

# Time to Reinvent the Wheel: A New Approach to Accounting Education

Khaldoon Al-Htaybat and Larissa von Alberti-Alhtaybat  
Faculty of Economics and Administration, King Abdulaziz University

## Abstract

*In recent years, accounting has failed in several instances, primary examples being Enron and WorldCom. The educational system cannot claim that it has no part in these failures since it has played a part in shaping the practitioners that ultimately failed the system. Thus, education has to be rethought and changes should be made accordingly. This study seeks to make one such contribution. Firstly, this article examines some relevant current approaches in accounting ethics and ethical education in accounting and the corresponding role given to rules and principles, ethical theories, values, and virtues. Secondly, it presents an approach in which those rules, values and virtues are included in an interrelated, consistent manner. Finally, implications of this approach for ethical education in accounting are discussed and recommendations for standard-setters and suggestions for future research are outlined.*

**Key words:** accounting principles; conceptual framework; ethics.

## Introduction

The foundation of the current accounting education system (AES), and perhaps all business-related degrees, is based on the value maximisation and stakeholder theory (see Jensen, 2002), either through revenue increase or cost reduction. This is one of the first ultimate goals accounting students are introduced to when embarking upon their journey of acquiring an accounting degree. Starting from the Principles of Accounting courses, the AES is based on profit maximisation and on cost-benefit theories. These ideas of the current system are based on how corporations can maximize profit, and how they minimise their costs as the only ultimate goals in the business environment, eventually giving the greatest importance to the shareholders/owners (McPhail, 2001a). Due to such accounting curriculum, accounting graduates

become true believers that profit is the most important achievement. In this context, Kumar et al. (1991), Ghoshal (2005), and McPhail (2001b) argue that the business education system is rooted in several principles, theories, models and assumptions which could direct students to believe that unethical decisions need to be made and unethical measures need to be undertaken in order to have a thriving business and to maximise shareholder value. McPhail (1999) uses notions of Foucault, Marx, Bourdieu and Gramsci to suggest that the capital power seeks to maintain its position through accounting education. Waddock (2003) also argues that the nature of business program teaching in universities may be one of the drivers behind the recent scandals in the business arena, such as Lehman Brothers, WorldCom and Enron.

The paper argues that introducing ethics, social or environmental accounting (Gray et al., 1994; McPhail, 2001b) in later semesters is yet too late, just as a brief reference to them at the end of a chapter is insufficient. Tolerance, altruism, trust, respect, empathy, fairness and justice are important values that should be included in accounting education. Based on our teaching experience, the majority of students join such degree with the notion of dealing with money, earning lots of it, and generally being money makers, thus it is very important to instil a sense of accountability and care for other stakeholders. As such, highlighting the investor, and perhaps creditors, as the main groups to be concerned with might be one of the first problems to tackle.

Educators have to place equal importance from the outset on the triple bottom-line (Milne et al., 2003) and although these matters have been discussed extensively, introductory accounting texts do not address these to date (Tweedie et al., 2012; see for instance Weygandt et al., 2011).

A new educational approach in accounting aiming to integrate accountability, social and environmental responsibility, and acting in accordance with these principles, is proposed. The need arises because of the crucial functions of the AES in generating accounting activities that will have an impact on the welfare of society. This paper provides a simple introduction to the new approach of AES, explaining what it is, why it matters, how it is done, and how to get started. We suggest a threefold approach, which includes concrete suggestions on how to instil ethical values in accounting students and thus future practitioners.

In the following section, this paper discusses the relevant theoretical context and reviews related to prior studies, proposing approaches in accounting education, based on ethical theories and moral values. Then, the paper outlines a new approach in which existing accounting values, and ethical and moral values are integrated in an interrelated, consistent manner. We argue that the existing accounting principles currently safeguard primarily the financial interest of shareholders, and then those of other user groups, such as creditors. We suggest an extension to the existing accounting principles, by including an ethical and moral value level to the

teaching of accounting principles and of the conceptual framework. Finally, some implications of the new approach to accounting education are discussed.

### ***Theoretical Context and Literature***

The concept of ethics is strongly rooted in the philosophical writing of the great philosophers, including Socrates, Aristotle, Kant, Heidegger, Hume and Descartes, whose works have influenced the development of academic thinking till today. The actual meaning of the word ethics derives from the Greek word *ethikos*, which originally comes from the Greek word *ethos*, meaning *custom*, and the Latin word *moralis*, also meaning *custom*. Therefore, the phrases ethics, moral characters or values will be used in this paper interchangeably, as essentially they mean the same and relate in the same manner to the way the individual acts, either in a good or a bad way. As one of the guiding philosophers, Socrates sought to find a way to live by the right principles, believing that doing what is right will make a person happy and that virtue is the key to happiness, which could be taught (Vlastos, 1985). One of his followers, Aristotle, considered ethics a practical subject, outlining how to do the good and the right thing, as opposed to just knowing it theoretically (Ackrill, 1981). In later philosophical works, Kant (Aune, 1979) reflected his ethical principles in the categorical imperative: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time will that it should become a universal law", from which an individual should delineate all actions. Thus, an internal guiding principle is suggested to govern every action, and accountability to this standard is subsequently created. Descartes (Marshall, 1998) believed that ethical or moral behaviour is strongly rooted in a religious belief system which guides human action. Hume (Root, 1956) suggested that education is the means to share ethical values and behavioural guidelines.

Accordingly, this paper argues that education is the primary vehicle to educate accounting graduates with greatly developed ethical standards. Finally, Derrida (McKernan, 2011) believes that it is the duty of educators and institutions not to stand transfixed but to 'really listen' to the need for change and to ensure that progress is made.

The roles of business accountability/responsibility towards society, values and integrity have often escaped largely from the traditional accounting education system. McPhail (2001b) argues that the issue of ethics in conventional accounting has been conceptualised in terms of the accountant's obligation to remain faithful to investors and creditors. Merritt (1991) states that business schools have failed to prepare their graduates to react morally to the issues that arise in their work environment. During the last few decades and even the last few years only, accounting systems, subject to AES, have seen a number of corporate failures and accounting scandals around the world that have affected economies, societies and the environment greatly (Eweje & Brunton, 2010). Enron, ImClone, Adelphia, Tyco,

Qwest, Global Crossing, WorldCom, Lehman Brothers and Bear Stearns come to mind immediately (Eweje & Brunton, 2010), but also Union Carbide and the Bhopal incident should not be excluded, and perhaps even Fukushima and economic disaster in Greece should be registered on this list. Corporate and economic failures have been on the increase globally (O'Leary & Stewart, 2012). Ultimately, one has to question pure market economy: does the human being need to be eliminated from the equation? Perhaps yes, since our education standards are failing society (McPhail, 2001a) and essentially we are accountable to society.

Education plays a major role in disseminating knowledge and is the main vehicle to achieve a possible change in accountants' mindsets (Boyce, 2004). Accounting education seems to fall short (McPhail, 2001a), even though most programmes include an ethics course or elements of ethics in different courses in their curriculum (Bampton & Cowton, 2002). The question asserts itself whether one ethics course will truly change the obvious problems. It is time to take a critical look at accounting education and undertake any necessary changes. Bampton and Cowton (2002) close their paper with a call for specific suggestions on how to integrate ethics education in accounting. In this paper, we suggest a new approach to the existing AES in the specific field of financial accounting. It suggests that accounting education needs a principal overhaul to change the approach to accounting education starting in the first semester. As opposed to identifying profit and maximising investor wealth as the primary objective of accounting (Ferguson et al., 2011), accounting education has to humanise accounting practice.

Can we as business schools in general and as accounting scholars in particular disconnect ourselves from society, and only consider our contribution as producing the next batch of graduates, well-trained to continue the profit-driven haste that has become life? Is it not our responsibility to seek improvement and ensure that our utmost has been done to avoid any such failings in the future (McKernan, 2011)? Profit in itself is no evil goal or measure but if it is the only aspiration eliminating all other aspects of life, it takes on a dehumanising character (Bauman, 1996). Is the university's position in society not one of distance, so as to allow critical analysis and discussion of current developments (Parker, 2002)?

In today's bid to satisfy funding sources, consultancy contracts and popular publication outlets, academic scholars give up a part of their independence and academic freedom, willingly or forcefully (Boyce, 2004; Parker, 2002), and focus on the expected performance-related output. While universities claim that such changes are due to external forces and external funding restrictions (Parker, 2002), it is possible that the reigning economic capitalist class is in fact seeking to safeguard the interests of its most powerful representatives, the world's large corporations (Boyce, 2004), by changing institutions and educating students accordingly (Boyce, 2004).

This paper argues that modern society has experienced dehumanisation in all aspects of life (Haslam, 2006) and accounting plays an active part in that process

(Bauman, 1996). It allows an individual to quantify and rationalise, in extreme cases including human life (Bauman, 1996). Emotions are removed (Broadbent, 1998) and decision-makers distance themselves sufficiently through their rationalisation and quantification to make uncomfortable decisions comfortably. Gray et al. (1994) suggest ethical and intellectual failure among accounting practitioners, and believe that in part accounting scholars and accounting education are to blame, as this could be seen as a moral failure on their part. They suggest considering social and environmental accounting as a vehicle to challenge conventional accounting education, in order to enhance values, and ethical and intellectual development of accounting students (Gray et al., 1994). McKernan (2011) clearly identifies universities and accounting educators' responsibility to ensure that there is progress and that history shall not repeat itself, i.e. we should not remain fixed.

Attention to accounting ethics is growing, as evidenced by the large number of journal publications (Bampton & Cowton, 2012), university courses, and international conferences that deal with the ethical aspects of accounting. Bampton and Cowton (2012) identified a total of 520 published articles over a time period of 30 years, with the bulk having been published from 1995 onwards. Bampton and Cowton (2012) suggest accounting education and ethics studies to be split into two types: firstly, studies inspecting the morality and ethical belief system of accounting students, and secondly, studies identifying whether accounting education should and does engage in ethics teaching, and its related impact on students' morality levels.

