

Analysis of the Institutionalization Level of Ethics within the Central Public Administration in Romania

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Abstract

In this paper we tried to analyze the aspects found in the specialized literature and the main objective was to identify the level of institutionalization of ethics within the central public administration in Romania.

Using the questionnaire, I was able to analyze structured data resulting from the information obtained from the people employed in the central public administration.

The result that emerges from the analysis is the following: at the level of the central public organization, the institutionalization of ethics is in an open process of transition that targets both the individual and the organizational level.

Key words: management, research, ethics, ethics management, institutionalization of ethics

J.E.L. classification: G32, H11, M12

1. Introduction

Ethics is a system of moral principles and concepts in any field of thought or activity. It is related to morality and studies what is good for both individuals and society.

Ethics is concerned with the standards by which human actions can be morally evaluated. In the organizations of the central public administration, the institutionalization of ethics represents the foundation of sustainable development.

Considering the current economic context, the purpose of our research is to identify the level of institutionalization of ethics within the central public administration in Romania.

2. Theoretical background

Ethics is a set of norms of moral conduct, being in many situations, synonymous with the concept of morality (Constantinescu, M. & Mureșan, Valentin, 2009, p. 32).

From an etymological point of view, the term "ethics" comes from the Greek language - ethos (habits, customs, way of acting), being synonymous with the term "morals" which comes from the Latin language - mores (behaviour, morals).

Ancient Greek philosophers, including Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, significantly contributed to the development of ethical principles and theories during that period.

The terms "morality" and "ethics" are competitors, although they are often poorly differentiated. A rigorous analysis of these terms is carried out by (Morar Vasile, 2006, p.13) who concludes that while moral actions are done out of duty and obedience, ethical ones are done in accordance with duty, relying on intelligence and experience.

The French philosopher André Comte-Sponville sheds light on the terms, concluding: "morality commands, ethics recommends" (Morar Vasile, 2006, p. 14).

The terms ethics and morality entered the language as synonyms, but we draw attention to the fact that the transition from morals to ethics in the business world is equivalent to that from a universal principle to particular rules.

Referring to the term ethics, the first philosopher who believed that man should be responsible for his actions was Aristotle (384-322 BC). He defined ethics as the science which deals with morality (human behavior) and which depends on the development and exercise of virtues which may be acquired by birth or may be partly assimilated by education, exercise and habit. These virtues are based on human character and aim at the attainment of happiness (Morar, Vasile, Craciun, Dan, Macoviciuc, Vasile, 2017, p. 16-23).

Ethics is, according to the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), the unconditional ability of all rational beings to act according to moral laws. The ethical theories of Aristotle and Kant are two of the most influential and studied theories in the history of philosophy.

Based on these theories, (Carroll, A. B. & Buchholtz, A. K., 2008, p. 242), define ethics as "the discipline that deals with what is good and bad, with debts and moral obligations".

In a world dominated by serious ethical violations, the concept of ethics should exist in any field in which we operate and involves encouraging moral behavior, preventing corruption, both in public and private sector organizations.

The institutionalization of ethics in various fields of activity has been present in specialized works since the 1960s in the United States of America.

In the course of the 30 years since the scientific appearance of applied ethics, the adoption of internal programs, of the own ethics codes, led in 1990 to the institutionalization of ethics in international business.

In the period after 1990, ethics has been an important topic in many countries. For example, in the USA, to combat government corruption, the Ethics in Government Act was passed, and to institutionalize the obligation to address risk both legally and ethically, they passed the Sarbanes-Oxley Act in 2002 (Vărzaru, A. Antoaneta, Bocean, G.Claudiu, Nicolescu, M.Marian, 2021, p.15-19).

Ethics in Romania after 1989 was influenced by several factors, such as:

- change of political regime (transition from communism to democracy). In this stage, the moral values violated by the communist regime were reevaluated,
- the transition from the socialist economy to the market economy. Practically, during this period, the foundations of the private sector were laid,
- the development of civil society through the emergence of independent organizations with a greater openness to the adoption of ethical behavior,
- Corruption that affected both the public and private sectors. Laws and codes of conduct were adopted to prevent and combat corruption, but specialized institutions were also established,
- integration into the EU, started in 1993 by submitting the application for membership and completed in 2007, when Romania became a full member. Integration into the EU presupposed the adoption of common standards in areas such as human rights, justice, the rule of law, internal and external policy, the environment etc.

These factors significantly influenced human behavior, challenging Romanian society to changes that led to the institutionalization of ethics within large organizations.

3. The importance of the institutionalization of ethics in Romania

In the last 30 years, reforms have been initiated in Romania, laws have been written based on models from advanced capitalist economies.

