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EXAMINATION OF THE ETHICAL RULES FOLLOWED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE ACCOUNTING PROFESSION CONSIDERING FOUR HOLY BOOKS AND THE IFAC CRITERIA

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ABSTRACT

In the present day, the world has globalized to become a big village. All types of information is more accessible yet it is harder to access individuals. With these new features of the world, human beings are no longer seen as simply a factor of production. As societies and institutions increasingly adopt a more comprehensive approach towards humankind, whereby human beings are recognized as social creatures, endowed with material and spiritual aspects and who think, feel, produce and discover, the ethical attitudes governing the idea of virtue in professional life will be able to be standardized more rapidly. Ideally, within professional life, an employee who has adopted a set of ethical rules, shares the common moral values with other employees, is committed to diligently following the ethical rules and is capable of reflecting the set of ethical rules as a governing philosophy in their professional life, will contribute to the welfare of all professional stakeholders, including themselves, the employer, the state, the society and the clients. Once this cyclical system is established, the members of a profession will indirectly provide their own welfare, as they are also included in that cycle. This study attempts to explain how four holy books, namely, the Torah, the Bible, the Psalms1 and the Quran, all of which have substantially influenced society culturally, socially, economically and in many other ways from the very early stages of human history and have been accepted as moral guides by people from the west to the east, serve to instruct and guide people about the ethical behaviors informing human nature. To help answer this question, a comparative analysis is conducted between the explanations provided in these books and the ethical standards governing the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) and today's professional ethics in accounting, particularly considering the ethical behaviors expected from the members of the accounting profession from past to present. The results of this study shall serve to contribute to professional ethics and ethical training.

Keywords: ethics according to holy books, professional ethics, the relation between religion and ethics, today's professional ethicsthe IFAC criteria

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethics is a discipline which has been studied for centuries by authorities responsible for shaping societies within the framework of certain rules, and has attempted to make sense of the individual moral structure based on these rules. From the times that the first human beings are believed to have existed, ethics has been a feature of society; first as an aspect of religion, as seen from the binding rules in holy books, and then as a branch of philosophy, after philosophers began to show interest in the subject, and as a component of theology, before finally making its impact felt in all bureaucratic structures in both eastern and western societies.

Morals, as distinguished from ethics, is a set of rules that produces good results for the society in general, makes distinctions between right and wrong, directs individuals to choose to do the right thing, and is to be followed for an honest and virtuous life. Ethics constitute the theoretical and conceptual discipline of all these

¹ The Psalms is considered as a separate holy book, distinct from the Bible, for the purposes of this study.

rules. In other words, ethics is a philosophical discipline that asks questions about what is right and wrong, and how to distinguish right from wrong.

Ethics plays an important functional role in the formation of a healthy social life and as it is an essential component of social confidence, social peace, social justice, social happiness and social development, it is vital in professional life.

Any subjects involving the concept of ethics should be discussed in connection with the operation of belief systems. Human beings are composed of two natures, the material and the spiritual. Failure to develop both natures so as to maintain their balance prevents human beings from achieving the model of personhood they aim to attain. The spiritual nature of human beings consists of beliefs and morals. Should this spiritual nature be neglected by an individual, it is inevitable that the society in which they live will be negatively impacted, regardless of how well they perform in their occupations. This is particularly relevant when it comes to some of the more commonly seen wrongs committed by today's professionals, such as misrepresentation of qualifications, unequal treatment of employees, corruption, bribes, lying, stealing and cheating, all of which are the result of the failure to adequately teach professional ethics to members of different professions. To address this failure and the wrongs that derive from it professionals need to have a competent understanding of both their material and spiritual natures and how they relate to the fundamental ethics principles determined by institutions and organizations, and sufficient importance needs to be placed on Ethics Training.