Corporate failures and accounting scandals created several responses seeking to reduce the number of such scandals. Professional accounting organizations and bodies issued a code of conduct, as a set of principles and rules used as guidelines for proper accountants' behaviour in their profession, and what society expects to be considered in decision making (McPhail & Walters, 2009; Melé, 2005). Acts and laws, such as the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, were called into life to establish new guidelines and penalties for disclosure, auditing and fraud.

Undergraduate classroom education should already take part in enhancing the personal qualities of accountants proactively, as a preventive action. Bampton and Maclagan (2005) outline a variety of reasons as to what accounting ethics education can effectively achieve, such as increasing students' awareness, teaching them that business indeed does not have to be unethical automatically, relating accounting education to morality and ethical issues, and helping students get a better understanding of practice-related matters.

We would like to strengthen the point that indeed, education can achieve changed behaviour, by calling upon Derrida's stance that institutions and educators have to ensure that such change is accomplished through their message. Academics might possess sufficient enough power through their cultural capital to accomplish a change in future generations' behaviour, even though it may mean taking on a

fight with the established and powerful forms of economic capital, who will seek to maintain their position (Boyce, 2004).

While several prior studies suggest that ethics education may not necessarily improve the ethics level of individuals (see Armstrong, 1987; Burks & Sellani, 2008; Cooley, 2004; Fulmer & Cargile, 1987; McCarthy, 1997; Ponemon, 1993; Martin, 1982; Ritter, 2006), as it is partially a selling factor when introduced by business schools (Neimark, 1995), there is a large number of prior studies which consider ethics education as a medium with the potential to be part of a solution to the increasing number of world-wide business scandals and which recommend that ethics education should be a significant part of business education in universities (e.g., Adkin & Radtke, 2004; Bampton & Cowton, 2002; Bampton & Cowton, 2012; Bampton & Maclagan, 2005; Byerly et al., 2002; Casado & Vallen 2000; DiBattista et al., 1997; Gautschi III & Jones, 1998; Gioia, 2002; Jones, 2009; Izzo, 2000; Kuhn, 1998; Lau, 2010; Low et al., 2008; McPhail, 2001a and b; Mahin, 1998; Nasher & Ruhe, 2001; Oddo, 1997; Park, 1998; Rossouw, 2002; Sims, 2002; Swanson & Frederick, 2003; Weber & Glyptis, 2000; Williams & Elson, 2009; Wu, 2003). Fulmer and Cargile (1987), Gammie and Gammie (2009), Shaub (1994), and Wu (2003) suggested that individuals' ethics education as one of demographic characteristics could correlate to the ethics of accountants.

Bampton and Cowton (2002) identify a gap in ethics education in accounting, management accounting specifically, and generally suggest that ethics education in business schools could still be improved (Bampton & Cowton, 2002). The recent financial crisis highlights the need for concentrated ethics education in relation to the various business disciplines, in order for students to determine a direct relation to their future workplace (Bampton & Maclagan, 2005). Two strategies are proposed to implement accounting ethics education in accounting courses: discrete and integrated course approaches (Dellaportas, 2006; Fisher et al., 2007). Batson et al. (2006) suggest integration or introjections as two types of internalisation of ethical values through ethics education. The integration of ethical values into individuals' inner principles occurs when one takes the precepts into one's core sense of self, whereas introjections or following regulations occur when an individual takes the precepts as a regulatory function rather than as a part of one's core self (Mayhew & Murphy, 2009). Nevertheless, Melé (2005) states that although considerable steps have been taken in ethical accounting education, it is essential after the recent accounting scandals to pay increasing attention to ethics in accounting and to improve ethical education for accountants. Based on prior research findings, McPhail and Walters (2009) concluded that conventional accounting education has a more negative than positive impact on students' ethical predispositions.

This paper argues that these findings are a result of, in some cases, accounting ethics education not being powerful enough to be reflected in the individuals' behaviour in the work environment. Accounting ethics is not being integrated

across the students' development in the accounting courses early enough since incorporating ethics, social or environmental accounting in later semesters is too late for students to believe in it. Such education should start at the primary level. Educators have to place equal importance from the outset on the triple bottom-line (Milne et al., 2003) and although these matters have been discussed extensively, introductory accounting texts and course syllabi do not address these to date (Tweedie et al., 2012). Therefore, the following section discusses the new approach to humanising our accounting education system according to which students should be educated.

## **Methods**

The research methodology is qualitative, reviewing the existing literature and accounting practice methods, and identifying the three steps to improve the accounting curriculum through iterative review of the extant literature. As a result, we propose a more humanised accounting system.

## **Results: A New Approach to Humanising the Accounting Education System**

Despite the existing debate in accounting literature whether ethics and moral values can or cannot be taught, we believe that moral and ethical education should be recognised as an important part of education, and that new types of accounting will be introduced (Cowton, 1999). The introduction of such education into the business schools' curriculum aims to address the importance of ethics education for accounting graduates (Bampton & Maclagan, 2005). Thus, it will lead to a certain level of morality, maturity and awareness to be able to recognise, examine, judge and assess ethical matters in the real world, to distinguish right from wrong, and good from bad behaviour, contrary to those who may be unfamiliar with these values due to lacking education, and, as a result, may lack the ability to address moral dilemmas in their work environment (Lau, 2010; Low et al., 2008; Peng 2011; Sims, 2002; Williams & Elson, 2009).

Interrelated consistent steps will be undertaken to integrate moral values and virtues in the existing accounting education system, as these value and virtues should neither be treated just as a general idea, nor be taught in a course separate from the students' primary educational subject matter, so as to avoid them seeming disconnected and unrelated. This should increase accounting academics' enthusiasm for the subject matter, as one of their identified issues was in which context or setting to teach ethics (Bampton & Maclagan, 2005). If students are taught in the first class that profit for the shareholder is one of the most important objectives, they should be taught at the same time that this profit should not cause harm or loss to society and environment. While profit is an important outcome of the accounting function, it should be based on virtuous accounting practices. Thus, ethics education

cannot simply take place in a separate course, disconnected from the actual study matter, allowing students to compartmentalise it into separated subjects. Students might perhaps only memorise the course content without ever determining the close and important relationship between being an accountant and acting ethically, and might not even understand the core of these theories in the first place and how they relate to the accountant's job (Cooley, 2004).

In fact, recent events show that, despite offering ethics education for some period already, business schools have failed to convey the message that accounting and finance decisions have to be made on an ethical basis. We seek to increase students' awareness of ethical considerations, to train them in analytical and critical thinking, and to enhance their moral reasoning skills to motivate them to act accordingly in their future work environment. Several essential steps are suggested to accounting professors and educators on how they should integrate moral values not only in the accounting courses but also in their ways of teaching accounting starting at the primary level of accounting education.

### ***Step One: Enhance the Conceptual Framework***

The current traditional accounting education is driven by the conventional conceptual framework, so students are first introduced to the basic objective of accounting on the basis of this framework, which incorporates key accounting principles, assumptions and constraints, as well as the qualitative characteristics, basic elements, and recognition and measurement concepts. Key accounting textbooks (see for instance Weygandt et al., 2011) base their introductory and intermediate level teaching on the comprehensive framework which primarily serves the purpose of guiding standard setters, statement preparers and other users (Weygandt et al., 2011). However, this framework also serves to guide accounting educators when instructing students in the science of accounting, and as the framework is used as a frame of reference internationally, including ethical values in the framework would harmonise educational practice. While recent editions have ethics highlighted as a major element of accounting (Weygandt et al., 2011), the subject matter itself has not been included as an element in the accounting foundation itself.

The first step is to include moral values in the conventional conceptual framework as additional accounting constraints. Current pervasive constraints in the internationally taught framework are materiality and cost, where materiality determines the relevance of the elements based on their ability to influence investors' decision-making and cost determines the cost versus the benefit of providing particular information (Kieso et al., 2012). The newly suggested constraint should be used as a moral guideline by which one's actions are judged as right or wrong, honest or dishonest, fair or not fair. Students should learn how they can act ethically, which involves teaching them how to show integrity, respect, fairness, and openness



in behaviour and attitude in almost all situations of their public life. In an attempt to do so, the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) provided its 2010 *Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants*, and earlier versions (Farrell & Cobbin, 2000), as a basis for many of the ethical codes applied by its member bodies. This code states that a professional accountant must comply with the following five fundamental principles: firstly, *integrity*: accountants should be straightforward and honest in all professional and business relationships. Secondly, *objectivity*: accountants should not allow for bias, conflict of interest or undue influence of others to override professional or business judgements. Thirdly, *professional competence and due care*: accountants should sustain professional knowledge and skill at the required level in order to ensure that any client or employer receives competent professional services based on current developments /legislation/ techniques in practice, and act diligently in accordance with the applicable technical and professional standards. Fourthly, *confidentiality*: accountants should show respect to the confidentiality of information acquired as a result of professional and business relationships. Finally, *professional behaviour*: accountants should comply with relevant laws and regulations and they should avoid any action that discredits the profession (available at IFAC web page, <http://web.ifac.org>).

Based on these suggested principles, we propose to include an ethical constraint in the conceptual framework, referred to as ethical quality, ensuring that information provided is in accordance with such ethical principles. As, for instance, cost-benefit determines the trade-off between providing information or not providing information, ethical quality constrains provision of information on the basis of morality. Such morality should be exercised by accountants, as they should provide all relevant information, the good and the bad, with integrity, professionalism, objectivity, confidentiality and due care. The information they provide should be free of bias, and factual<sup>1</sup>, whether it shows the firm in a good or bad light. Thus ethical quality restricts the accountants, their judgement and decision-making.