Valentin Mureșan, the promoter of applied ethics in Romania, stated that "the world still lives with the illusion that ethics can be reduced to spontaneous compliance with laws and regulations or the fear of God", and "in Romania the situation seems even worse", because widespread corruption at all levels (Mureșan, Valentin, 2009, p. 10).

In developed countries, the institutionalization of ethics is present in many organizational levels. In Romania, the institutionalization of ethics is only in a transition stage, but steps are being taken towards a new stage in the country's development.

The opening of organizations for the institutionalization of ethics in Romania is hampered by the lack of experience of ethics managers and ethics committees.

Most ministries have implemented codes of ethics, procedures for monitoring and reporting ethics violations, and ethics training programs, but these remain rather formal, not convincing either staff or beneficiaries. The mere existence of codes does not guarantee moral behavior or the eradication of unethical behavior and a lack of trust and enforcement leads to a mimicry of ethics. Taking as a hypothesis, the premise that the institutionalization of ethics is absolutely necessary for the successful development of any business, in this paper we proposed to provide a starting point in the field of education.

Research, on a scientific basis, requires a serious accumulation of information from a research-supported activity.

4. Research methodology

In this study, we aimed to offer a starting point in the field of analysis of the level of institutionalization of ethics within the central public administration in Romania. The study regarding the measurement of the institutionalization of ethics in the field of central public administration was carried out with the help of a direct research - the questionnaire. This was created after analyzing the specialized literature in the field and establishing a number of objectives and hypotheses.

This questionnaire was structured in three sections dealing with issues related to the following problems:

- measurement of the level of institutionalization of ethics;
- future (programmed) ethical behavior;
- socio-professional characteristics of the interviewed persons.

Analysis of the level of institutionalization of ethics in the implementation of ethical behavior.

The main objective of the survey-based study was to measure the level of institutionalization of ethics within the central public administration. This main objective was, correlated with the socio-demographic and economic characteristics of the people interviewed, to form a clearer picture of the motivational factors involved.

The research tool used was the questionnaire, specially developed to clearly capture both the measurement of the degree of institutionalization of ethics and the perceptions of the interviewed persons on the knowledge of the institutionalization of ethics within the central public administration. The questionnaire consisted of 9 content questions and 3 identification questions.

For the statistical analysis of the research, 110 people participated, resulting in the selection of 100 valid answers.

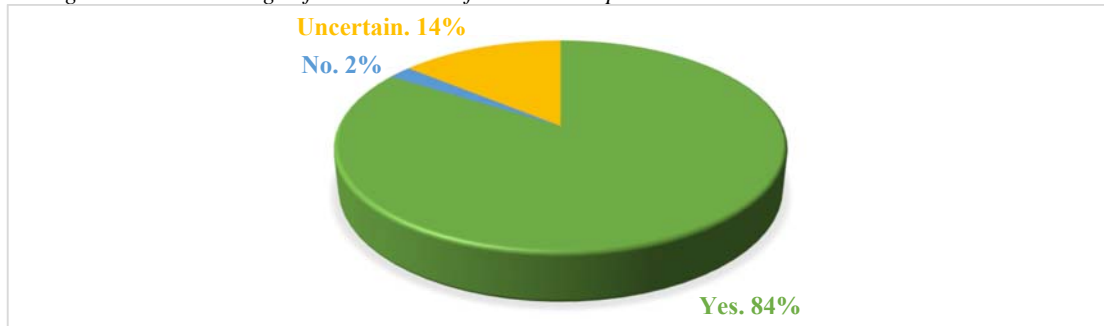
The application period of the questionnaire was of short duration and took place at the beginning of February, for 2 weeks.

5. Findings

The information collected based on the questionnaire was centralized, and the interpretation of the obtained data will be presented below by highlighting the percentages and graphics of the most important aspects and trends of the behavior of the interviewed people.

Asked if they know that a public official has been appointed as an 84% of respondents knew that there was an ethics responsible, and on the other hand, only 16% did not know or were uncertain. (Fig. 1)

