IMPLEMENTATION OF ETHICS MANAGEMENT NOWADAYS IN THE ROMANIAN UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract
The paper shows that, at the present moment, the management of ethics in the academic environment represents the coordination of all elements related to the moral life of a university. The last decades have insistently imposed on public awareness the importance of taking into account the ethical dimension of the life of universities. Ethical codes, ethics committees and commissions, ethical audits, ethical education of staff, techniques to create an institutional culture of a moral nature have all become increasingly widespread. The University respects the dignity of each of its members and promotes academic integrity on ethical principles. Its members are committed to contributing to the democratic development and prosperity of the society. The University is an institution whose goals, valid for each of its members, include development and professional affirmation, the evolution of knowledge and research while respecting the rule of law and the human rights. I think that the values and principles that universities have to promote in particular, and whose actual achievement is sought to ensure, are: academic freedom, personal autonomy, justice and equity, merit, professionalism, honesty and intellectual integrity, transparency, respect and tolerance, responsibility, goodwill and care. I also think that "institutionalization of ethics" in academia is a new reality for which we all must be prepared.

A Brief Introduction to the Evolution of Ethics Management in Academia

Management of ethics in the university environment as a management discipline deals with the development of those leadership tools that contribute to the ethical development of a university, as well as those methods that can be used to determine the direction in which the academia should develop. The management of ethics in the university environment presupposes the description and analysis of the current ethical situation through "ethical audit", i.e. by assessing the state of "the ethical content" of the academic environment, determining the desirable situation and deciding on the measures to be taken in perfect harmony with the other forms of management (e.g. "ethical development of the university"). Management of ethics in the university environment is the result of the increasingly visible imprinting of the academic environment with responsibility/morality, regarded as an indispensable condition of its existence. A university demonstrates moral responsibility when it subordinates its interests to the interests of its customers – the students.

In this context, *ethics management in the university environment* is represented by all the activities and measures that follow the institutional organization of ethics for the creation of honest universities.

Do not confuse *ethics management* with *ethics of management* or *management ethics*, i.e. the study and control of ethical issues raised by different forms of management – strategic management, quality management, social management, etc.

The management of ethics in the university is altogether different. This represents a new branch of management of an educational institution. It must also be distinguished from "the academic ethics" in the broad sense, that is, from the traditional analysis of ethical issues in universities to provide normative clarifications and moral guidance, using various ethical theories and analytical tools provided by the philosophy of morality.

Philosophers of morality have always been interested in the usefulness and applicability of their theories. Studying the theories of some authors such as **Kant**,

Mill, or **Hare**, any student was able to see the emphasis they put on "apps" – procedures first of all, viewed as exercises, to show that the theory works.

Concerns about improving morality are surprisingly old, and they have always been the mark of the civilized world. In modern times, there is the temptation to neglect such civic engagements and public programs of moral improvement. We still have the illusion that ethics can be reduced to spontaneous compliance with laws and regulations.

The etymology of the *ethical* word derives from the Greek *ethos* that originally defined the customs in general, but today it is reduced only to the meaning of moral customs. *Ethos* may designate as well the moral profile of the human community, the moral of the groups.

The applied ethics deals with contextualization, problem-solving of concrete situations, thus is providing accurate moral guidance. It deals with the study of controversial issues of contemporary society, in fields such as: university ethics, pedagogical ethics, bioethics, etc. Focused on the study of deviations from the traditional principles of morality, the applied ethics aims to broaden the thematic field of ethics and limit generality, thus providing answers about the concrete life of a person or a distinct community, such as the academic environment.

In the recent years, the importance of taking into account the ethical dimension of academic life has been strongly imposed on public consciousness. Ethical codes, ethics committees, ethical audit, ethical education of staff, techniques to create an academic culture of moral nature have become more and more widespread. "Institutionalizing university ethics" is a new reality. The various "ethical contents" in the academic world have begun to force new theoretical refinements, simply generating a new branch of management – the management of university ethics.

Academic ethics is an area at the intersection between the ethics of research, the ethics management in the academic environment and the professional deontology of the researcher or professor. Although the concerns that may be circumscribed in this area are far from being a recent development (since the dawn of modernity, ethical debates about the correlative debts of teachers and students, or topics such as the moral acceptability of the use of corpses for the development of medical knowledge), the field has known a significant autonomy in the last 20-25 years, especially as a result of the need to respond theoretically to requirements arising from research and education funding bodies, as well as from the public opinion. Thus, dedicated journals have appeared or have been consolidated (the most well-

known is probably the *Journal of Academic Ethics,* edited at Springer), and several books or compendia have been published.