In practical terms, ethical quality would be the constraint against which information is measured, or showing whether the provision of information reflects ethical characteristics of fair, good and right. Thus, any information that does not uphold fair, good and right should be reviewed and amended accordingly. For instance, if an organisation chooses to recognise revenues too early, resulting in an overstated profit, ethical quality should be a constraining factor that leads to questioning and amending such early recognition.

### ***Step Two: Implement Kant through the Golden Rule of Reciprocity***

In current accounting education students are introduced to the basic accounting equation in the first few classes. The equation reflects the following golden rules of

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<sup>1</sup> Reflecting qualities that are already identified in the conceptual framework (Kieso et al., 2012)

accounting: (1) assets equal sources of finance, i.e. assets equal liabilities plus owners' equity; (2) debit equals credit, and (3) regarding the real accounts, what comes in is debited and what goes out is credited. As far as personal accounts are concerned, the recipient is debited and the sender is credited, while in nominal accounts any expenses or losses are debited and any income or revenues are credited. At this stage students need to expand their values in ethics or morality to include the golden rule of accounting, reciprocity, reflecting Kant's categorical imperative (Aune, 1979). Educators should introduce the positive form of this rule with the accounting equation: corporations should treat others as they would like others to treat them, and the negative or prohibitive form with the following equation: corporations should not treat others in the way that they would not like to be treated. Accounting educators should explain this rule from an accounting perspective as a *reciprocal* or *two-way* relationship between the two sides of the accounting equation, the firm and others, that involves both sides to equal effects. For instance, regarding trade debtors and trade creditors, corporations should pay their payables as timely as they would like their receivables to be paid, without abusing their leverage and bargaining power. In line with the existing principle of going concern, considered to be vital to society as everyone assumes their going concern, companies should already disclose when they face 'life-threatening' difficulties resulting in the cessation of operations, reflecting ethical behaviour.

In practice, we suggest to not 'just' include a slide that discusses ethical behaviour and explains the Sarbanes-Oxley-Act, but rather incorporate ethical concepts into the actual accounting conceptual curriculum. Thus, alongside the existing accounting concepts we must incorporate ethical teaching in order for students not to perceive ethics as an add-on but as an elementary aspect of the accounting profession. We suggest education akin to health educators who do not leave any room for variation when explaining treatments but emphasise the 'must' more than the 'could'. Essentially, we believe that ethics is not optional and that ethical accounting is a compulsory aspect of the profession.

### ***Step Three: Mature the Curriculum***

A specialised accounting ethics course should be included in any accounting programme, concerning itself with the moral development of accounting students (Brands, 2010), and with the provision of empowerment rather than restriction (Kjonstad & Willmott 1995). This course should be taught in the light of real life accounting scandals cases and ethics' code for professional accountants as part of international accounting and/or auditing standards. McPhail (2006) informs on a possible approach to such a course, in which students prepared a report on an identified ethical dilemma of a particular company and that report was sent to the respective business, leading to engaging with that company and its possible responses (McPhail, 2006). Teaching a full course in accounting ethics and

values based on different real life accounting scandals will allow students to discuss actual ethical dilemmas that came up in accounting practice, and how accountants participated in these scandals to encourage students to discuss and evaluate critically and help them to develop their own ethical awareness (Gray et al., 1994; Huss & Paterson, 1993).

Ethical education in accounting should have an impact on the ethical behaviour of those receiving this education and not only merely provide a set of theoretical tools to solve hypothetical ethical dilemmas (Melé, 2005). Ethical education has to be oriented toward motivating moral behaviour and acquiring virtues (Bampton & Maclagan, 2005), through the presentation and discussion of rules and precedent cases, based on the principles and values of specific people involved in a particular situation, significant facts of their lives, traits of their character, as well as other relevant information about the factors which have a positive influence on morality (Melé, 2005). When teaching this course, educators should go beyond conventional accounting ethics education, i.e. safeguarding investors' and creditors' interests above all (McPhail, 2001a), to focus instead on organisational social responsibility, environmental accounting, increase of product safety, improvement of working environment conditions, realisation of true equal opportunities, and of course, safeguarding a company's assets. Interactive discussion and group work (Geary & Sims, 1994; McPhail, 2006) or role-playing (Loeb, 1988; Park, 1998) could be employed as teaching and learning methods, and topics focusing on accounting and situations likely to be faced by students in their future working life should also be included.

In practice, we suggest including a specified course on accounting ethics, not just business ethics in general, which discusses such cases as Enron and WorldCom in detail, for students to understand the exact details of the various cases, the related issues, and the shortcomings of accounting regulation. None of the existing courses allows outlining the exact details, due to timing, and none allows students to analyse the necessary ethical behaviour. Thus, we consider it a necessity to include such a course in the curriculum.

### ***Recommendations to Standard-Setters***

The outlined steps are to be implemented in order to enhance the AES in financial accounting and reporting courses. As a sub-field of financial accounting, financial reporting, will automatically be subjected to ethics education, but the primary concern of financial reporting, thus of accountants that engage in financial statement preparation, is to acquire knowledge of relevant financial standards and be able to apply them. Greer and Tonge (2006) state that ethics is an integral element in achieving reliable financial reporting, and that one reason for Enron's possible failure was the shortcomings of the US financial reporting set up, which at the time relied entirely on compliance with GAAP and did not require true and fair view

reporting, for instance (Greer & Tonge, 2006). Thus, for ethics to become a primary concern, standard-setters have to strengthen the position of morality and ethical decision-making. Standard-setters should consider whether ethical behaviour and investment in ethics and morality could be treated as an intangible asset, in the same vein as goodwill is an intangible asset. Spending on enhancing working conditions in an overseas plant would no longer be an act of kindness but an actual investment, with the relevant paperwork, shown in the statement of financial position and giving a clear signal to all stakeholders, potential and current investors included.

Furthermore, businesses in their work environments should expect possible future ethical obligation towards others, which may or may not be incurred depending on the occurrence of some future event. Contingent Ethical Obligations (CEOs) should be included in accounting education as part of contingent liabilities, just as corporations should include the accounting treatment of CEOs, as they already do for environmental contingent liabilities. For instance, a company like Union Carbide would have to get an expert opinion on the likelihood of a disaster such as the Bhopal incident happening, and based on that would have to either make amends or would report a CEO. The likelihood of a CEO is described as probable, reasonably possible, or remote, and a CEO is recorded in a corporation's accounts and shown in the statement of financial position when a CEO is either probable or reasonably estimable. A footnote to the statement of financial position describes the nature and extent of the CEO.

## **Discussion**

This paper has made the case for ethics to be an elementary part of accounting education. That in itself, as can be seen from the literature review, is not a new suggestion. As Bampton and Cowton (2012) thoroughly demonstrate, a large amount of literature has been published in the field, making important contributions to the advancement of accounting education through ethical components. Vyakarnam et al. (1996) highlight the ethics-related problems that permeate all levels of the profession, obviously due to the Enron Scandal in 2000. McPhail (2001b) makes an important contribution when he points out that we need to rehumanise accounting, especially considering that other professions, such as medical doctors or engineers, have the notion of ethics as elementary concepts (McPhail, 2001b). Bampton and Maclagan (2005) suggest that ethics should be an integral part of accounting, and Tweedie et al. (2012) clarify the various aspects of the accounting curriculum, such as the available textbooks, that need to be enhanced. Bampton and Cowton (2002) close with a call for further research, and it is against the backdrop of these discussed publications that this paper was written. One important factor is to get students thinking about ethics and values in the accounting context, both as part of education and as a daily function in the workplace. Concurrent textbooks (see Weygandt et al., 2011) stress the importance of ethics but still need improvement (Tweedie et al., 2012), as ethics need to be more integrated.

Our paper suggests that an adjustment to the actual teaching of accounting principles is needed, and we suggest that this should also be considered as a change to accounting standards. Three adjustments were introduced: firstly, we believe that an additional constraint has to be included while teaching the conceptual framework, which we identified as ethical quality. If ethics is a part of the core foundation and function of accounting, akin to Hippocratic Oath in medicine, students and graduates will focus on ethics in the same manner as they focus on profit. To this end, we also suggested that the instruction of the accounting equation should be enhanced through Kant's categorical imperative, which endorses a reciprocal relationship with an organisation's stakeholders: treat others as you would like to be treated. There is no doubt that critics will wonder how such belief system is related to the business environment but practice will only change, to the better, if change happens at the roots or the starting point, which is education. Yet, while important, adjusting the basic curriculum alone is not sufficient, as students need to engage with actual cases and to discuss real life examples. To this end, we think that a specialised course, which focuses on accounting-specific ethics cases and problems, needs to be part of any accounting curriculum. The theoretical context which supports these developments and changes is based on the ancient Greek philosophers who believed that virtues and morals are an integral part of life, extending to Kant who introduced society to the categorical imperative reflecting his ultimate measure of how to do things right, and finally ending with Derrida, who believes that it is the faculty's responsibility to ensure that past mistakes and negative events should not be repeated.

In line with these theoretical beliefs, we have made recommendations to standard-setters to think outside the box, perhaps, and enhance the conceptual framework to include an ethical element for practical use as well. This may be the answer to the question: how much regulation is necessary? If an ethical element guides practitioners, they might seek for the 'right way' themselves, or at least not deviate as much. Some elements of practice already reflect the ethical belief system, for instance environment-related contingent liabilities, which we took as a guiding element to include similar contingent ethical liabilities.