Proper ethical behaviors have been prescribed through religion from the earliest periods of human existence, and over time certain sanctions have evolved into norms. Ethical rules and ethics training have a very long history, dating back to the time of Adam, as recounted in the holy books. It is noteworthy that there is consistency between the ethical rules in the IFAC criteria, such as integrity, objectivity, professional competency and prudence, privacy and professional behavior, and the ethical theories proposed by religious authorities and philosophers, including such notables as Moses and Socrates. Holy books contain the ethical rules that enjoy general acceptance today as well as many orders and prohibitions that promote virtue and ethical behavior. The many rules contained within the holy books and proposed by idealist philosophers from as far back as the Middle Ages for the purpose of cultivating certain ethical habits of life in general society, demonstrate the importance of the ethics discipline on social grounds.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are no studies in the relevant literature examining the relation between the divine orders in holy books and the current ethical rules governing professional life. Thus, this study is the first of its kind to be performed in this subject area. Furthermore, only a very small number of studies on ethics training are found in the literature.

Regarding ethics training, Ünsal (2009, 409) stressed the necessity of instituting a continuous, effective education model. Moreover, Bayraktaroğlu (2005, 308) noted in his study that ethics training was not given sufficient importance in universities, a finding suggesting that it would be beneficial to have ethics training organizations established by an ethics board.

Being the only study to compare the ethics rules prescribed in the four holy books with the ethics rules expected to be followed by employees in the field of accounting, the results of this study shall contribute valuable information to this subject's body of literature.

3. THE STUDY'S RELATION TO ETHICS AND MAIN CONCEPTS

The word "ethics" is derived from the Greek word "*ethos*", which originates from "*ethika*", meaning "the subjects related to *ethe*", "*ethe*" being the plural form of ethos. "*Ethos*", which is the singular form of "*ethe*", means character and temper. It later came to refer to a philosophical discipline in Western languages, a discipline based on the meaning of "character" in "*ethos*". With the original meaning of "ethic" being character and temper, it expresses a situation that is related to a person and a dimension that is specific to that person (İyi, 2012: 5). In this respect, when a person's "ethos", that is, their "moral character" is called into question, it is referring to that person's unique qualities on moral grounds. Therefore, evaluating a person in moral terms means making a moral judgement about that person (Güçlü, E. Uzun and S. Uzun, Yolsal, 2008: 501).

The word "moral" is derived from the Arabic word "*hulk*", meaning "temper, nature and character" and as such is used to describe a person's relationships with others that are created within a framework of certain norms, as well as the complete set of norms, principles, rules and values that organize and give meaning to these relationships and actions towards other creatures (Baydar, 2004: 15). The word "*moralis*", which was first used

by the Roman philosopher and bureaucrat Cicero to mean "moral", is derived from the ancient Greek word "*ethikos*". The terms "morals and ethics", "moral and ethical", and "moral philosophy and ethics", are all perceived to be interchangeable with one another, both in Turkish and in western languages. However, many philosophers believe that it is wrong to perceive ethics and morals as identical. According to these thinkers, the relation between ethics and morals is, in a narrow sense, very similar to the one between "science philosophy" and "science". The meaning of the word "ethics" is much broader than the meaning of the word "morals", as it includes many principles, attitudes and behaviors that are not included in morals (Güçlü et al., 2008: 502-503).

Virtue can be thought of as the entire spectrum of positive morals which serve to bring an individual to spiritual competence. Socrates is the first philosopher in history to mention virtue, and according to him, the only way to reach happiness, which he asserted to be the ultimate goal of humans, is to live a virtuous life to the end and to not give up on this ideal. Continuing this line of thought, he added that since all human beings by nature aim to achieve a state of happiness, nobody deliberately manifests unvirtuous or mean behavior. With this, Socrates essentially claimed that knowledge is basically the only virtue, since all evil was seen to be caused by the lack of information (Güçlü et al., 2008: 479). The virtue of knowledge should therefore make a person a good human being and foster his or her life. True knowledge, whereby one is to learn to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong, is in effect self-knowledge (Plato, 2014: 40). In this sense, as ethical behavior is centered on knowledge, it can be learned. In a conversation with Gorgias, Socrates claimed that people, whether male or female, are happy if they are virtuous and right, and unhappy if they are unvirtuous and wrong (Plato, 2011: 81).

