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Analysis of the level of compliance with the code of ethics in the accounting profession

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The accountant professional code of ethics contains the ethical principles applicable to his profession. The purpose of the code of ethics for the accountant is to enable the professional to adopt a personal attitude, according to the ethical principles known and accepted by society. Most financial scandals have called into question the ethical conduct of accounting professionals. The code of ethics in the accounting area aims to enable professionals to adopt a personal attitude in accordance with some ethical principles known and accepted by society, in order to maintain adequate social behavior in accordance with the requirements of society. To this end, a cross-sectional, quantitative, descriptive and inductive study was carried out of primary data collected from professionals registered with the Order of Accountants and Auditors of Mozambique, working in Maputo City in 2018, with the aim of analyzing the level compliance with the code of ethics for accounting professionals. Out of the 2600 professionals registered in the Order of Accountants and Auditors of Mozambique, 195 were submitted to the study, the majority of whom were female, young and with higher education. In this study, it was concluded that most professionals choose to observe the principles and rules of the code of ethics, despite an insignificant minority that needs more time on ethical issues.

Key words: Code of ethics, accounting, Mozambique.

INTRODUCTION

Ethical issues are discussed today in the professional, organizational and governmental field (Medeiros et al., 2018). The ethical principles applicable to the profession of accountant represent the essence of the profession's intentions to live and act within ethics (Megliorini et al., 2010). Accounting scandals involving nationally and internationally renowned companies intensify society's concern about information that demonstrates the real

situation of companies (Kushniroff, 2012).

The professional accountant must have an unquestionable ethical behavior, know how to maintain secrecy, have personal conduct, dignity, honor, competence and serenity to provide the user with information with safety and reliability, and, at the same time, have a personal conduct in order to not be seduced in defrauding information (Azevedo and Cornacchione,

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2012). For these reasons, the subject “Ethics” acquires enormous importance in the current context of the capitalist business market.

In several countries, the activity of accounting professionals has been called into question. Such situations result from acts of corruption and addiction to the truth in the exercise of the activity. The purpose of the code of ethics for the accountant is to enable the professional to adopt a personal attitude according to the ethical principles known and accepted by society (Nerandzic et al., 2012).

The exercise of accounting activity, at a professional level, presupposes the compliance of a set of principles and rules, which refers to a professional way of how to be and do. This meaning is at the origin of the creation of the Order of Accountants and Auditors of Mozambique (OCAM) and also of the different codes of ethics, conduct or ethics, observed by the different accounting institutions.

In carrying out their duties, certified accountants and auditors must respect the legal standards and generally accepted accounting principles, adapting their application to the specific situation of the entities to whom they provide services, avoiding any decrease in their independence due to personal interests or external pressures, striving for accounting and tax truth. As he provides services, he has access to information for decision-making, and must therefore keep confidentiality, not acting in bad faith in the performance of his activities (Williams and Elson, 2010).

In case of breach of confidentiality, it will result in penalties imposed by the Statute of the Order of Accountants and Auditors of Mozambique, the body that administers accounting professionals, which may compromise professional registration.

Mozambique, in the same context, has been triggering a set of actions to combat harmful practices in the economy, among them, those considered corrupt that have been being noticed recently. Some examples of these practices are media cases such as tax evasion, over-invoicing, Embraer, Nacala Airport, undeclared debts, and all of them, in some way, involve the accounting activity.

At the international level, several studies that address the theme of professional ethics and deontology have been developed. Despite the remarkable growth of these studies, few focus on accounting and auditing professionals.

However, one of the ways to analyze the concern raised, focusing on the period 2012-2017, is answering the following research questions:

- (1) What is the level of compliance with the professional code of ethics by professionals?
- (2) What are the main factors that influence the process of compliance with the code of ethics by accounting professionals?
- (3) What relationship is there between demographic

characteristics and level of compliance?

Considering the aforementioned, the present study aims to analyze the degree of compliance with the code of ethics of Accounting and Auditing professionals in the practice of their functions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Code of ethics

The codes of ethics contain positive ethical standards because they are disseminated. Most of them are natural norms, others are only positive and exceptional, and others are even positive norms contrary to natural norms (Breakey, 2019).