According to **Ronald Jeurissen'**s opinion, *ethics management in the university environment* aims to improve decision-making processes, procedures and academic structures, so that academic activities are as much as possible linked to ethical principles. The tools used are ethical codes, ethical audit, and other strategies to lead a university on the path of morality. According to **Donald Menzel**, *ethics management in the academic environment* does not consist of controlling and penalizing the behaviour of academic staff or reflecting on the ethics of the academic workplace. It is rather the set of actions taken by deans or vice-rectors to stimulate the formation of a moral conscience and an ethical sensitivity capable of impregnating all aspects of university activity. This type of ethics management in the university environment is to promote and maintain a strong ethical culture in the workplace from the academic environment.

The experience of managing ethics in the universities world-wide is short-lived, about two to three decades, but some models of university ethics have been proposed. Some authors speak of *four stages* in the evolution of ethics management in the university environment, namely: *the initial stage*, ethical awareness, *the stage of ethical reasoning*, consisting of procedures and criteria for decision-making, *the stage of ethical action* and *the stage of ethical leadership*, promoting employment and ethical culture.

At this moment, in Romania, ethics in higher education is approached as "something to be done", being imposed by normative acts. Therefore, most Romanian universities aim at fulfilling the minimum standards imposed by specific methodologies, the effects of which are relatively low. Compliance with national standards leads to uniformity, conformity. However, we consider that a voluntary approach to ethics management in the higher education system is necessary in order to increase the competitiveness of the system. The elements of ethics management in the university environment must be acknowledged and assumed by each academic member of the academic environment.

University ethics management must offer universities the opportunity to exchange good practices and promote both traditional European values such as solidarity, cooperation, freedom, tolerance, efficiency, respect for human rights and the principles of ethics management and total quality, materialized in: orientation towards students, the internalization of student-faculty/university relationship, the quality of primary education, continuous improvement of teaching methods, system vision and data argumentation.

Ethical Content of a Moral Academic Institution

At present, the general context in which Romanian universities are active seems to increasingly require restructuring at the level of academic management. However, the application of general prescriptions in specific sectors is not without problems. On the one hand, public or private funding of universities and, implicitly, the responsibility of spending these public or private funds generates increasing pressure to demonstrate the quality of the results obtained. The implementation of ethics management in many academic environments is a means of guiding and structuring the practices of these academic institutions towards the quality of the educational services offered. In the general spirit of ethics management in the university environment, their quality is defined operationally, most of the times, through the satisfaction of the customers (the students). On the other hand, the transposition of the client-centred paradigm has not proved to be easy because of the diversity of entities that can be considered as being "customers" of the academic services.

Sallis (2005) proposes *a classification of "university customers" into four categories*: primary customers – those who benefit directly from university services (students); secondary customers – those who have a direct interest in educating primary customers (parents, family, relatives, sponsors, etc.); tertiary customers – those who have an interest in educating the whole group of primary customers, not specific: future employers, government, society as a whole; internal customers – university staff, whose actions depend on the success of the institution (teachers, auxiliary administrative staff, secretaries, librarians, cashiers, technical and sound technicians, cleaners, guard and protection staff, etc.).

The inclusion of university staff in the category of customers is justified by the fact that their professional performance depends on the actions of the other employees. Each member of the academic community offers and receives services from others. Ignoring these mutual dependencies would generate the risk of lowering the performance of the higher education institution as a whole. In terms of communication, this implies not only their inclusion as receivers of information flows within the university, but also providing them with feedback opportunities on existing procedures, as well as on new ideas and services.

Some authors argue that, in order to increase the confidence of their own employees in the educational institution and its services, this institution has to put in place an internal marketing mechanism. This would imply, in addition to the previous recommendations, a positive and proactive attitude that accompanies the

messages, necessary for their persuasive efficiency and, in general, to stimulate the identification of the employees with the academic institution in which they operate.