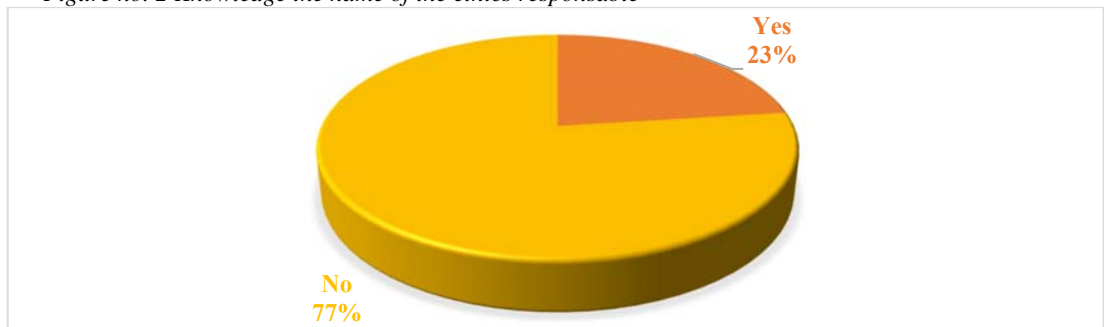
Figure no. 1 Knowledge of the existence of an ethics responsible



Source: questionnaires

Regarding the name of the ethics responsible, 23% of respondents knew the name and 77% did not know his name. (Fig. 2)

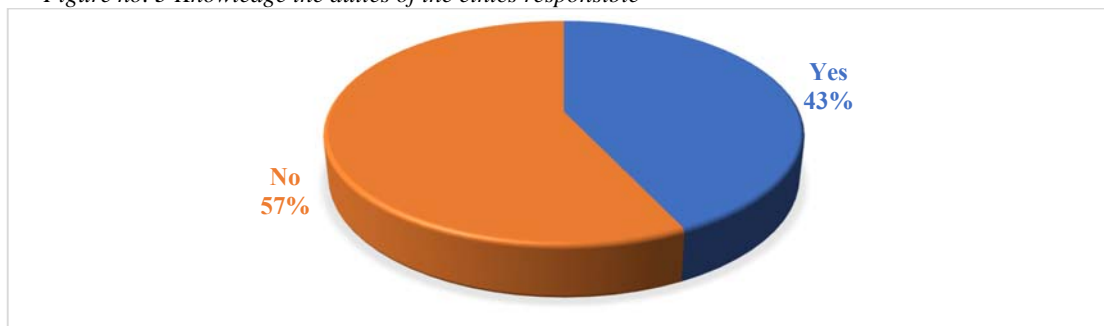
Figure no. 2 Knowledge the name of the ethics responsible



Source: questionnaires

Regarding the duties of the ethics responsible, 43% of the respondents knew the duties of the ethics adviser, and at the opposite pole, 57% did not know what their main duties are. (Fig. 3).

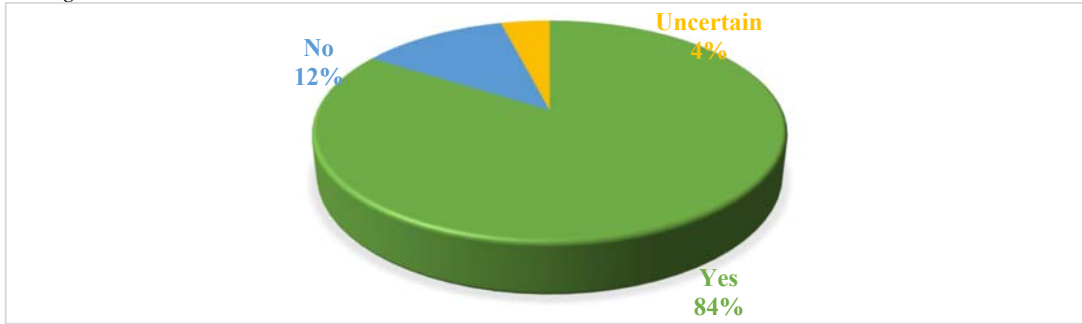
Figure no. 3 Knowledge the duties of the ethics responsible



Source: questionnaires

To the question: "If you have an ethical dilemma, would you contact the ethics advisor?", 84% of the respondents answered affirmatively, followed by 12% who answered negatively, and 4% were uncertain. (Fig. 4). Ethical change is at the centre of communication strategy. (Parsons, P. J., 2016, p. 67).