Business ethics is a set of moral standards and principles that shape and guide the attitudes and behaviors of stakeholders in the business world. In general, the concepts of "morals" and "business ethics", and "ethics" and "business ethics" are used interchangably to indicate the same meanings. The term "business ethics" as applied in the resources written in English is usually translated into Turkish as "business ethics" or "business morals". Business morals refers to the relationships between the following groups (Özdemir, 2009: 307-308):

- \checkmark The relationships among businesses,
- ✓ The relationships between business administrators and business workers,
- \checkmark The relationships among business workers,
- \checkmark The relationships between the businesses and their clients,
- \checkmark The relationships between businesses and suppliers,
- \checkmark The relationships between businesses and government executives,
- \checkmark The relationships between businesses and environmental factors,
- ✓ The relationships between businesses and other organizations (e.g. credit institutions, unions, nongovernmental organizations)

The fundamental elements constituting business morals are "working morals", "professional morals" and "establishment morals" (Özdemir, 2009: 304).

4. THE ETHICAL RULES IN THE TORAH

The Torah is the Old Testament of the Bible, and it was written in Hebrew and Aramaic. It consists of three sections: the law books (Five Books of Moses), the Prophets and the Zabur, also known as the Psalms. The Ten Commandments in the Torah are directly related to ethical behaviors in general. Although the first four commandments are generally about belief principles, the last six commandments are consistent with ethical behaviors. The Ten Commandments in the Torah are as follows (Torah, 2011: 77).

- 1. Thou shall have no other gods before me
- 2. Thou shall not make unto thee any graven image
- 3. Though shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain
- 4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy
- 5. Honor thy father and thy mother
- 6. Thou shall not murder
- 7. Thou shall not commit adultery
- 8. Thou shall not steal

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- 9. Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor
- 10. Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's house, wife, servants, animals or anything else

In western countries, business ethics is directly associated with Jewish and Protestant morals. The Torah especially forbids murder, stealing and lying in relation to business ethics. The Ten Commandments, which include many humanistic values related to virtue, are accepted as a guide by Jewish people.

An examination of the Torah text reveals the following values and rules associated with ethics:

- ✓ Integrity
- ✓ Honesty
- ✓ Objectivity (Acting Independently)
- ✓ Professional Competence and Prudence
- Privacy (Maintaining Confidentiality)
- ✓ Justice
- ✓ Commitment (Loyalty)
- ✓ Love
- ✓ Respect
- ✓ Tolerance
- ✓ Do not Obtain Unfair Profit
- ✓ Humbleness
- ✓ Anger Management
- ✓ Do not Gossip
- ✓ Helpfulness
- ✓ Mentorship
- ✓ Good Nature-Good Will
- ✓ Value of Being Educated
- ✓ Fair Pay for Fair Work
- ✓ Do not Cheat
- ✓ Do not Murder
- ✓ Do not Steal

5. THE ETHICAL RULES IN THE ZABUR (PSALMS)

The Zabur, also known as the Psalms, is the holy book written by David as inspired by God. The book consists of 150 psalms, some of which include David's laments to God. The Israeli people used these prayers and hymns as part of their worship (Zabur, 2013: 3).

While the Psalms mainly consist of prayers and hymns, they nonetheless clearly express a set of rules to be followed as well as right and wrong behaviors, and serve as a style guide for speech.

An examination of the Zabur text reveals the following values and rules associated with ethics:

- ✓ Integrity
- ✓ Honesty
- ✓ Objectivity (Acting Independently)
- ✓ Professional Competence and Prudence
- ✓ Justice
- ✓ Commitment (Loyalty)
- ✓ Love
- ✓ Respect
- ✓ Do not Obtain Unfair Profit
- ✓ Humbleness
- ✓ Anger Management
- ✓ Helpfulness
- ✓ Mentorship
- ✓ Value of Being Educated
- ✓ Fair Pay for Fair Work
- ✓ Obedience to the Laws and Respect of Rights
- ✓ Do not Cheat
- ✓ Do not Murder

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✓ Do not Steal

6. THE ETHICAL RULES IN THE BIBLE

The orders and prohibitions found in the Bible are primarily based on the Ten Commandments. In many sections of the Bible, behaviors associated with virtue, good nature, morals and ethics are recommended, while immoral behaviors are strictly prohibited.

The following verses in the Bible clearly demonstrate that people are encouraged to behave virtuously:

"What is the reason of your quarrels and arguments? Is it not your passions that are fighting in your bodies? You desire and do not have, so you murder when you cannot earn it. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel when you do not get what you want. You do not have, because you do not ask it of God. And you still do not receive even when you do ask because you wish to use it for the sake of your passions."