Although the professional code of ethics serves to restrain unethical procedures, this is not its main objective. Its primary objective is to express and encourage the sense of justice and decency in each member of the organized group.

Code of ethics must indicate a new standard of interpersonal conduct in the professional life of each worker who is exercising any position in the organization (Ho, 2003). Thus, the professions in the country are organized through Professional Orders. There is the Order of Accountants and Auditors, the Order of Doctors, the Order of Lawyers, the Order of Engineers, among others. Everyone has his or her own codes of ethics.

The vast majority of professionals work as employees of companies and are thus subject to two codes of ethics: that of the order of their profession and that of the company (Adams et al., 2001). In principle, they are distinct areas: one thing is the profession, with its own professional duties, and another, distinct, the company in which you work (Koonmee et al., 2010). The two usually have rules in common: when there is a simultaneous violation of both codes, it is a good rule that the violation is judged by the ethics committee that first receives the complaint (Gilman, 2005).

The objective of the code of ethics for the accountant is to enable this professional to adopt a personal attitude, in accordance with the ethical principles known and accepted by society (Mihelic et al., 2010).

For the exercise of the profession of accountant, technical preparation is not enough; he must defend the ethical principles and values applicable to his profession, in order to produce a true image of what it constitutes for new generations of professionals (Wessels, 2005). A code of ethics must contain precepts that deal with the group's obligations in at least four areas: competence, confidentiality, integrity and objectivity (Sadowski and Thomas, 2012).

Ethics in accounting

The liberal professions, almost entirely, have a great

social value. What changes is the way of acting and the nature of the services, with accounting being highlighted for its role in protecting the life of the wealth of social cells and for producing qualified documents on heritage behavior (Gilman, 2005).

The professional accountant is one of the oldest professions and it has developed with society and today it is among the most required and the most widespread, as every company and every institution necessarily needs these services. Like any other profession, laws that guide the class of accountants define accounting (Cooper and Robson, 2006).

These laws have the function of determining how accounting procedures should be performed, protecting the accountant from several situations, such as being inspected or even reported to the agency OCAM supervisory bodies.

Despite all the professions, without exception, regarding professional ethics, the accounting profession is perhaps the one that demands more. It is through their reports, records and statements and mainly by signing the technical responsibility for the service provided that exposes dependents and accounting users to such information (Ho, 2003). It is impossible to disconnect accounting from ethics, so that there is a balance and good direction of society, making it impossible for anyone to be harmed.

This asset consists of a set of assets, rights and obligations, and accounting has an obligation to control it. From these findings, it is clear how important accounting is for companies, regardless of their size. Without proper accounting, the company ends up being considered without identity, unable to act in the market, because it has essential tools for the progress of organizations (Robé, 2011).

For this, it is mandatory that the accounting is demonstrated in the reports in a correct way, not only to serve management purposes. These accounting reports must be, in an ethical and responsible manner, everything must be presented according to the acts and facts that happened properly in the company's operating situation.

In the accounting profession, this is no different. It is extremely important that the work is done efficiently and effectively, so that it satisfies the client's need, without breaching the rules that regulate the profession (Coffee Jr., 2001).

Accountant's professional code of ethics

According to Kraemer (2001), in addition to serving as a guide to moral action, the professional code of ethics enables the accountant's profession to declare his purpose:

(1) Comply with society's rules;

(2) Serve with loyalty and diligence; and
(3) Respect yourself

The purpose of the code of ethics for the accountant is to enable the professional to adopt a personal attitude, according to the ethical principles known and accepted by society (Melé, 2005).

The accountant's professional code of ethics contains the ethical principles applicable to his profession. In summary, according to the Oliveira and Rodrigues (2014) approach, these principles concern:

(1) Responsibility, before society, to act with care and quality, adopting free and impartial criteria;
(2) Loyalty, before the contractor of your services, keeping professional secrecy and refusing tasks that contradict morals;
(3) Responsibility towards the duties of the profession (technical improvement, registration with professional bodies, etc.);
(4) Preservation of the professional image, keeping updated in relation to new work techniques, also adopting the highest professional standards of conduct. The accountant must contribute to the development and dissemination of the knowledge of the profession. Respect for colleagues must always be observed.