And while we suggest all these changes, we believe that realistically education can raise accounting students' (thus future accountants') awareness of ethical behaviour, significantly improve students' knowledge of previous cases and potential minefields in the regulation, and bring to their attention the need to analyse potential behaviours on the basis of what is right, fair and honest. It is important to raise awareness and enhance knowledge of ethical behaviour, as corporate downfalls do not just affect the immediate stakeholders, such as investors, creditors, customers and employees, or the economy of the country the corporation is based in but, as the Lehman Brothers case illustrates, can affect other economies as well. While major economies can balance this, small countries have a harder time recovering

or may not be able to do so without external help. Furthermore, we believe that realistically ethics can be enhanced in financial reporting through standard-setters' requirements, as any requirements incorporated in rules have a higher chance of being complied with. Thus, we recommend further research in this area, since this is beyond the scope of this paper.

We would like to close with a call for further practical research, investigations into real-life cases that may then be used for educational purposes, and we would like to call upon standard-setters to consider an ethical element in the guiding principles as one solution to the question of how much regulation is enough and what the optimum level of standards is, as the reintroduction of upholding the highest level of virtues should reduce or ideally eliminate the level of deliberate accounting mistreatments.

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**Khaldoon Al-Htaybat**

Accounting Department  
Faculty of Economics and Administration  
King Abdulaziz University  
Jeddah, PO Box 80200, Zip Code 21589,  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia  
kmahmod@kau.edu.sa

**Larissa von Alberti-Alhtaybat**

Accounting Department  
Faculty of Economics and Administration  
King Abdulaziz University  
Jeddah, PO Box 80200, Zip Code 21589,  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia  
drlarissaalhtaybat@gmail.com

# Vrijeme za promjene: novi pristup obrazovanju u području računovodstva

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## Sažetak

*U posljednjih nekoliko godina računovodstvo se pokazalo neuspješnim u nekoliko situacija, od kojih za primjer možemo uzeti Enron i Worldcom. Obrazovni sustav ne može poreći svoju odgovornost u tim neuspjesima budući da je odigrao bitnu ulogu u obrazovanju stručnjaka koji su na kraju iznevjerili sustav. Stoga bi trebalo dobro promisliti o sadašnjem obrazovnom sustavu i u njega uvesti odgovarajuće promjene. Cilj ove studije jest u tome dati svoj doprinos. U članku se analiziraju neki važni aktualni pristupi računovodstvenoj etici i etici u obrazovanju računovođa, kao i odgovarajuća uloga koju imaju pravila i principi, teorije etike, vrijednosti i vrline. Članak prikazuje pristup u kojem su ta pravila, vrijednosti i vrline međusobno čvrsto povezani. Na kraju se raspravlja o implikacijama koje taj pristup ima na obrazovanje u području računovodstvene etike. Navode se preporuke za donositelje standarda i prijedlozi za buduća istraživanja.*

**Ključne riječi:** *principi računovodstva; konceptualni okvir; etika.*

## Uvod

Temelji sadašnjeg obrazovnog sustava u području računovodstva, a možda i svih studija u području biznisa, postavljeni su na maksimalizaciji vrijednosti i teoriji interesno-utjecajnih skupina (vidi Jensen, 2002), odnosno ili na povećanju dobiti ili na smanjenju troškova. To je jedan od prvih krajnjih ciljeva s kojima se studenti računovodstva upoznaju kada započinju svoj put prema dobivanju diplome u području računovodstva. Počevši s kolegijem Principi računovodstva, računovodstveno obrazovanje temelji se na maksimalizaciji profita i na teoriji troškova i dobiti. Te ideje sadašnjeg obrazovnog sustava temelje se na tome kako korporacije mogu maksimalizirati profit, a troškove minimalizirati, što su ujedno i jedini krajnji ciljevi u poslovnom okruženju koji su dioničarima i vlasnicima bitni (McPhail, 2001a). Zbog takvog kurikula u računovodstvenom obrazovanju diplomirani računovođe uistinu vjeruju da je profit najvažnije dostignuće. U ovom kontekstu Kumar i sur. (1991), Ghoshal (2005) i McPhail (2001b) tvrde da se sustav obrazovanja u području biznisa temelji na nekoliko principa, teorija, modela i pretpostavki koji bi mogli navesti

studente da vjeruju u to da se neetičke odluke moraju donositi i da se neetičke mjere moraju poduzeti da bi posao cvjetao i da bi se maksimalizirala vrijednost dionica. McPhail (1999) se koristi idejama Foucaulta, Marxa, Bordieua i Gramscija kada tvrdi da moć kapitala traži način da održi svoj položaj putem obrazovanja u području računovodstva. Waddock (2003) također tvrdi da je priroda nastavnih programa u području biznisa na sveučilištima možda jedna od pokretačkih snaga nedavnih skandala u poslovnom svijetu, kao što su oni koji su pogodili Lehman Brothers, Worldcom i Enron.

U radu se također tvrdi da je uvođenje etike, društvenog ili ekološkog računovodstva (Gray i sur., 1994; McPhail, 2001b) u višim semestrima ipak prekasno, kao što je i njihovo kratko spominjanje na kraju poglavlja u udžbeniku nedovoljno. Tolerancija, altruizam, povjerenje, poštovanje, empatija, poštenje i pravda važne su vrijednosti koje bi trebalo uključiti u obrazovanje računovođa. Na temelju našeg nastavnog iskustva većina studenata odabire taj studij zbog rukovanja novcem, velike zarade i općenito zbog profitabilnosti, pa je stoga jako važno u njima usaditi osjećaj odgovornosti i brige za druge interesne skupine. Jedan od glavnih problema kojim bi se trebalo pozabaviti jest istaknuti ulagače i možda vjerovnike kao glavne skupine na koje treba obratiti najveću pažnju.

Nastavnici od samog početka moraju naglasiti jednaku važnost trobilančnog koncepta (Milne i sur., 2003). Iako se o takvim pitanjima uvelike raspravljalo, uvodni tekstovi u udžbenicima iz računovodstva još uvijek ih ne obrađuju (Tweedie i sur., 2012; vidi Weygandt i sur., 2011).

Predlaže se novi obrazovni pristup računovodstvu, koji ima za cilj integrirati odgovornost, društvenu i ekološku, kao i naglasiti važnost postupanja u skladu s tim principima. Potreba za tim javlja se zbog činjenice da obrazovanje računovođa ima ključnu ulogu u računovodstvenim aktivnostima koje će imati utjecaj na dobrobit društva. Ovaj rad pruža jednostavan uvod u novi pristup sustavu obrazovanja računovođa, objašnjava što on podrazumijeva, zašto je bitan, kako se provodi i kako započinje. Predložimo trostruki pristup koji obuhvaća konkretne prijedloge o tome kako u studentima računovodstva, budućim računovođama, usaditi etičke vrijednosti.

U sljedećem poglavlju ovog rada raspravlja se o važnom teorijskom kontekstu i pregledu prije provedenih studija, te se predlažu pristupi u sustavu obrazovanja računovođa koji se temelje na etičkim teorijama i moralnim vrijednostima. Zatim se u radu prikazuje novi pristup u kojemu su postojeće vrijednosti u računovodstvu, etičke i moralne vrijednosti, međusobno čvrsto i dosljedno povezane. Tvrdimo da postojeći principi računovodstva trenutno prije svega štite financijske interese dioničara, a zatim interese ostalih skupina, kao što su npr. vjerovnici. Predložimo proširenje postojećih principa računovodstva tako što bi se u nastavni proces u kojemu se studentima objašnjavaju principi računovodstva i konceptualni okvir uključile i etičke i moralne vrijednosti. Na kraju se raspravlja o implikacijama koje novi pristup ima na obrazovanje računovođa.

## **Teorijski kontekst i literatura**

Koncept etike proizlazi iz filozofskih djela koja su napisali veliki filozofi poput Sokrata, Aristotela, Kanta, Heideggera, Humea i Descartesa. Njihova djela utječu na razvoj akademskog načina razmišljanja sve do danas. Pravo značenje riječi *etika* potječe od grčke riječi *ethikos*, koja se razvila od druge grčke riječi, *ethos*, a znači *običaj*, i od latinske riječi *moralis*, koja također znači *običaj*. Stoga će se izrazi *etika*, *moralne osobine* i *vrijednosti* naizmjenično koristiti u ovom radu, budući da u svojoj osnovi imaju isto značenje i jednako su povezani s načinom na koji se pojedinac ponaša, bilo to ponašanje dobro ili loše. Sokrat je, kao jedan od vodećih filozofa, pokušavao pronaći način na koji treba živjeti u skladu s ispravnim principima, vjerujući da će pojedinac biti sretan ako čini ono što je ispravno. Također je smatrao da je vrlina ključ sreće i da se ona može naučiti (Vlastos, 1985). Aristotel je, kao jedan od njegovih sljedbenika, smatrao da je *etika* praktična tema, objašnjavajući kako postupati dobro i ispravno, umjesto to samo znati u teoriji (Ackrill, 1981). U svojim kasnijim filozofskim djelima Kant (Aune, 1979) je naveo svoje etičke principe u kategoričkom imperativu: „Postupaj samo prema onoj maksimi za koju u isto vrijeme možeš željeti da postane opći zakon.“ Prema tome bi pojedinac trebao opisivati svako djelovanje. Tako je predložen unutarnji princip koji vodi i upravlja svim aktivnostima, a poslije se prema tom standardu stvara odgovornost. Descartes (Marshall, 1998) je smatrao da je etičko ili moralno ponašanje čvrsto utemeljeno na sustavu vjerskih uvjerenja koja upravljaju ljudskim postupcima. Hume (Root, 1956) je napisao da je obrazovanje sredstvo s pomoću kojega se etičke vrijednosti i smjernice ispravnog ponašanja mogu dijeliti. Naposljetku, Derrida (McKernan, 2011) smatra da dužnost nastavnika i institucija nije da samo ukočeno stoje, nego da „uistinu slušaju“ potrebu za promjenama i da vode računa o tome da se napredak zaista postigne.