"You disloyal people, don't you know that friendship with the world means being enemies with God? Those who want to be friends with the world make themselves enemies to God. God is against the arrogant ones. But he forgives the humble ones." (Bible, 2012: 405, James's Letter)

The Bible verses given above refer in part to almost all of the general ethics rules, even going so far as to proclaim that ambitious people who have many connections with the world will become the enemy of God. The Bible clearly recommends to steer clear of evil deeds, including murdering in the case of failing to acquire something worldly. Later in this study, a comprehensive examination of the orders and prohibitions specified in the Bible regarding other acts will be conducted

An examination of the rules found in the Bible reveals the following values and rules associated with ethics:

- ✓ Integrity
- ✓ Honesty
- ✓ Objectivity (Acting Independently)
- ✓ Professional Competence and Prudence
- ✓ Justice
- ✓ Commitment (Loyalty)
- ✓ Love
- ✓ Respect
- ✓ Tolerance
- ✓ Do not Obtain Unfair Profit
- ✓ Humbleness
- ✓ Anger Management
- ✓ Do not Gossip
- ✓ Helpfulness
- ✓ Mentorship
- ✓ Good Nature and Good Will
- ✓ Value of Being Educated
- ✓ Fair Pay for Fair Work
- ✓ Obedience to the Laws and Respect of Rights
- ✓ Do not Cheat
- ✓ Do not Persist in Making the Same Mistake
- \checkmark Do not be a Hypocrite
- ✓ Do not Steal
- ✓ Self-control

7. THE ETHICAL RULES IN THE QURAN

From when it began to be first revealed until its completion, the Quran clearly specified a set of arrangements related to social life and established orders and prohibitions to protect people, even from themselves. According to the sequence of revelation, the first surah of the Quran begins with "Recite in the name of your Lord who created, who taught by the pen, taught man that which he knew not." (The Noble Quran, 2014: 566, Surah Al-Alak 96/1-5), followed by the second surah, which continues with "Nun. By the pen and what they inscribe,", "And indeed, you are of a great moral character." (The Noble Quran, 2014: 524, Surah Al-Qalam, 68/1-4), both of which affirm that first the individual, and then the overall society will prosper and grow through reading, writing and science. All of these verses support the ethical training that this study desires to

emphasize and stress that all types of development are founded on knowledge, not least of all, the act of becoming a morally upright person, which requires one to be educated in morals.

The Quran, from the beginning to the end, discusses moral issues that correspond to the ethical rules of a society, such as virtue, good nature, fairness, honesty and justice. However, this study will limit itself to presenting only a few examples, as the Quran is a book that includes the entirety of rules and information needed by humanity in every age.

An examination of the surahs in the Quran reveals the following values and rules associated with ethics:

- ✓ Integrity
- ✓ Honesty
- ✓ Objectivity (Acting Independently)
- ✓ Professional Competence and Prudence
- ✓ Privacy (Maintaining Confidentiality)
- ✓ Justice
- ✓ Commitment (Loyalty)
- ✓ The Superiority of Law
- ✓ Love
- ✓ Respect
- ✓ Tolerance
- ✓ Do not Obtain Unfair Profit
- ✓ Humbleness
- ✓ Anger Management
- ✓ Do not Gossip
- ✓ Helpfulness
- ✓ Mentorship
- ✓ Good Nature-Good Will
- ✓ Value of Being Educated
- ✓ Fair Pay for Fair Work
- ✓ Altruism
- ✓ Obedience to the Laws and Respect of Rights
- ✓ Do not cheat
- ✓ Do not Persist in Making the Same Mistake
- ✓ Do not be a Hypocrite
- ✓ Do not Murder
- ✓ Do not Steal
- ✓ Self-control