The accountant's behavior must adapt to the demands made by society, technical preparation is not enough, however good it may be. He needs to find a higher social purpose in the services you perform. In addition, it must produce a true image of what it constitutes for the new generation of professionals, openly defending the ethical principles and values applicable to their profession.

The ethical principles applicable to the profession of accountant represent the essence of the profession's intentions to live and act within ethics (Baker, 2007). It can be said that one of the essential conditions for the professional success of the accountant and his adherence to a set of ethical principles that serve as premises for his actions (Woiceshyn, 2011).

One of the important points for the implementation of an ethical administration is the distinction that must be made between two fundamental concepts: the ethical question and the ethical dilemmas (Buchan, 2005). The ethical issue is related to the formulation of the problem. Thus, if a top executive lies and violates the rules of his institution, the ethical issue is clear and the problem can be easily resolved (Bell and Bryman, 2007).

The ethical dilemma deals with solving the problem. As it involves the choice of conflicting factors, such a solution is not transparent. Thus, if the aforementioned senior executive is a relative or friend of the company's president, when making a decision to resolve the problem, the administrator will be faced with an ethical dilemma (Ho, 2003).

Among the problems that cause ethical dilemmas in

organizations, are the lack of clear guidelines, the lack of communication between the different hierarchical levels and the lack of open discussions about the problems that affect companies (Maguire and Phillips, 2008).

The accountant plays a relevant role in the analysis and improvement of ethics in the accounting profession, as he is always dealing with ethical dilemmas, in which he must exercise, in the fullness of his sovereignty, his role as an independent professional (De Sá, 1996).

An example of an ethical dilemma for the accounting professional is that of an auditor who was called upon to audit client-relative accounts. The reason for this procedure is due to the fact that the company normally does not accept the relationship between the professional (auditor) and the client (audited). It is as if there were, necessarily, a collusion between the parties, which may not be true, but whose belief should not be discussed (Hillison, 2017).

Fundamental principles of the accountant's professional code of ethics

Among the accountants' duties towards society is the high standard of ethical conduct. An appropriate example of a code of ethics is that of the management accountant who, according to Dias et al. (2015), considers competence, secrecy, integrity and objectivity. While IFAC (2016) defends as principles the integrity, objectivity, professional competence and due care and confidentiality.

Professional competence and due diligence

Professional competence and due diligence, under IFAC (2016), is to maintain professional knowledge and skills at the level necessary to ensure that a client or employer receives competent professional service based on updated developments in practice, legislation and techniques and to act with diligence and in accordance with the technical and professional standards applicable when providing professional services. Thus, according to Oliveira and Rodrigues (2014), competence comprises:

- (1) Maintain an adequate level of professional competence, improving through constant training;
- (2) Adapt to the relevant legal provisions (laws, regulations, instructions, provisional measures, professional code of ethics);
- (3) Prepare clear and complete reports, with appropriate recommendations after each analysis.

A professional accountant must take steps to ensure that those who work under his authority in a professional capacity have adequate training and supervision. Whenever appropriate, a professional accountant should

make clients, employers or other users of professional services aware of the limitations inherent in services and activities, the professional's competence also includes the ability to integrate into the social environment in which he lives.

The preparation of the financial statements and the additional recommendations for disclosure of accounting facts are basic points where the accountant shows his professional competence (or his lack) to the company's management (De Moor and De Beelde, 2005).

Secrecy or confidentiality

Confidentiality relates to the information you have collected as a result of personal and professional service company relationships and you must not disclose any information to third parties without proper and specific authorization unless there is a legal or professional right or duty to disclose, no it should be used to the personal advantage of the Professional Accountant or third parties (IFAC, 2016). Based on this assumption, confidentiality according to Sadowski and Thomas (2012) comprises:

- (1) Keep all company confidential information secret;
- (2) Inform subordinates, as well as monitor them, in order to keep information confidential;
- (3) Refrain from using confidential information (insider information) for their own benefit or for related persons.