Uloga odgovornosti kompanija prema društvu, vrijednosti i integritet često su izostavljeni iz tradicionalnog obrazovnog sustava u području računovodstva. McPhail (2001b) tvrdi da je pitanje etike u konvencionalnom računovodstvu konceptualizirano u smislu da računovođa ima obvezu biti lojalan ulagačima i vjerovnicima. Meritt (1991) tvrdi da poslovne škole nisu uspjele naučiti svoje studente da na moralan način reagiraju na pitanja i probleme koji se javljaju u njihovu poslovnom okruženju. Tijekom posljednjih nekoliko desetljeća, pa čak i posljednjih nekoliko godina, računovodstveni sustavi, pod utjecajem sustava obrazovanja u području računovodstva, doživjeli su niz neuspjeha velikih korporacija i računovodstvenih skandala diljem svijeta, a koji su imali golem utjecaj na ekonomije, društvo i okoliš (Eweje i Brunton, 2010). Enron, ImClone, Adelphia, Tyco, Qwest, Global Crossing, WorldCom, Lehman Brothers i Bear Stearns prvi su koji padaju na pamet (Eweje i Brunton, 2010), no ne bi trebalo zaboraviti ni incidente vezane uz Union Carbide i Bhopal, a na tom bi se popisu trebali naći i Fukushima i ekonomska katastrofa u Grčkoj. Broj korporativnih i ekonomskih neuspjeha je u porastu na globalnoj razini (O’Leary i Stewart, 2012). Na kraju, treba ispitati čistu tržišnu ekonomiju: treba li čovjeka eliminirati iz jednadžbe? Možda

je odgovor potvrđan, jer naši obrazovni standardi dovode do neuspjeha društva (McPhail, 2001a), a mi u stvari imamo odgovornost prema tom istom društvu.

Obrazovanje ima glavnu ulogu u diseminaciji znanja i glavno je sredstvo s pomoću kojega se može postići određena promjena u mentalnom sklopu računovođa (Boyce, 2004). Čini se da je sustav obrazovanja računovođa podbacio (McPhail, 2001a), usprkos tome što mnogi obrazovni programi uključuju kolegij iz etike ili elemente etike u različitim kolegijima u svom kurikulu (Bampton i Cowton, 2002). Nameće se pitanje hoće li jedan kolegij iz etike uistinu promijeniti očite probleme. Vrijeme je da se kritički sagleda obrazovni sustav računovođa i da se provedu sve potrebne promjene. Bampton i Cowton (2002) završavaju svoj rad pozivom na dostavu konkretnih prijedloga o tome kako integrirati etiku u obrazovanje računovođa. U ovom radu predložimo novi pristup postojećem sustavu obrazovanja računovođa u posebnom području financijskog računovodstva. On naglašava činjenicu da obrazovanje u području računovodstva treba opsežnu reviziju da bi se promijenio pristup u obrazovanju računovođa već u prvom semestru. Suprotno određivanju profita i maksimalizacije bogatstva ulagača kao glavnih ciljeva računovodstva (Ferguson i sur., 2011), sustav obrazovanja računovođa treba humanizirati računovodstvenu praksu.

Možemo li mi, kao poslovne škole općenito, a posebno kao računovodstveni stručnjaci, odvojiti sebe od društva, te smatrati da je naš doprinos svojevrsna proizvodnja nove generacije računovođa koji su dobro naučeni kako nastaviti profitom motiviranu užurbanost, koja je postala našim životom? Nije li naša odgovornost tražiti poboljšanja i pobrinuti se da damo sve od sebe kako se neuspjesi računovodstva ne bi ponovili u budućnosti (McKernan, 2011)? Profit sam po sebi nije loš cilj ili mjera, no ako je on jedino čemu težimo te eliminiramo ostale aspekte života, profit poprima dehumanizirani karakter (Bauman, 1996). Nije li položaj sveučilišta u društvu distanciran upravo zato da bi se omogućila kritička analiza i rasprava o tekućim pitanjima (Parker, 2002)?

U današnje vrijeme, kada učenjaci s obrazovnih institucija pokušavaju zadovoljiti izvore financiranja, ugovore o konzaltingu i izdavanje publikacija, oni se istodobno odriču i dijela svoje neovisnosti i akademske slobode, svojevoljno ili prisilno (Boyce, 2004, Parker, 2002) te se usredotočuju na očekivani dobitak vezan uz svoj rad. Dok sveučilišta tvrde da je do takvih promjena došlo zbog vanjskih čimbenika i ograničavanja vanjskog financiranja (Parker, 2002), moguće je da vladajuća ekonomska kapitalistička klasa zapravo traži način da zaštiti interese svojih najmoćnijih predstavnika, velikih svjetskih korporacija (Boyce, 2004), tako što na odgovarajući način mijenja institucije i obrazuje studente (Boyce, 2004).

U ovom se radu tvrdi da je moderno društvo iskusilo dehumanizaciju u svim aspektima života (Haslam, 2006) i da je računovodstvo u tom procesu imalo veliku ulogu (Bauman, 1996). Ono pojedincu omogućava kvantifikaciju i racionalizaciju, a u iznimnim slučajevima taj proces uključuje i ljudski život (Bauman, 1996). Emocije tu ne postoje (Broadbent, 1998), a pojedinci koji donose odluke dovoljno su distancirani

posredstvom racionalizacije i kvantifikacije da bi mogli donositi neugodne odluke na ugodan način. Gray i sur. (1994) navode etičke i intelektualne neuspjehe kod računovođa i smatraju da su djelomično krivi i računovodstveni stručnjaci i obrazovanje u području računovodstva jer se ti neuspjesi mogu smatrati i moralnim neuspjesima za koje su oni odgovorni. Gray i sur. također predlažu razmatranje društvenog i ekološkog računovodstva kao sredstva kojim se može usprotiviti konvencionalnom sustavu obrazovanja računovođa, da bi se povećale vrijednosti, kao i etički i intelektualni razvoj studenata računovodstva (Gray i sur., 1994). McKernan (2011) jasno ukazuje na odgovornost sveučilišta i nastavnika računovodstva koji bi morali voditi računa o tome da do napretka uistinu dođe i da se povijest ne ponovi, tj. da ne ostanemo inertni.

Etici u računovodstvu poklanja se sve veća pažnja, što potvrđuje velik broj objavljenih članaka u stručnim časopisima (Bampton i Cowton, 2012), sveučilišnih kolegija i međunarodnih konferencija koje se bave etičkim aspektima računovodstva. Bampton i Cowton (2012) utvrdili su ukupan broj od 520 objavljenih članaka u razdoblju od 30 godina, od kojih je većina objavljena od 1995. godine do danas. Bampton i Cowton (2012) smatraju da bi se obrazovanje u području računovodstva i studiji etike trebali podijeliti na dvije vrste: na studije koji se bave proučavanjem moralnosti i sustava etičkih uvjerenja kod studenata računovodstva i na studije koji se bave određivanjem činjenica vezanih uz to bi li se obrazovanje u području računovodstva trebalo baviti, kao i bavi li se uistinu, proučavanjem etike, kao i kakav učinak ona ima na moralne standarde studenata.

Neuspjesi velikih korporacija i računovodstveni skandali dali su nekoliko odgovora s ciljem smanjenja broja takvih skandala. Profesionalne računovodstvene organizacije i tijela izdali su pravila ponašanja, tj. principe i pravila koji se koriste kao smjernice za ispravno ponašanje računovođa u njihovoj profesiji i koja ukazuju na to što društvo očekuje da će se uzeti u obzir pri donošenju odluka (McPhail i Walters, 2009; Melé, 2005). Odredbe i zakoni, kao što je Sarbanes-Oxley zakon iz 2002. godine, doneseni su da bi se uspostavile nove smjernice i kazne za otkrivanje podataka, reviziju i prijevaru.

Dodiplomsko obrazovanje računovođa trebalo bi već proaktivno sudjelovati u razvoju osobnih kvaliteta računovođa, kao oblik preventivnog djelovanja. Bampton i Maclagan (2005) navode mnogobrojne primjere o tome što etika u obrazovanju računovođa može uspješno postići. Neki od primjera su povećanje razine svijesti studenata, ukazivanje na to da biznis ne mora uistinu automatski biti neetičan, povezivanje obrazovanja u području računovodstva s moralnošću i etičkim pitanjima, kao i pomaganje studentima da steknu bolje razumijevanje o računovodstvenoj praksi.

Željeli bismo naglasiti činjenicu da obrazovanje uistinu može dovesti do promjena u ponašanju, pozivajući se na Derridin stav o tome da institucije i nastavnici moraju voditi računa o tome da se putem njihovih poruka promjene stvarno postignu. Akademski stručnjaci možda imaju dovoljno moći da kroz svoj kulturni kapital postignu promjene u ponašanju budućih generacija, čak iako to može značiti da se



moraju upustiti u borbu s etabliranim i moćnim oblicima ekonomskog kapitala koji će tražiti načine da održi svoj položaj (Boyce, 2004).