8. THE ETHICAL RULES OF IFAC

The standards governing the ethical criteria of IFAC were determined by The International Ethics Standards Board for Accountants (IESBA). Given that members of the accounting profession from 114 countries are subject to these criteria, it can be argued that the accounting field is very near to achieving ethical standardization. The ethical principles underlying this standardization serve as an example of professional ethics and should, ideally speaking, be universally applied in all occupational groups. The result of this study's evaluation of the IFAC criteria can be employed as a systematic tool and thereby used as a reference by trade associations and trade bodies. Considering the extent to which a set of ethical principles has been applied, IFAC appears to have advanced more than other trade unions. To give a brief history of IFAC, it was established at the 11th World Accounting Congress held in Munich, Germany in 1977. Currently, 156 accounting organizations and 114 countries are members of IFAC. Turkey attended the 1977 Congress as a founding member of IFAC and was represented by the Accounting Experts Foundation. The Union of Chambers of Certified Public Accountants and Sworn-in Certified Public Accountants of Turkey (TÜRMOB) was the second Turkish accounting organization to become a member of IFAC in 1994. The main aim of TÜRMOB is to cooperate with the accounting trade unions who are their members, and to contribute to the improvement of accounting by remaining committed to the prescribed international standards that serve to help the accounting professionals provide a high-quality service for the benefit of society (Selvi, 2001: 1).

According to IFAC, the general ethics value and rules are as follows:

✓ Honesty

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- ✓ Objectivity
- ✓ Professional Competence and Prudence
- ✓ Privacy
- ✓ Professional Behavior

9. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ETHICS RULES

As in all periods of history, the ethics rules of today are determined according to a human-centered approach and consist of those behaviors that aim to improve society through individual actions. Every structure that is accepted as an authority by people has been a guide in ethical terms. This section of the study will make a comparative analysis between the IFAC criteria and the holy books.

Table 6.1: A comparison of the ethics values and rules expressed by the Torah, the Psalms, the Bible and the Quran and

those of IFAC

Ethics Values and Rules	Torah	Psalms	Bible	Quran	IFAC
Integrity					\checkmark
Honesty					\checkmark
Objectivity (Acting Independently)					\checkmark
Professional Competence and Prudence			\checkmark		\checkmark
Privacy					\checkmark
Justice		\checkmark			\checkmark
Commitment (Loyalty)		\checkmark			\checkmark
The Superiority of Law					\checkmark
Love		\checkmark			
Respect		\checkmark			
Tolerance					
Do not Obtain Unfair Profit		\checkmark			\checkmark
Humbleness		\checkmark			
Anger Management		\checkmark			
Do not Gossip		\checkmark			
Helpfulness		\checkmark			
Mentorship		\checkmark			
Good Nature (Good Will)		\checkmark			
Value of being Educated		\checkmark			\checkmark
Fair Pay for Fair Work		\checkmark		\checkmark	
Altruism		\checkmark		\checkmark	
Obedience to the Laws and Respect of Rights		\checkmark		\checkmark	\checkmark
Do not Cheat					\checkmark
Do not Persist in Making the Same Mistake		\checkmark		\checkmark	
Do not be a Hypocrite				\checkmark	
Do not Murder			\checkmark		
Do not Steal		\checkmark			
Self-control					

The study examined the presence of the 28 ethics values and rules placed in the vertical axis according to the 5 authorities designated in the horizontal axis. Most of the ethics principles are present in all 5 authorities. These include the principles of integrity, honesty, objectivity, professional competency and prudence, commitment (loyalty), avoidance of unfair profit, justice, avoidance of cheating, obedience to the laws and respect of rights, value of being educated and no stealing. The values and rules that are included in the Torah, Psalms, Bible and Quran are love, respect, humbleness, anger management, avoidance of gossip, helpfulness, mentorship, good nature (good will), fair pay for fair work, altruism, and no persisting in the same mistake. The Quran is the only holy book to include all of the ethical values and rules analyzed in the study, while in the Bible, privacy and the superiority of law are the only values not mentioned of the 28. In the Torah, 25 of the ethical values and rules are present, with superiority of law, self-control and warning against being a hypocrite being absent. Lastly, the Psalms make reference to 24 ethical principles, omitting privacy, the superiority of law, tolerance and self-control.

To provide a more detailed analysis of the findings, the Torah includes 25 ethics values and rules (integrity, honesty, objectivity, professional competency and attention, privacy, justice, commitment, love, respect, tolerance, avoidance of unfair profit, humbleness, anger management, avoidance of gossip, helpfulness, mentorship, good nature, value of being educated, fair pay for fair work, altruism, obedience to the law and

respect of rights, avoidance of cheating, not persisting in the same mistake, no murdering and no stealing), while there are no verses referring to the superiority of law, avoidance of being a hypocrite, and self-control.