It seems obvious, at first glance, that it is the accountant's obligation to keep information about the company confidential, since it is competing with others for a share of the market (Tomkins, 2001). If there are problems with the company's management, in order to adopt procedures that contradict the legal provisions, actions must be taken to safeguard their own professional responsibility (Eccles et al., 2014). This includes the preparation of clear financial statements, with recommendations for alternative disclosure procedures, which include explanatory notes to the financial statements (Turner et al., 2010).

Integrity

According to Bayou et al. (2011), integrity presupposes the duty of the professional accountant to be straight and honest in all professional and business relationships. Therefore, for Tweedie et al. (2013) integrity includes:

- (1) Avoid conflicts of interest, advising the parties involved of the potential conflict;
- (2) Refuse any gift that may influence your actions;
- (3) Avoid taking any action that could harm the company from achieving its objectives in an ethical manner;
- (4) Recognize and communicate to the company management any professional limitations in the exercise

of the function;

(5) Communicate any and all information, judgment and opinion to the company's management.

As mentioned earlier, avoiding conflicts of interest, refusing bonuses or gifts, not taking any action that could harm the company from achieving its objectives in an ethical manner, communicating any information or judgment to the company is crucial to maintaining an integral image of the professional accountant and values the your profession (Breakey, 2019).

Objectivity

According to IFAC (2016), objectivity should not allow previous judgments, conflicts of interest or undue influence from others to override professional or business judgments, in a succinct way. Bayou et al. (2011) states that objectivity comprises:

- (1) Adopt clear and objective language; and
- (2) Evidence all relevant information that may influence the user of the financial report.

Despite not being much questioned, professional behavior falls within the fundamental principles that mean: comply with the relevant laws and regulations and must avoid any action that discredits the profession (Chaiboonsri et al., 2010).

The accountant must be and must adopt a clear and objective language and highlight any information that is important to the user of the financial report, this includes communicating favorable information, as well as unfavorable information, and his opinions as professional, communicating the information clearly and objectively and show users all relevant information that would probably interfere with the understanding of the statements, explanatory notes and recommendations presented (Beyer et al., 2010).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a cross-sectional, quantitative, descriptive and inductive study of primary data collected from professionals registered with OCAM, working in the city of Maputo in 2018.

Population and sample

The universe set for this study is made up of all accountants from Maputo City certified by OCAM, here considered finite ($N = 2600$). For the selection of the sample elements, simple random sampling determined as follows (Mahaluça, 2016):

$$n = \frac{Z_{\alpha/2}^2 \cdot p \cdot q \cdot N}{\varepsilon^2 \cdot (N - 1) + Z_{\alpha/2}^2 \cdot p \cdot q}$$

Equation 1: Formula for sample size calculation

For this, a 95% confidence level and an accuracy of 6% were considered. The choice of this error was to minimize data collection time, less loss of information and cost savings. Due to the lack of information on the success rate p (level of compliance with the professional ethics code), the worst case scenario was used, that is, 50% of the success rate was attributed. Thus, in this study, 242 elements were selected.

Inclusion criteria

- (1) All accountants and auditors of Mozambican nationality; certified by OCAM from 2012 to 2017;
- (2) All accountants and auditors with a minimum age of 20 years;
- (3) All accountants and auditors certified by OCAM who practice the profession with a minimum time of 3 years and with at least average level of education.

Data collection instruments

For data collection, a closed-ended questionnaire of multiple choice questions was used, where the respondents opted for one of the alternatives or for a certain allowed number of options. This instrument was chosen to determine the response patterns and the level of difficulty of the respondents. Closed questions allow for more accurate answers, that is, they are standardized, easy to apply, simple to code and analyze. The questionnaires were distributed individually, and through e-mail addresses, with a return rate of 80% (195/242).

Pre-test of the questionnaire

In order to highlight possible flaws in the writing of the questionnaire, such as complexity of the questions, imprecision in the wording, unnecessary questions or constraints to the informants, 20 accountants and auditors certified by OCAM were randomly selected from this population. After the pretest, 3 questions were excluded due to the redundancy of the information.