The implementation of ethics management in the university environment is hampered by the fact that the needs and perspectives of the multiple categories of actors involved in the university environment do not always coincide. On the one hand, this fragmented nature of the vision of those involved reveals the importance of communication in setting university objectives, standards and practices. On the other hand, it generates a multitude of definitions of the quality of the academic institutions products.

Barnett (2005) lists seven such perceptions: *technical* (imposing technical tools); *collegial* (the collective voice of the university community); *epistemic* (requests for "defining the territory" from communities centred around a discipline); *consumerist* (from direct beneficiaries, current or potential); *employing* (the voice of the labour market that will have to integrate the products of the university system); *professional* (requests from organizations bringing together specialists in certain professions); *inspectorial* (state's voices and of other external agencies authorized to evaluate the university environment).

The harmonization of distinct perspectives on the ethics of university products requires, on the part of these organizational environments, communication and negotiation efforts both externally and internally.

Muel Kaptein defines a moral academic institution based on his descriptive concept of "ethical content". The conceptual model of ethical content is based on the premise that there are three types of relationships that are morally relevant in any academic institution: a) the relationships between the teaching and/or the administrative staff and the university – it is called "the size of the tangled hands", suggesting the potential conflict between the interests of the employees and the interests of the academic institution in terms of the use of its assets; b) relationships between the employees themselves (teaching and administrative staff), called the "multiple hand size", suggesting the moral hazard that emerges from the university's need to use more than one employee; c) relations between university and students, called "the size of dirty hands", suggesting the academic institutions' desirable efforts to keep themselves "clean", that is, to honestly honour the promises made to the students.

The evaluation of the moral content of a university is based on a list of "qualities", "criteria" or "virtues" of the academic institution. The author, **Muel Kaptein**,

selected seven "ethical academic qualities" that must be interpreted relative to each of the three dimensions. Qualities are provisions given by universities that stimulate teachers and administrators to express the responsibilities of the university in the three dimensions. If these qualities are not appropriately adopted in academic life, it increases the university's chance of losing its moral mission. Here is a brief description of these *seven academic institutional virtues* in **Muel Kaptein**'s view:

Clarity refers to the degree to which the university clarifies and makes its moral requirements transparent in the form of moral values and rules. When looking at the size of "embarrassed hands' (employee-university relationship), clarity is the extent to which the university is transparent about how employees can use the university's services, setting out detailed rules for doing so. Ignorance, blur and chaos favour the acceptance of small gifts, bribery, abusive use of university services, etc. A condition of a university's morality is that teachers, secretaries, librarians, etc. know what is being claimed from them (the detailed and public character of moral codes). As far as employee relations are concerned, clarity means defining accurately and fixing within the code all the responsibilities of the academic and auxiliary teachers within their mutual relationships. And in relation to the students, to establish and clarify what they expect from the university staff.

Consistency is the extent to which the moral expectations of the university are mutually consistent, unambiguous and compatible with other values. The leadership of the university (rector, vice-rectors, deans, department managers) plays a decisive role in giving consistency to the moral relationships with the students, making efforts to use the assets and services of the university with care, ensuring that the relationships between the academic and/or the auxiliary staff are functional and moral, and meeting the expectations of students.

Penalty refers to the degree to which positive or negative sanctions apply to the behaviour of the academic or auxiliary staff. Moral rules are imposed by the academic community, they are not optional, and the lack of this quality gives way to immorality.

Feasibility represents the extent to which responsibilities and expectations can be put into practice. In relation to the dimension of "multiple hands" (employee-employee relationship), the lack of this university's quality can mean an academic leadership that cannot trace feasible workloads, therefore inefficient. The university leadership does not know how to distribute time and resources and does not know enough about concrete situations. Regarding the "dirty hands" dimension, its lack means that the university can create unrealistic expectations among students.

Supportability refers to supporting teachers and auxiliaries in the good use of university goods and services ("entangled hands"), to cultivate close cooperation with colleagues and managers (rector, dean, departments – "multiple hands"), students ("dirty hands"). It confers unity to all those who have interests at the university level.

Visibility refers to the extent to which the effects of the actions of teachers and auxiliary staff are visible. The visibility of immoral behaviour must be present both on a hierarchical line, but also between teachers or auxiliary staff.

Criticability refers to the extent to which critical discussions on immoral behaviour, dilemmas and moral problems faced by the teaching staff or auxiliary staff are possible or encouraged in the university.