In the Psalms, 24 ethics values and rules (integrity, honesty, objectivity, professional competency and prudence, justice, commitment, love, respect, avoidance of unfair profit, humbleness, anger management, avoidance of gossip, helpfulness, mentorship, good nature, value of being educated, fair pay for fair work, altruism, obedience to the law and respect of rights, avoidance of cheating, not persisting in the same mistake, no murdering and no stealing) are included, while four values and rules (privacy, superiority of law, tolerance and self-control) are not present.

The Bible includes 26 values and rules (integrity, honesty, objectivity, professional competency and attention, justice, commitment, love, respect, tolerance, not obtaining unfair profit, humbleness, anger management, avoiding gossip, helpfulness, mentorship, good nature, value of being educated, fair pay for fair work, altruism, obedience to the law and respect of rights, avoidance of cheating, not persisting in the same mistake, avoidance of being a hypocrite, no murdering, no stealing and self-control), with privacy and superiority of law not being found in the verses.

In the IFAC criteria, 14 ethics values and rules are included (integrity, honesty, objectivity, professional competency and prudence, privacy, justice, commitment, superiority of law, avoidance of unfair profit, value of being educated, obedience to the law and respect of rights, avoidance of cheating, no stealing and self-control), while the remaining 28 principles (love, respect, tolerance, humbleness, anger management, avoidance of gossip, helpfulness, mentorship, good nature, fair pay for fair work, altruism, not persisting in the same mistake, avoidance of being a hypocrite, and no murdering) were not found in these criteria.

10. CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

A sense of ethics has always been a prominent feature of humankind. Ethical behaviors serve as the foundation of the trust mechanism wherever human beings are present. This study examined ethics in terms of both conceptual and functional dimensions and explained how ethics can be made functional on social grounds.

Ethical values began to be systematized with the formation of societies, having been improved upon and enhanced throughout all periods of history through the better understanding of the inner workings of individuals and the provision of education using humane values. Ethical values and the individual-centered approach have been supported throughout the course of history by religion, other social institutions and states. However, social, political, economic and professional problems emerged in all periods of social development due to the violation of ethical principles. Religious texts provide a reference for the ethical judgements of the world that have been handed down by societies. Many non-governmental organizations have adopted their ethical approaches from religion, and thereby operate in accordance with the dictates of the religious authorities. It is important to understand that religion is still an authority for most people, and therefore its effect cannot be disregarded. This study has analyzed the holy books and put forward the ethical values proclaimed by these books for the purpose of engendering self-reflection about ethical values in people around the world.

In the western world, the Protestant ethic, that is, religion, is the basis of the ethical values informing professional ethics. The ethical values accepted by other societies and IFAC are also present in holy books that date back centuries. These ethical values need to be taught to the entire society. As commitment to the ethical values is very important for establishing social trust and peace, this responsibility is too sensitive an issue to be left to individual decisions. Thus, the burden of each individual in the society to uphold the ethics principles is essential for the formation of an ethical atmosphere, one that maintains its dynamism through education and that helps to facilitate the adoption of common habits, whereby all individuals adhere to ethical values by showing self-control, without the need of supervision.

To conclude, a business and professional life without ethical principles will damage the necessary environment of trust within society. Professional organizations play a key role in identifying ethical values in their determination of the ethics codes that serve to govern the members of their respective professions. Furthermore, "Ethics Institutes" are very important in terms of making these ethical values dynamic and open to improvement. It should be a common practice in all professions that workers submit reports and be supervised, as done by the trade unions and the professional organizations working with accounting specialists. The existing trade unions and professional organizations should make it a standard requirement that ethical principles be adhered to and if not, criminal sanctions should be applied. In addition, the members of all professions should be evaluated and rated according to their professional competency, motivation and mentoring skills, and newly employed workers should not be granted the same title as those who have been working for at least three years or longer. This type of evaluation and rating system will serve to create a great sense of belonging, in corporate terms, based on a kind of mentoring relationship. The ethical values to be followed by all workers and other members of the society is paramount for ensuring social welfare, trust, peace and development.

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