Data analysis

A descriptive statistical analysis was performed using graphs and frequency tables, to understand the behavior of the variables under study. The Chi-square test was performed to analyze the relationship between categorical variables. The Standardized Z test was also used to compare proportions. Student's t test was used to compare the means and determine the confidence interval. For all tests, a significance level of 5% and a confidence level of 95% were used.

Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 and BioEstat 5.3.

Ethical aspects

The risks of the study were minimal except for some minimal possibility of identifying the professional by using a name in the OCAM database (for confirmation reasons), and, as a way of minimizing it, the database manager passed the information on to a coded guideline form to ensure data anonymity at all times. The researcher created his mask in the SPSS and analyzed the data extracted by the base manager taking into account the variables under study. It is important to emphasize that these data are for academic purposes only.

Table 1. Partner profile - demographic of the respondents.

Option	Gender			Chi-square test	
	Male	Female	Sum	χ^2	p-value
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)		
Age group (years)					
20-30	52 (49.5)	53 (57.1)	105 (53.8)	0.841	0.657
31-50	29 (52.7)	26 (47.3)	55 (28.2)		
51-75	15 (42.9)	20 (57.1)	35 (17.9)		
Sum	96 (49.2)	99 (50.8)	195 (100)		
Education level					
Medium	36 (50.7)	35 (49.3)	71 (36.4)	0.097	0.755
Higher	60 (48.4)	64 (51.6)	124 (63.9)		
Sum	96 (49.2)	99 (50.8)	195 (100)		
Professional experience (Years)					
3-5	15 (53.6)	13 (46.4)	28 (14.4)	1.399	0.844
6-10	26 (49.1)	27 (50.9)	53 (27.2)		
11-15	19 (44.2)	24 (55.8)	43 (22.1)		
16-30	16 (45.7)	19 (54.3)	35 (17.9)		
>30	20 (55.6)	16 (44.4)	36 (18.5)		
Sum	96 (49.2)	99 (50.8)	195 (100)		

RESULTS

Socio-demographic profile

As shown in Table 1, of the 195 respondents, the majority are female, with around 50.8%. As for the age group, 53.8% are between 20 and 30 years old, 28.2% are between 31 and 50 years old and 35% are at least 51 years old. The most frequent age group in males and females is 20 to 30 years old with 54.2 and 26.3%, respectively. The Chi-square test shows that there is no significant difference in age between genders.

Regarding the level of education, most of the respondents have higher education with 63.9%. In the male group, 50.7% have a medium level and in the female group 51.6% higher. The Chi-square test shows that there is no significant difference in the level of secularity between the sexes (Table 1)

According to the data in Table 1, most professionals have 6-10 years of experience with about 27.2%, 10-15 years (22.1%) and 18.5% with more than 30 years. The group of males when compared to females only shows a slight difference in the time of experience in the range of 3-5 years and more than 30 years. This difference is not significant.

Code of ethics compliance profile

As for the awareness and application of the code of

ethics, 57.9% of the professionals stated that they know and follow everything it contains (Op1), 13.3% know but do not follow it because they think it is unnecessary (Op2), 25.6% know and use it according to the client or employer (Op3), and 3.1% do not know (Op4). Female sex workers are more likely to apply the code of ethics properly when compared to male ones. Professionals with less service time have less knowledge about the application of the code of ethics. The results show that there is no relationship between knowledge and application of the code of ethics with sex and years of work experience (Table 2)

Regarding the factors that lead the professional to act correctly, 14.4% claim possible sanctions (Op5), 41.5% moral principles (Op6), 14.9% internal company norms (Op7), 10.3% religious (Op8), 10.8% social conventions (Op9) and 7.7% other reasons (Op10). Possible sanctions (60.7%), moral principles (53.1%) and social convictions (52.4%) are the main factors that lead female sex workers to act correctly. The results show that there is no relationship between factors that lead the professional to act correctly with sex and years of work experience (Table 2).

As for the relevance in the correct performance of ethics, 41% of the professionals claim the suitability (Op11), 39.5% the number of clients (Op12) and 19.5% other reasons (Op13). Male professionals (57.5%) consider ethics to be correct due to suitability. Professionals with more than 5 years are more suitable in the ethical performance of their activities. The results

Table 2. Relationship between awareness and compliance with the code of ethics and socio-demographic characteristics.