Dok se u nekoliko ranijih studija smatralo da etičko obrazovanje neće nužno popraviti etičke standarde pojedinaca (vidi Armstrong, 1987; Burks i Sellani, 2008; Cooley, 2004; Fulmer i Cargile, 1987; McCarthy, 1997; Ponemon, 1993; Martin, 1982; Ritter, 2006) jer su oni djelomično i prodajni faktor kada ih uvodi poslovna škola (Neimark, 1995), postoji i velik broj ranijih studija u kojima se smatra da je etičko obrazovanje sredstvo koje ima potencijal da postane dijelom rješenja za sve veći broj skandala na svjetskoj razini, u kojima se također predlaže da bi etičko obrazovanje trebalo biti značajnim dijelom poslovnog obrazovanja na sveučilištima (npr. Adkin i Radtke, 2004; Bampton i Cowton, 2002; Bampton i Cowton, 2012; Bampton i Maclagan, 2005; Byerly i sur., 2002; Casado i Vallen 2000; DiBattista i sur., 1997; Gautschi III i Jones, 1998; Gioia, 2002; Jones, 2009; Izzo, 2000; Kuhn, 1998; Lau, 2010; Low i sur., 2008; McPhail, 2001a i b; Mahin, 1998; Nasher i Ruhe, 2001; Oddo, 1997; Park, 1998; Rossouw, 2002; Sims, 2002; Swanson i Frederick, 2003; Weber i Glyptis, 2000; Williams i Elson, 2009; Wu, 2003). Fulmer i Cargile (1987), Gammie i Gammie (2009), Shaub (1994) i Wu (2003) smatrali su da bi etičko obrazovanje pojedinca kao jedna od demografskih karakteristika moglo biti u korelaciji s etikom računovođa.

Bampton i Cowton (2002) pronašli su prazninu u etičkom obrazovanju u području računovodstva, tj. posebno u menadžerskom računovodstvu, a općenito predlažu da bi se etičko obrazovanje u poslovnim školama još uvijek moglo popraviti (Bampton i Cowton, 2002). Nedavna financijska kriza naglašava potrebu za pojačanim etičkim obrazovanjem u različitim poslovnim disciplinama, da bi studenti mogli odrediti izravnu vezu etike sa svojim budućim radnim mjestom (Bampton i Maclagan, 2005). Predlažu se dvije strategije za provođenje etičkog obrazovanja u nastavi računovodstva: odvojen i integriran pristup (Dellaportas, 2006; Fisher i sur., 2007). Batson i sur. (2006) predlažu integraciju i introjkciju kao dva tipa internalizacije etičkih vrijednosti u etičkom obrazovanju. Do integracije etičkih vrijednosti u unutarnje principe pojedinca dolazi onda kada taj pojedinac u svoj karakter preuzme ta ista pravila i vrijednosti; do introjkcije ili poštivanja pravila dolazi kada pojedinac smatra da ta pravila imaju regulatornu funkciju, a ne smatra ih dijelom svoje osobnosti (Mayhew i Murphy, 2009). Ipak, Melé (2005) tvrdi da iako su poduzete značajne mjere prema unapređenju etičkog obrazovanja računovođa, nakon navedenih nedavnih računovodstvenih skandala neophodno je obratiti veću pažnju na etiku u računovodstvu i poboljšanje etičkog obrazovanja računovođa. Na temelju rezultata ranijih istraživanja McPhail i Walters (2009) su zaključili da konvencionalno obrazovanje računovođa ima veći negativan nego pozitivan utjecaj na etičke predispozicije studenata.

U ovom se radu tvrdi da su takvi rezultati proizašli iz, u nekim slučajevima, nedovoljnog i neučinkovitog etičkog obrazovanja računovođa, koje se nije odrazilo na ponašanje pojedinaca u radnom okruženju. Računovodstvena etika ne počinje se integrirati u razvoj studenata putem računovodstvenih kolegija dovoljno rano, jer je

očito da je uvođenje etike, društvenog i ekološkog računovodstva u višim semestrima prekasno da bi ih studenti shvaćali ozbiljno i u njih vjerovali. Takvo obrazovanje trebalo bi početi u prvim semestrima. Od samog početka nastavnici bi trebali naglasiti važnost trobilančnog koncepta (Milne i sur., 2003). Iako se o takvim pitanjima uvelike raspravlja, uvodni tekstovi u računovodstvo i nastavni planovi i programi kolegija se njima još uvijek uopće ne bave (Tweedie i sur., 2012). Zbog toga se u sljedećem poglavlju raspravlja o novom pristupu kojim bi se humanizirao naš sustav obrazovanja računovođa i prema kojemu bi se studente trebalo obrazovati.

## **Metode**

Metodologija istraživanja je kvalitativnog tipa te daje pregled postojeće literature i metoda koje se koriste u računovodstvenoj praksi. Također se predlažu tri koraka kojima bi se mogao poboljšati kurikulum obrazovanja u području računovodstva posredstvom iterativnog pregleda postojeće literature. Kao rezultat predlažemo humaniziraniji sustav računovodstva.

## **Rezultati: nov pristup humaniziranju obrazovnog sustava u području računovodstva**

Usprkos debati u računovodstvenoj literaturi koja se vodi o tome mogu li se etičke i moralne vrijednosti naučiti ili ne, mi vjerujemo da moralno i etičko obrazovanje treba priznati kao važan dio obrazovanja i da će se uvesti nove vrste računovodstva (Cowton, 1999). Uvođenje takvog obrazovanja u kurikulum poslovnih škola ima za cilj naglasiti važnost etičkog obrazovanja za diplomirane računovođe (Bampton i Maclagan, 2005). Dakle, ono će dovesti do određenog stupnja moralnosti, zrelosti i svijesti koji će računovođama omogućiti prepoznavanje, propitivanje, prosuđivanje i procjenu etičkih pitanja u stvarnom svijetu, što će im pomoći da razlikuju dobro i loše, ispravno od neispravnog ponašanja, za razliku od onih studenata kojima će sve te vrijednosti biti nepoznate zbog nepotpunog obrazovanja. Kao posljedica toga drugoj skupini studenata nedostajat će sposobnost rješavanja moralnih dilema u radnom okruženju (Lau, 2010; Low i sur., 2008; Peng 2011; Sims, 2002; Williams i Elson, 2009).

Poduzet će se međusobno povezane mjere da bi se došlo do integracije moralnih vrijednosti i vrlina u postojeći obrazovni sustav računovođa, jer te vrijednosti i vrline ne bi trebalo shvaćati samo kao neku općenitu ideju, niti ih predavati u posebnom kolegiju, izvan ostalih stručnih kolegija, da bi se izbjegla mogućnost da se oni studentima čine dalekima i nepovezanima. To bi trebalo dovesti do povećanog entuzijazma računovodstvenih stručnjaka, jer se jedan od njihovih problema odnosio na kontekst i mjesto u kojem bi trebali studentima predavati etiku (Bampton i Maclagan, 2005). Ako studente na prvom satu naučimo da je profit za dioničare jedan od najvažnijih ciljeva, trebali bismo im u isto vrijeme ukazati na to da taj profit ne smije uzrokovati zlo ili gubitak za društvo i okoliš. Dok je profit važan rezultat računovodstvene djelatnosti, on bi se trebao temeljiti na moralnoj računovodstvenoj praksi. Zbog

toga se etičko obrazovanje ne može jednostavno provoditi unutar posebnog kolegija, odvojeno od struke, jer bi ga tada studenti i doživljavali kao predmet odvojen od struke. Studenti bi možda i samo zapamtili sadržaj kolegija bez određivanja važnih i bliskih veza između zanimanja računovođe i etičkog postupanja, a možda čak uopće i ne bi razumjeli osnove tih teorija, niti na koji su način one povezane s poslovnim aktivnostima računovođe (Cooley, 2004).

Zapravo, nedavni događaji pokazuju da, usprkos činjenici da etičko obrazovanje postoji već neko vrijeme, poslovne škole nisu uspjele studentima prenijeti poruku da odluke koje se donose u računovodstvu i financijama moraju biti donesene na etičkim principima. Tražimo način na koji bismo razvili svijest studenata o etičkom promišljanju, naučili ih analitičkom i kritičkom mišljenju i razvili njihove vještine moralnog razmišljanja, kako bismo ih motivirali da se ponašaju u skladu sa svim tim u budućem poslovnom okruženju. Predlažemo nekoliko glavnih koraka profesorima i nastavnicima računovodstva u sklopu kojih bi trebali integrirati moralne vrijednosti ne samo u nastavu računovodstva nego i u svoj način poučavanja, počevši od osnovnog stupnja obrazovanja u području računovodstva.

### ***Prvi korak: proširiti konceptualni okvir***

Suvremeni tradicionalni sustav obrazovanja u području računovodstva temelji se na konvencionalnom konceptualnom okviru, pa se studenti najprije upoznaju s osnovnim ciljem računovodstva u skladu s tim okvirom, a koji obuhvaća ključne principe, pretpostavke i ograničenja računovodstva, kao i kvalitativne karakteristike, osnovne elemente i pojmove prepoznavanja i mjerenja. Renomirani udžbenici računovodstva (vidi npr. Weygandt i sur., 2011) temelje svoj uvodni dio i srednji stupanj učenja računovodstva na opsežnom okviru koji ponajprije ima za svrhu voditi one koji određuju standarde i pripremaju financijska izvješća, a zatim i ostale korisnike (Weygandt i sur., 2011). Međutim, taj okvir također vodi i nastavnike računovodstva kada poučavaju studente računovodstvu, pa budući da se isti okvir koristi kao međunarodni referentni okvir, uključivanje etičkih vrijednosti u njega moglo bi harmonizirati obrazovnu praksu. Dok novija izdanja naglašavaju etiku kao glavni element računovodstva (Weygandt i sur., 2011), sam sadržaj etike kao element nije uključen u osnove računovodstva.