Good ethics management in the university environment must ensure the presence of these qualities to guarantee the organization of the *three fundamental ethical academic dimensions* in a responsible way. It is therefore about the clarity and precision of writing the code of academic ethics, ensuring the consistency of the code of university ethics with the other regulations and values (consistency of the approach), about the fact that the violation of the academic ethics code is being sanctioned, about ensuring that the provisions of the ethical code are achievable that the university, through its leadership, should support the realization of the ethical program and that the consequences of unethical conduct will be made public and critically discussed at university level – all of these in the relationship between the staff and the university leadership, as well as in the relations between employees or those between the staff and the students.

The Evaluation of Ethical Qualities at the Academic Level in Romania

The evaluation of ethical qualities at the academic level can be done through interviews, document consultation, etc. The academic ethical audit of a university consists precisely in the evaluation of its moral content and possibly in suggesting solutions for its moral development.

C. McNamara characterizes *a "moral university"* as one that respects at least the following *four principles*: 1) interacts naturally with students and other varied beneficiaries (employers, parents, relatives, sponsors), and the basic rules of the university make out of the good of beneficiaries part of the good of its own academic institution; 2) the members of the educational institution are extremely sensitive to the issue of impartiality: their basic rules stipulate that the interests of

others matter as much as their own interests; deception and exploitation of students are not allowed; 3) responsibility is regarded as being rather individual than collective. No teaching staff or auxiliary staff will be able to hide behind the academic institution they represent. Members of the university must be individuals who assume their personal responsibility for the actions of the educational institution they represent. The rules of the educational institution establish that teachers and auxiliary staff are responsible for themselves; 4) universities regard their activities in terms of objectives. The objective is an operating mode that is highly valued by university members and links them to the external environment. Obviously, all these are related to an advanced stage of the evolution of the ethical management in the academic environment.

C. McNamara, in his ethics management guide in the university environment, believes that a mature distribution of roles and responsibilities in a university that takes ethical management into the academic environment seriously would require such institutional changes at the academic level: a) the University Rectorship and the University Senate must actually support ethical programs. If the management of a university does not believe in them, there is little chance of success; b) the management of a university should establish an ethics committee at the level of the central governing bodies, having the role of supervising the conduct of the ethics management program at the academic level; c) the university leadership should have an ethical management board set up to implement and manage "ethical programs at university level", including policies and procedures of a moral nature, and to solve moral dilemmas and conflicts that may suffocate the atmosphere in a university; d) the academic management must order the establishment of the director of ethical issues at the academic level position, a person who combines managerial knowledge and experience with that in the field of practical applied ethics management. One single person must be responsible for the management of ethics at the university level, which becomes the subject of a new profession; e) the university leadership should set up an "ombudsman" position – a person responsible for the institutionalization of moral values at the workplace, in the academic world, but also with the resolution of moral litigation, by the wise interpretation of policies and procedures, and by close contact with teachers and auxiliary staff, but also with students.

According to **Trevino** and **Weaver**, *the ethical platform of an university* consists of at least the following elements: a) the creation and development of ethical codes at

university level – which articulate the university's firm expectations of morality; b) organizing and leading ethics committees to deal with: development of ethical policies, evaluation of actions and decisions of the university and teaching or administrative staff, investigation and sanctioning of deviations from the rules; c) establishment of ethical communication systems (e.g.: ethical hotlines) as means available to the teaching or auxiliary staff to report abuses or to ask for counselling; d) the existence of a director with ethical issues or an "ombudsman", which must coordinate ethical education policies, investigate rumours, settle conflicts; e) organizing ethical trainings, such as those aimed at forming the virtues of the teaching profession or administrative staff; f) conducting disciplinary activities in the case of unethical behaviours; g) creating an institutional culture of respect for the specific values of the university to which the person belongs.

Conclusions

In Romania, there are, however, few universities who seriously apply ethics management programs in the academic environment. These programs would, in fact, be rather complicated, involving awkward tasks that are redundant in the eyes of ordinary academic leadership.

Generally speaking, the effectiveness of ethics management in the academic environment depends on the university's ability to exploit all types of information, namely all communication channels, both formal and informal, thus building an open university ethic culture. This is fundamental in the university environment, where the construction of an "ethical learning community" calls for the presence of efficient information networks – supported both by structural platforms and by individual efforts.

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