Compliance with the code of ethics	Gender			Z-Test		Professional experience (Years)					Z-Test		
	Male	Female	Sum	Z	p-value	3-5	6-10	10-15	16-30	> 30	Sum	Z	p-value
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)			n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)		
Knowledge and application of the code													
Op1	48 (42.5)	65 (57.5)	113 (57.9)			15 (13.3)	31 (27.4)	26 (23.0)	21 (18.6)	20 (17.7)	113 (57.9)		
Op2	13 (50.0)	13 (50.0)	26 (13.3)			3 (11.5)	8 (30.8)	6 (23.1)	5 (19.2)	4 (15.4)	26 (13.3)		
Op3	32 (64.0)	18 (36.0)	50 (25.6)	6.433	0.092	9 (18.0)	13 (26.0)	8 (16.0)	9 (18.0)	11 (22.0)	50 (25.6)	5.776	0.927
Op4	3 (50.0)	3 (50.0)	6 (3.1)			1 (16.7)	1 (16.7)	3 (50.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (16.7)	6 (3.1)		
Sum	96 (49.2)	99 (50.8)	195 (100.0)			28 (14.4)	53 (27.2)	43 (22.1)	35 (17.9)	36 (18.5)	195 (100.0)		
Factors that lead to acting ethically													
Op5	11 (39.3)	17 (60.7)	28 (14.4)			3 (10.3)	6 (21.4)	8 (28.6)	4 (14.3)	7 (25.0)	28 (14.4)		
Op6	38 (46.9)	43 (53.1)	81 (41.5)			14 (17.3)	23 (28.4)	17 (21.0)	14 (17.3)	13 (16.0)	81 (41.5)		
Op7	17 (58.6)	12 (41.4)	29 (14.9)			4 (13.8)	8 (27.6)	4 (13.8)	10 (34.5)	3 (10.3)	29 (14.9)		
Op8	13 (65.0)	7 (35.0)	20 (10.3)	5.326	0.503	3 (15.0)	5 (25.0)	3 (15.0)	4 (20.0)	5 (25.0)	20 (10.3)	18.852	0.670
Op9	10 (47.6)	11 (52.4)	21 (10.8)			3 (14.3)	7 (33.3)	5 (23.8)	1 (4.8)	5 (23.8)	21 (10.8)		
Op10	8 (50.0)	8 (50.0)	15 (7.7)			1 (6.3)	4 (25.0)	6 (37.5)	2 (12.5)	3 (18.8)	15 (7.5)		
Sum	96 (49.2)	99 (50.8)	195 (100.0)			28 (14.4)	53 (27.2)	43 (22.1)	35 (17.9)	36 (18.5)	195 (100.0)		
What do they consider most relevant in the correct performance of ethics													
Op11	46 (57.5)	34 (42.5)	80 (41.0)			10 (12.5)	25 (31.2)	11 (13.8)	17 (21.2)	17 (21.2)	80 (41.0)		
Op12	36 (46.8)	41 (53.2)	77 (39.5)			14 (18.2)	18 (23.4)	22 (28.6)	11 (14.3)	12 (15.6)	77 (39.5)		
Op13	14 (36.8)	24 (63.2)	38 (19.5)	4.711	0.095	4 (10.5)	10 (26.3)	10 (26.3)	7 (18.4)	7 (18.4)	38 (19.5)	8.319	0.403
Sum	96 (49.2)	99 (50.8)	195 (100.0)			28 (14.4)	53 (27.2)	43 (22.1)	35 (17.9)	36 (18.5)	195 (100.0)		
Proposal from any client or employer to act in an unethical manner? If so, what triggered that act?													
Op14	36 (48.0)	39 (52.0)	75 (38.5)			9 (12.0)	20 (26.7)	12 (16.0)	18 (24.0)	16 (21.3)	75 (38.5)		
Op15	12 (46.2)	14 (53.8)	26 (13.3)			6 (23.1)	8 (30.8)	5 (19.2)	4 (15.4)	3 (11.5)	26 (13.3)		
Op16	3 (33.3)	6 (66.7)	9 (4.6)			2 (22.2)	2 (22.2)	2 (22.2)	2 (22.2)	1 (11.1)	9 (4.6)		
Op17	20 (58.8)	14 (41.2)	34 (17.4)	4.954	0.421	4 (11.8)	11 (32.4)	7 (20.6)	5 (14.7)	7 (20.6)	34 (17.4)	13.989	0.831
Op18	15 (41.7)	21 (58.3)	36 (18.5)			5 (13.9)	8 (22.2)	12 (33.3)	3 (8.3)	8 (22.2)	36 (18.5)		
Op19	10 (66.7)	5 (33.3)	15 (7.7)			2 (13.3)	4 (26.7)	5 (33.3)	3 (20.0)	1 (6.7)	15 (7.7)		
Sum	96 (49.2)	99 (50.8)	195 (100.0)			28 (14.4)	53 (27.2)	43 (22.1)	35 (17.9)	36 (18.5)	195 (100.0)		
How to act in case of request to change invoice and accounting values													
Op20	50 (50.0)	50 (50.0)	100 (51.3)			18 (18.0)	27 (27.0)	24 (24.0)	15 (15.0)	16 (16.0)	100 (51.3)		
Op21	26 (53.1)	23 (46.9)	49 (25.1)	1.896	0.863	6 (12.2)	14 (28.6)	13 (26.5)	7 (14.3)	9 (18.4)	49 (25.1)	18.788	0.536

