good. So, ethics should be integrated in organizations, institutions, schools and combined with other instrument that lead to the creation of a moral environment.

Plato, the Greek philosopher said that “All evil is ignorance”. Maybe, this statement is too radical, because even if we know something is bad (we are not ignorant), there is a chance to comit a mistake, to comit something that is not moral. But, we have the premises in order to act accordingly. In the same way, we could agree that school teaches us a lot of things, a lot of theory, even if we will not apply everything of that. But we develop a critical and logical way of thinking, that help us to make decisions in everydaylife. So does ethics, as an object of study.

But it is not sufficient to study ethics, it is more important to have the instruments that help you implement it and create a more ethical environment for all members of the society or a certain community. We could say that management of ethics arose from this need, to better understand and implement ethics in organizations or institutions or other entities.

If there are a lot of definitions of the concept of ethics, there are also an important debate in the professional literature for the concept of “management of ethics”. We can present some of them:

“The management of ethics can be defined as the management of all elements related to the moral life of an organization” (Gavrilescu, 2011).

Kaptein (1998) explains in simple and concise words what is the difference between ethics management (or management of ethics) and management ethics (ethics of management). The former is focused on ethics, the latter is centered on management. In our research, we focus on ethics management and on its instruments used in order to implement ethics in organizations.

Kaptein use the term “organization” for ethics management, considering that ethics must be organized in an institution or other entity and this is done with the help of management. His definition is: “ethics management is about imbuing an organization with ethical responsibility as an indispensable element of the corporate existence”.

The author sees ethics management as a management discipline and I agree with his perspective and this is the reason for which ethics and ethics management should be considered as important as other management areas, like human resources for example and should be studied in schools or even companies.

The instruments of ethics management presented in most works of specialists are: codes of ethics, ethics committees, ethics trainings, ethics phone lines, ethics audit, ethics procedures and programs, whistle blowing mechanism.

Codes of ethics represent norms and values that are inherent in the company’s objectives, that the corporation stands for and can be held accountable for (Bacher, 2007). Usually, these codes have a written form and should be known by all participants at the company’s activity (employees or other partners).

After studying this concept, we found also another one, but very similar with this – phantom codes of ethics. These are norms and values known and respected by employees, but they do not have a written form, being considered informal codes of ethics.

A good code of ethics must satisfy moral standards of trust, respect, responsibility, equity, transparency, care for avoid damage, respect for law, environment and other individuals (Scwartz, 2002). These codes have to be distributed among people in an organization, taught in trainings and also by following the leader, who has to be a model.

Ethics committees are responsible for the implementation and the control of all programs and procedures of ethics management and also manage the problems that arise in an organization. These councils or committees are formed by different specialists in different area of expertise, like human resources, psychology, sociology, accounting, law and others.

According to Muresan (2009), their functions are: development of an ethics code, periodical evaluation of ethical procedures and their adjustment, maintenance of an ethical organizational culture, moral counseling, protection of all institution’s members’ rights.

Ethics training programs are organized by companies in order to train employees to recognize ethical problems, ethical dilemmas, to make them more aware of the correct decisions from a moral perspective, to explain the ethics codes. In Romania, ethics trainings are not very common as in developed countries. The most used methods for an ethical training are conferences, seminars, simulations of ethical dilemmas, etc.

Ethics phone lines are offered by the organization in order for them to require an anonymous consultation on an ethical problem or to announce an ethical conflict. This instrument should be managed by a neutral person or institution, because otherwise, employees may feel afraid to use these lines.

According to Farlex Financial Dictionary (2012), “an ethics audit is an investigation into how well (or poorly) a company conforms to the ethical standards of its industry or society generally. Some companies may formally adopt a code of ethics and conduct periodic ethics audits to see how closely they follow their own rules”.

Regarding this aspect, in our country, ethics audits are usually realized when problems appear, not being a periodical instrument. So, this form of control and evaluation should be made on a current basis, in order to insure a better ethical climate in the organization.

Ethical procedures and programs refers to gender equality, non-discrimination, conflicts, privacy, receipt of gifts, environmental protection and the behaviour and attitude that an employee should adopt when facing with ethical dilemmas. These also include the sanctions for violating the rules.