Prvi je korak uključiti moralne vrijednosti u uobičajeni konceptualni okvir kao dodatna ograničenja u računovodstvu. Postojeća ograničenja koja prožimaju taj okvir koji se koristi u nastavi računovodstva u cijelom svijetu jesu materijalnost i troškovi. Materijalnost određuje važnost elemenata na temelju njihova utjecaja na način na koji ulagači donose odluke, a troškovi određuju odnos troškova i koristi pružanja određenih informacija (Kieso i sur., 2012). Novo ograničenje koje se predlaže trebalo bi se koristiti kao moralna smjernica prema kojoj se postupci pojedinca prosuđuju kao ispravni ili neispravni, pošteni ili nepošteni, iskreni ili neiskreni. Studenti bi trebali naučiti kako se etično ponašati, a to podrazumijeva da će im se na nastavi objasniti kako pokazati integritet, poštovanje, poštenje i otvorenost, i u ponašanju i

u stavovima, u gotovo svim situacijama u njihovu javnom životu. U pokušaju da se to učini, Međunarodna federacija računovođa (IFAC) objavila je 2010. godine svoj Kodeks etike za profesionalne računovođe, kao i neke ranije verzije (Farrell i Cobbin, 2000), kao osnovu mnogih etičkih kodeksa koje primjenjuju njihove članice. Taj kodeks navodi da profesionalni računovođa mora poštivati sljedećih pet principa. Prvi je *integritet*: računovođe bi trebali biti jasni i poštjeni u svim profesionalnim i poslovnim odnosima; drugi *objektivnost*: računovođe ne bi trebali dopustiti pristranost, konflikt interesa ili nepriličan utjecaj drugih kojim bi poništili profesionalne ili poslovne prosudbe; treći *profesionalna kompetencija i dužna briga*: računovođe bi trebali održavati profesionalno znanje i vještine na potrebnoj razini da bi mogli voditi računa o tome da svaki klijent ili zaposlenik dobije kompetentne profesionalne usluge u skladu s aktualnim promjenama / propisima / tehnikama u praksi, te marljivo raditi u skladu s trenutno važećim tehničkim i profesionalnim standardima. Četvrti je princip *povjerljivost*: računovođe bi trebali poštivati povjerljivost podataka do kojih su došli u profesionalnim i poslovnim odnosima. Peti je princip *profesionalno ponašanje*: računovođe bi trebali postupati u skladu s važećim zakonima i propisima, izbjegavati bilo kakve radnje koje mogu diskreditirati njihovu profesiju (dostupno na mrežnoj stranici Međunarodne federacije računovođa, <http://web.ifac.org>).

Na temelju predloženih principa smatramo da bi u konceptualni okvir trebalo uključiti etičko ograničenje koje se naziva etička kvaliteta, vodeći računa o tome da je dana informacija u skladu s takvim etičkim principima. Budući da, na primjer, odnos troškova i dobiti određuje balansiranje između davanja ili zadržavanja informacija, etička kvaliteta ograničava davanje informacija na temelju moralnosti. Takvom bi se moralnošću trebali koristiti računovođe kada pružaju sve važne informacije, dobre i loše, s integritetom, profesionalizmom, objektivnošću, povjerljivošću i dužnom brigom. Informacije koje pružaju trebale bi biti nepristrane i činjenične<sup>1</sup>, bez obzira na to pokazuju li kompaniju u dobrom ili lošem svjetlu. Tako etička kvaliteta ograničava računovođe, njihove prosudbe i proces donošenja odluka.

U praksi bi etička kvaliteta bila ograničenje s kojim se mjeri informacija ili se pokazuje reflektira li pružanje određene informacije etičke karakteristike: poštenje, dobrotu i ispravnost. Stoga bi se svaka informacija koja ne podržava načela poštenja, dobrote i ispravnosti trebala pregledati i ispraviti na odgovarajući način. Na primjer, ako organizacija odluči potvrditi prihode prerano, što ima za rezultat pretjeranu dobit, etička bi kvaliteta trebala biti ograničavajući faktor koji vodi ispitivanju i ispravku takve preuranjene potvrde.

### ***Drugi korak: primijeniti Kantovo zlatno pravilo reciprociteta***

U suvremenom obrazovanju računovođa studentima se na nekoliko prvih sati nastave objašnjava osnovna računovodstvena jednadžba. Ta jednadžba odražava

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<sup>1</sup> Tj. one koje odražavaju kvalitete već određene u konceptualnom okviru (Kieso i sur., 2012)

sljedeća zlatna pravila računovodstva: (1) imovina je jednaka izvorima imovine, tj. imovina je jednaka vlasnički kapital plus obveze; (2) dugovanje je jednako kreditu; (3) što se tiče stvarnih računa, ulazne stavke su zaduženja, a izlazne stavke su potraživanja. Kada se radi o osobnim računima, primatelj je zadužen, a pošiljatelj potražuje, dok su u nominalnim računima bilo kakvi troškovi ili gubici zaduženja, a bilo kakvi prihodi ili dohodak potraživanja. Na ovom stupnju studenti moraju proširiti svoje etičke vrijednosti ili moralnost da bi shvatili zlatno pravilo računovodstva, reciprocitet, koje reflektira Kantov kategorički imperativ (Aune, 1979). Nastavnici bi trebali prikazati pozitivan oblik tog pravila računovodstvenom jednadžbom: korporacije bi se trebale ponašati prema drugima onako kako bi one voljele da se drugi ponašaju prema njima, a negativni ili prohibitivni oblik sljedećom jednadžbom: korporacije se ne bi trebale prema drugima ponašati onako kako ne bi željele da se drugi ponašaju prema njima. Nastavnici računovodstva bi to pravilo trebali objasniti s računovodstvene perspektive kao *recipročnu* ili *dvosmjernu* vezu između dviju strana računovodstvene jednadžbe, firme i drugih, koja uključuje obje strane na isti način. Na primjer, što se tiče potraživanja od kupca i obaveza prema dobavljačima, korporacije bi trebale platiti ono što duguju na vrijeme, jednako kao što bi voljele da se njima njihova potraživanja plate na vrijeme, bez zloupotrebljavanja vlastitog utjecaja i moći pregovaranja. U skladu s postojećim principom trajnosti poslovanja, koje se smatra bitnim za društvo jer svi pretpostavljaju da je to poduzeće koje trajno posluje, kompanije bi trebale odmah objaviti kada dođu u situaciju da se moraju suočiti s ozbiljnim teškoćama koje mogu dovesti do prekida poslovanja, na taj način odražavajući etičko ponašanje.

U praksi, smatramo da nije dovoljno samo uključiti jedan slajd na kojemu se raspravlja o etičkom ponašanju i objašnjava Sarbanes-Oxley zakon, nego bi etičke pojmove trebalo ugraditi u postojeći konceptualni kurikulum računovodstva. Stoga uz postojeće računovodstvene pojmove moramo uvesti etičku nastavu da bismo pomogli studentima da shvate da etika nije samo dodatak, nego temeljni aspekt računovodstvene profesije. Predlažemo obrazovanje slično onome kod nastavnika koji rade na medicinskim školama koji ne napuštaju sobu zbog promjene kada objašnjavaju medicinske postupke, nego naglašavaju „morati“ više nego „trebalo bi“. U biti vjerujemo da etika nije izborni predmet i da je etičko računovodstvo obvezni aspekt profesije.

### **Treći korak: razvijati kurikulum**

U računovodstvene obrazovne programe trebalo bi uvesti specijalizirani kolegij računovodstvene etike koji bi se bavio moralnim razvojem studenata računovodstva (Brands, 2010) i mogućnostima osnaživanja više nego ograničenjima (Kjonstad i Willmott, 1995). Taj kolegij trebao bi se provoditi u svjetlu stvarnih slučajeva računovodstvenih skandala i etičkog kodeksa za profesionalne računovođe kao dijelu međunarodnih računovodstvenih i/ili revizijskih standarda. McPhail (2006) opisuje mogući pristup takvom kolegiju u sklopu kojega su studenti pripremili izvješće

o prepoznatim etičkim dilemama određene kompanije, a zatim je to izvješće bilo poslano dotičnoj kompaniji, što je dovelo do suradnje s njom i davanja mogućih odgovora (McPhail, 2006). Provođenje potpunog kolegija računovodstvene etike i vrijednosti utemeljenih na različitim stvarnim računovodstvenim skandalima pomoći će studentima u raspravi o stvarnim etičkim dilemama koje se javljaju u računovodstvenoj praksi, a način na koji su računovođe sudjelovali u tim skandalima potaknut će studente na razgovor i kritičku evaluaciju i pomoći im u razvoju vlastite etičke svijesti (Gray i sur., 1994; Huss i Paterson, 1993).

Etičko obrazovanje u računovodstvu trebalo bi imati utjecaj na etičko ponašanje onih koji se na takav način obrazuju, a ne samo izlaganje teorijskih alata kojima će se rješavati hipotetičke etičke dileme (Melé, 2005). Etičko obrazovanje mora biti orijentirano prema poticanju moralnog ponašanja i usvajanju vrlina (Bampton i Maclagan, 2005), putem predstavljanja i razgovora o pravilima i prethodnim slučajevima, na temelju principa i vrijednosti određenih ljudi koji su umiješani u određene situacije, o važnim činjenicama u njihovu životu, njihovim karakternim osobinama, kao i o drugim važnim informacijama o faktorima koji imaju pozitivan utjecaj na moralnost (Melé, 2005). Kada provode taj kolegij, nastavnici bi trebali napraviti iskorak izvan konvencionalnog računovodstvenog obrazovanja, tj. čuvanja interesa ulagača i vjerovnika iznad svega (McPhail, 2001a), pa se umjesto toga usredotočiti na društvenu odgovornost poduzeća, ekološko računovodstvo, povećanje sigurnosti proizvoda, poboljšanje uvjeta u radnom okruženju, ostvarivanje stvarnih jednakih mogućnosti, i naravno, na čuvanje imovine kompanije. Interaktivne rasprave i rad u skupinama (Geary i Sims, 1994; McPhail, 2006) ili igranje uloga (Loeb, 1988; Park, 1998) mogli bi se koristiti kao metode učenja i poučavanja, a teme koje se bave računovodstvom i situacijama s kojima će se studenti vjerojatno suočiti u svojem budućem radnom vijeku također bi trebalo uzeti u obzir.