Table 2. Cont'd

Op22	7 (46.7)	8 (53.3)	15 (7.7)			1 (6.7)	2 (13.3)	2 (13.3)	5 (33.3)	5 (33.3)	15 (7.7)		
Op23	3 (30.0)	7 (70.0)	10 (5.1)			2 (20.0)	4 (7.5)	1 (10.0)	1 (10.0)	2 (20.0)	10 (5.1)		
Op24	5 (50.0)	5 (50.0)	10 (5.1)			1 (10.0)	4 (40.0)	1 (10.0)	2 (20.0)	2 (20.0)	10 (5.1)		
Op25	5 (45.5)	6 (54.5)	11 (5.6)			0 (0.0)	2 (18.2)	2 (18.2)	5 (45.5)	2 (18.2)	11 (5.6)		
Sum	96 (49.2)	99 (50.8)	195 (100.0)			28 (14.4)	53 (27.2)	43 (22.1)	35 (17.9)	36 (18.5)	195 (100.0)		
Stricter and more efficient inspection would make professionals act correctly and ethically													
Yes	45 (48.9)	47 (51.1)	92 (47.2)			18 (19.6)	23 (25.0)	19 (20.7)	15 (16.3)	17 (18.5)	92 (47.2)		
No	51 (49.5)	52 (50.5)	103 (52.8)	0.007	0.933	10 (9.7)	30 (29.1)	24 (23.3)	20 (19.4)	19 (18.4)	103 (52.8)	4.009	0.405
Sum	96 (49.2)	99 (50.8)	195 (100.0)			28 (14.4)	53 (27.2)	43 (22.1)	35 (17.9)	36 (18.5)	195 (100.0)		

show that there is no relation between the relevance in the correct performance of ethics with sex and years of work experience (Table 2).

Of the 195 professionals interviewed, 38.5% affirm that they never (Op14) received a proposal from employers or clients to act in an unethical way. Of the 120 professionals who received a proposal to act in an unethical manner, 13.3% say that what triggered the act was inspection (Op15), 4.6% colleagues (Op16), 17.4% customers (Op17), 18.5% the boss (Op18) and 7.7% others (Op19). The data show that there is no dependency relationship between what triggered the unethical action with sex and years of work experience (Table 2).

Asked how they act in the event of a request to change billing and accounting values, 51.3% say they explain that this attitude is contrary to their ethics and do not provide (Op20), 25.1% just say no and do not explain why (Op21), 7.7% provide but make it very clear that they could not (Op22), 5.1% agree and change as requested by the customer (Op23), 5.1% disagree but change as requested from the customer (Op24) and 5.6% change as requested by the employer (Op25) (Table 2).