Another instrument used in ethics management could be the whistle blowing mechanism. This tool is differently perceived, being dependent on the culture that someone belong to. If Americans encourage whistle-blowers, French consider that this phenomenon is not honourable, being similar to betrayal.

The whistle blower is an employee that reveals something illegal, non-ethical or wrong that happens in the organization. Whistle-blowing is not something personal, is not revenge and this mechanism must be encouraged.

So, there appears the need for protecting whistle-blowers by regulations, otherwise, they could lose their jobs. During ethics training, people should understand when there is an ethical obligation to blow the whistle and recognize the cases in which is not.

Alavudeen, Kalil Rahman and Jayakumaran (2008) agree that internal whistleblowing must be encouraged and the external one prevented by organizations in certain limits, of course. The external one affects the image and reputation of an organization, so managers have to try solving problems inside their company or institution.

The authors also present the steps for implementation of a good whistle-blowing mechanism: formal procedures for reporting violations (hotlines), clear communication of the person to whom employees can reveal violations, clear communications about bans on retaliation.

3. ETHICS IN TEACHING INSTITUTIONS

The present article introduces a broader research regarding the application of ethics in teaching institutions. These are public institutions, so we will first try to

explain why it is important ethics for these entities and what is the ethics infrastructure used in order to better implement mechanisms of ethics management.

When we talk about public sector, we talk about public money, so the problem of ethics is even more stringent than in the private sector, because a lot of problems are of public interest. In most of the public institutions, there is a more direct connection between community and the people offering public services.

Public institutions refer both to a central and local level and comprises public agencies, governments, ministries, city halls, local administration, health care institutions, teaching institutions, justice, police, army and others. Besides, implementation of ethics needs a legal infrastructure and this is done within the public sector.

Ethics in the public sector reflects the moral attitude of citizens and is a mirror of the ethical climate of the society. So, ethics in these institutions lead to a social progress. Grigoruta (2005) shows that there is a strong relation between public reforms and ethics management, because a change in regulations, like a reduction of control, may lead to a wrong behavior or mistakes.

A better image of countries at European level starts with ethics, because an ethical climat means less corruption, a more efficient way of spending public money and all these create trust.

Ethics in teaching institutions has an important role for the entire society, because these entities create models, not just people with information. So, ethics can be taught by including a discipline in the curricula of the institution or even by offering ethical models in person of teachers, educators, professors and others. In order to create an improved ethical climat in these institutions, managers have to apply principles and methods specific to ethics management.

At a first look at the main teaching instution in Romania, we may conclude that ethics management is not very well known or implemented. We see codes of ethics, ethics committees or councils, but ethics management is not just these codes or committees, is much more.

These days, National Education Ministry of Romania launched for debates an Ethics Code needed in the preuniversity system. This code is very strict and include normal and common sense rules, like: a teacher that was sanctioned one, will never be part of the teaching staff or the article stripulating that it is forbidden to offer private lessons to your own students. And in Law no1/2011 regarding national education system, we also have a chapter related to university ethics, ethics codes and ethics commission.

But all ethics codes are wright, common sense, of course they are not always perfect and have to be updated to the new changes. In my opinion, the problem of corruption or non-ethical behavior in eduction is not because we do not have rules, but because we do not know to disseminate these rules, to apply them and control their implementation. And even if we communicate all these ethics codes, it is not enough for having a good ethical climate. Teaching institutions have to “teach and learn” ethics, ethics management and management ethics, of course adapted for each level of education.

If public responsible do not understand the role of having an ethics management, not just an ethics code or commission, we will never improve our ethics background and our ethical image. And in Romania, implementation of an ethics management in public institutions is at a very low level.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This article reached its objectives of knowing the terms of ethics, management of ethics and the tools needed for a better implementation in teaching institutions from the public sector. We tried to explain these mechanisms in simple words, in order to better understand the great role and importance of ethics management for companies, organizations or public entities. This paper represents a first stage for a further quantitative research regarding ethics and ethics management in higher education system in Romania. In my opinion, the public system suffers from an important lack of ethics management, so I think that there is a need for a question thinking orientation, using Power Thinking methodologies of Marilee Adams.

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