U praksi, predlažemo uvođenje specifičnog kolegija o računovodstvenoj etici, a ne samo poslovnoj etici općenito, u sklopu kojega bi se detaljno raspravljalo o slučajevima kao što su Enron i WorldCom, da bi studenti mogli razumjeti točne detalje pojedinih slučajeva, probleme povezane s njima, i nedostatke računovodstvenih propisa. Nijedan od postojećih kolegija ne bavi se preciznim detaljima, vjerojatno zbog nedostatka vremena, pa nijedan učenikima ne omogućava analiziranje potrebnog etičkog ponašanja. Stoga smatramo da je neophodno uvesti takav kolegij u kurikulum.

### ***Preporuke za donositelje računovodstvenih standarda***

Navedene korake trebalo bi provesti da bi se poboljšao sustav obrazovanja računovođa u smjerovima financijskog računovodstva i izrade financijskih izvješća. Potkategorija financijskog računovodstva, izrada financijskih izvješća, automatski će biti podređena etičkom obrazovanju, no glavni cilj izrade financijskih izvješća, pa tako i računovođa koji su uključeni u pripremu financijskih izvješća, jest steći znanje o važnim financijskim standardima i moći ih primijeniti. Greer i Tonge (2006) tvrde

da je etika ključni element u postizanju pouzdanih financijskih izvješća te da je jedan od mogućih razloga Enronova pada bio nedostatak okvira financijskog izvještavanja u Sjedinjenim Američkim Državama, koje se u tom trenutku u potpunosti oslanjalo na usklađenost s Općeprihvaćenim računovodstvenim načelima (GAAP) i nije, na primjer, zahtijevalo istinito i vjerodostojno izvještavanje (Greer i Tonge, 2006). Dakle, da bi etika postala primarni interes, donositelji standarda moraju ojačati položaj moralnosti i etičkog donošenja odluka. Također bismo morali i razmisliti o tome bi li se etičko ponašanje i ulaganje u etiku i moralnost moglo smatrati nematerijalnom imovinom, kao što se smatra da je i reputacija tvrtke nematerijalna imovina. Ulaganje u poboljšanje radnih uvjeta u tvornicama u inozemstvu više ne bi bio čin dobrote, nego stvarno ulaganje, s odgovarajućom papirologijom i prikazano u bilanci, koje daje jasne znakove svim dionicima, uključujući potencijalne i postojeće investitore.

Nadalje, kompanije bi u svojem radnom okruženju trebale očekivati moguće buduće etičke obveze prema drugima, do čega može ili ne mora doći, ovisno o nekim budućim događajima. Potencijalne etičke obveze (engl. *Contingent Ethical Obligations*) bi se također trebale uvesti u računovodstveno obrazovanje kao dio potencijalnih obveza, isto kao što bi korporacije trebale uvesti računovodstveni postupak za potencijalne etičke obveze, jer to već čine za potencijalne ekološke obveze. Na primjer, kompanija kao što je Union Carbide morala bi dobiti stručno mišljenje o mogućnosti da se dogodi katastrofa kao što je incident koji se dogodio Bhopalu. Na temelju tog mišljenja kompanija bi trebala ili popraviti situaciju ili prijaviti potencijalnu etičku obvezu. Vjerojatnost potencijalne etičke obveze se može opisati kao moguća, umjerena ili slaba, a potencijalna etička obveza bilježi se u račune kompanije i pokazuje se u bilanci kada je ili moguća ili umjerena. Fusnota u bilanci opisuje prirodu i opseg potencijalne etičke obveze.

## Rasprava

U ovome radu smatra se da bi etika trebala biti sastavnica sustava obrazovanja u području računovodstva. To samo po sebi, kako se može vidjeti u literaturi, nije nov prijedlog. Kako Bampton i Cowton (2012) detaljno objašnjavaju, velik je opseg literature objavljene o toj temi, koja daje važan doprinos napretku obrazovanja računovođa uvođenjem etičkih komponenti. Vyakarnam i sur. (1996) naglašavaju probleme povezane s etikom koji prožimaju sve razine računovodstvene profesije, očito zbog skandala u Enronu 2000. godine. McPhail (2001b) je dao svoj važan doprinos toj temi kada je naglasio da moramo humanizirati računovodstvo, posebno imajući na umu da i druge profesije, poput liječnika ili inženjera, također imaju etiku kao osnovno polazište (McPhail, 2001b). Bampton i MacLagan (2005) smatraju da bi etika trebala biti sastavnica računovodstva, a Tweedie i sur. (2012) objašnjavaju različite aspekte kurikula računovodstva, na primjer dostupne udžbenike, koji se moraju doraditi i unaprijediti. Bampton i Cowton (2002) završavaju svoj rad s pozivom na daljnja istraživanja, te je upravo ta spomenuta literatura razlog zbog kojeg je ovaj

članak napisan. Jedan važan čimbenik je navesti studente da razmišljaju o etici i vrijednostima u računovodstvenom kontekstu, i kao o dijelu obrazovanja i kao o dnevnoj praksi na radnom mjestu. Neki drugi suvremeni udžbenici (vidi Weygandt i sur., 2011) naglašavaju važnost etike, no još uvijek ih treba doraditi (Tweedie i sur., 2012) jer etiku treba integrirati u još većoj mjeri.

U našem radu navodi se da je potrebna prilagodba suvremene nastave o principima računovodstva, a mi predlažemo da bi se to moglo razmotriti i kao promjena računovodstvenih standarda. Predložene su tri prilagodbe: prvo, smatramo da je potrebno uvesti dodatno ograničenje kada se u nastavi obrađuje konceptualni okvir koji smo nazvali etičkom kvalitetom. Ako je etika dio glavnog temelja i funkcije računovodstva, slično Hipokratovoj zakletvi u medicini, studenti i diplomirani računovođe usredotočit će se na etiku na isti način na koji se usredotočuju na profit. Imajući to na umu kao cilj, također smo predložili da se nastava o računovodstvenoj jednadžbi dopuni Kantovim kategoričkim imperativom, koji potvrđuje recipročnu vezu sa svim zainteresiranim stranama u organizaciji: ponašaj se prema drugima onako kako bi želio da se drugi ponašaju prema tebi. Nema sumnje da će se kritičari pitati kako je takav sustav uvjerenja povezan s poslovnim okruženjem, ali računovodstvena praksa će se promijeniti na bolje samo onda ako dođe do korjenite promjene ili ako se ona dogodi na samom svom početku, to jest u obrazovanju. Ipak, iako je prilagodba osnovnog kurikula jako bitna, ona sama nije dovoljna, jer studenti moraju proučiti stvarne slučajeve i razgovarati o stvarnim životnim primjerima. Zato smatramo da bi bilo dobro da se kao dio bilo kojeg kurikula računovodstva uvede specijalizirani kolegij koji bi se fokusirao na slučajeve i probleme računovodstvene etike. Teorijski kontekst koji podržava ta kretanja i promjene najprije se temelji na radu starih grčkih filozofa koji su vjerovali da su vrline i moral sastavni dio života, zatim na Kantu, koji je u društvo uveo pojam kategoričkog imperativa koji odražava njegovo krajnje mjerilo kako ispravno postupati, a završava Derridom koji smatra da je dužnost fakulteta voditi računa o tome da se pogreške iz prošlosti i loši događaji ne ponove.

U skladu s tim teorijskim uvjerenjima mi smo naveli preporuke za donositelje standarda koje ih možda navedu na razmišljanje iz drugačije perspektive i unaprijede konceptualni okvir tako da on uključuje etički element i u praksi. To može biti odgovor na pitanje: koliko je regulative potrebno? Ako se etičkim elementom rukovode ljudi koji se bave računovodstvom, oni sami za sebe mogu potražiti „pravi put“, ili barem neće puno skretati s pravog puta. Neki elementi u praksi već odražavaju etički sustav uvjerenja, kao na primjer potencijalne obveze prema okolišu, što smo uzeli kao vodilju za predstavljanje sličnih potencijalnih etičkih obveza.

Kada predlažemo te promjene, uvjereni smo da, realistično gledajući, obrazovanje može proširiti svijest studenata računovodstva (dakle budućih računovođa) o etičkom ponašanju, značajno unaprijediti njihovo poznavanje ranijih slučajeva i potencijalno opasnih područja u propisima, kao i skrenuti njihovu pažnju na potrebu analiziranja ponašanja na osnovi onoga što je ispravno, pošteno i iskreno. Važno je podići razinu



svijesti i proširiti znanje o etičkom ponašanju, budući da propast velikih korporacija ne utječe samo na neposredne dionike, kao što su ulagači, vjerovnici, klijenti i zaposlenici ili na gospodarstvo države u kojoj ta korporacija ima sjedište, nego, kako ilustrira primjer korporacije Lehman Brothers, njezina propast može utjecati i na druga gospodarstva. Dok se velika gospodarstva mogu nositi s takvom situacijom, malim gospodarstvima je puno teže oporaviti se ili to uopće ne mogu učiniti bez vanjske pomoći. Nadalje, uvjereni smo da se, realno gledajući, razina etike može povećati u financijskim izvješćima posredstvom zahtjeva koje postavljaju donositelji standarda, budući da postoji veća šansa da će se poštivati zahtjevi uključeni u pravila. Stoga predlažemo daljnja istraživanja u ovom području, jer je to izvan opsega ovog rada.

Željeli bismo završiti ovaj rad pozivom na daljnja istraživanja u praksi, ispitivanja stvarnih slučajeva koja se tada mogu koristiti u obrazovne svrhe, kao i apelirati na donositelje standarda da razmotre etičke elemente u principima računovodstva koji bi mogli biti jedan od odgovora na pitanje o tome koliko je regulative dovoljno i koji je optimalan stupanj standarda, jer bi zagovaranje najvišeg stupnja vrlina trebalo smanjiti, ili, u idealnim okolnostima, eliminirati stupanj namjerne zlouporabe računovodstva.