Asked if the more severe and efficient inspection

would make professionals act correctly and ethically, most (52.8%) affirm that no, being mostly male professionals with 50.5% and over 5 years (93.3%), and that difference is not significant (Table 2).

DISCUSSION

The data shows that there is a significant increasing tendency for female professionals to exert accounting activity. As seen in recent years, the participation of women in the labor market has been growing in several areas of activity, with regard to the accounting area, and it is possible to observe that women occupy increasingly expressive indexes. Several studies carried out in Brazil on accounting ethics, found very high proportions of women (Feil et al., 2017; Magro et al., 2017). Another study carried out with accountants on the importance of the code of ethics as an instrument for decision making, found results very different from the findings in that study, where the percentage of women was only 22 and 40% (de Lima Custodio et al., 2019; De Souza et al. 2017).

In the present study, most professionals are

under 30 years old. This profession has attracted many young people in recent years who seek greater opportunities in the increasingly diversified national labor market in Accounting. Several international studies have found different results, such as Souza et al (Souza et al., 2017) who found an average age of 45 years, Custódio and Ferreira (de Lima Custodio et al., 2019) with an age between 35 and 40 years. Another study carried out in Brazil on ethical perception found mostly professionals aged less than or equal to 30 years, corroborating the findings in the present study (Feil et al., 2017; Lima et al., 2019).

Most professionals have a higher education level. This reinforces the fact that the search for a higher education is increasingly common among professionals working in this area, since professional qualification is precedent for attracting and retaining customers and employers, where they seek professional competence and due zeal. Several studies are unanimous in stating that most accounting professionals have a higher education level (Barbosa and Martins, 2016; de Lima Custodio et al., 2019; De Souza et al., 2017).

Most respondents have more than 5 years of experience. Souza et al (De Souza et al., 2017)

found most professionals with more than 5 years of service. The search for the services of professionals with more years of service has been more required in this area, due to the complexity of the work.

Having made the relationship between gender and the level of compliance, it was noted that those who most observe the code of ethics are female accountants, the main factor being social conventions and moral principles. As a result, it was determined that the responses are in balance with the response of having a strict inspection to comply with the code of ethics for the valuation of the accounting professional.

Regarding the time of experience or experience in the area, it was noted that professional accountants with a short time in practice more observe the code of ethics (with less than 10 years of experience). This also reflects that this group of professionals is the ones who fear sanctions and penalties in case of non-compliance with the rules of the code of ethics.

Accounting as a social science must incorporate fair and viable measures, always in order to elevate the services provided to clients, exercising its role consciously and in accordance with the Code of Ethics to improve its social image (Custódio and Ferreira, 2018). Strict inspection and surveillance must be measures taken for the proper compliance with the code of ethics (Antunes et al., 2011).

Most accountants claim to have received a proposal to change the results. A study carried out in Brazil on accounting ethics, found results like the findings in this study, where about 2% affirm that they always receive a proposal to match the results, 12% most of the time and 44% sometimes (Cardozo et al., 2017). The accountant's main role is to demonstrate, with clarity and confidence, the accounting information to their clients, in order to help them making decisions (Berlatto et al., 2015).

The basic principle for a good professional relationship starts with ethics, it is not something created by law, but very important, a basic example that can be cited is the professional's own devaluation created by accountants. Medeiros et al. (2018) considers that ethics has the function of investigating and explaining people's behavior throughout the various stages of history, since, as a set of values in which each believes, behavior undergoes changes throughout history.

Conclusions

The code of ethics in the accounting area, aims to enable professionals to adopt a personal attitude in accordance with some ethical principles known and accepted by society, in order to maintain adequate social behavior in accordance with the requirements of society. In this study, it was observed that accounting professionals more than a good technical domain of their activities, it is necessary to find a higher social purpose in the services that they perform.

In several financial scandals, the accountant has been identified as the most responsible for the phenomenon. To minimize this image in society, the accountant must openly defend the ethical principles and values applicable in his profession, in such a way that it is possible to produce a true image of what it constitutes for the new generation of professionals, passing on a positive view for new members of the profession and for the society in which they live.

In this study, it was concluded that most professionals choose to observe the principles and rules of the code of ethics, despite an insignificant minority that needs more time on ethical issues.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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