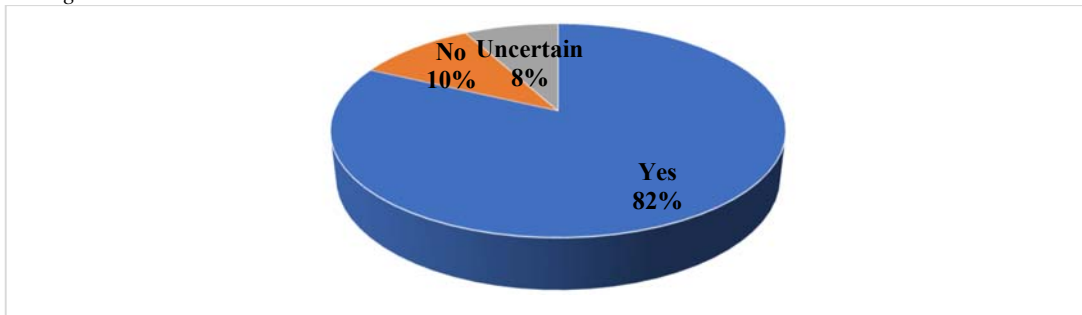
Figure no. 4 The ethical dilemma



Source: questionnaires

To the question: " Does your organization have a written ethics code? ", 82% of the respondents answered affirmatively, followed by 10% who answered negatively, and 8% were uncertain. (Fig. 5)

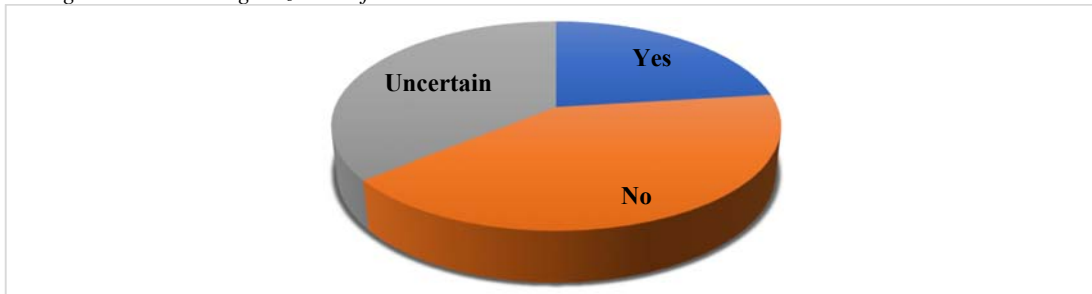
Figure no. 5 The written ethics code



Source: questionnaires

To the question regarding the organization of courses on business ethics, 23% of the respondents answered affirmatively, followed by 41% who answered negatively and 36% were uncertain. (Fig. 6).

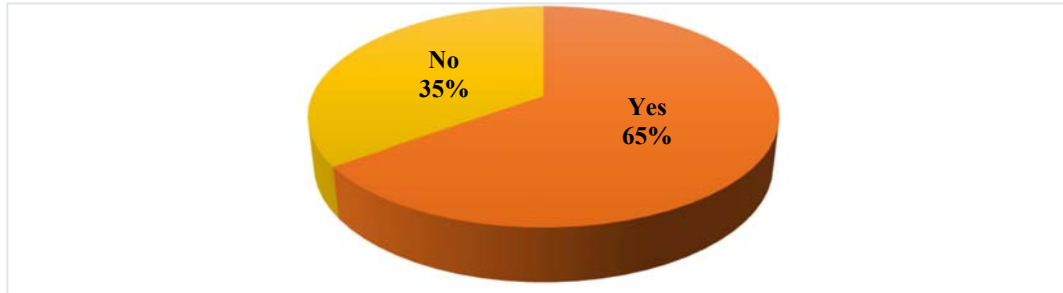
Figure no. 6 The organization of courses on business ethics



Source: questionnaires

To the question of freedom of opinion, 65% of the respondents answered affirmatively, followed by 35% who answered negatively. (Fig. 7).

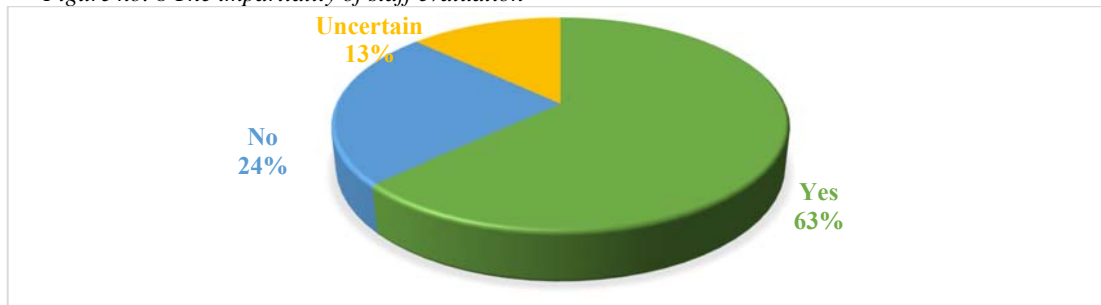
Figure no. 7 The freedom of opinion



Source: questionnaires

To the question about personnel evaluations, 63% of the respondents answered affirmatively, followed by 24% who answered negatively and 13% were uncertain. (Fig. 8).

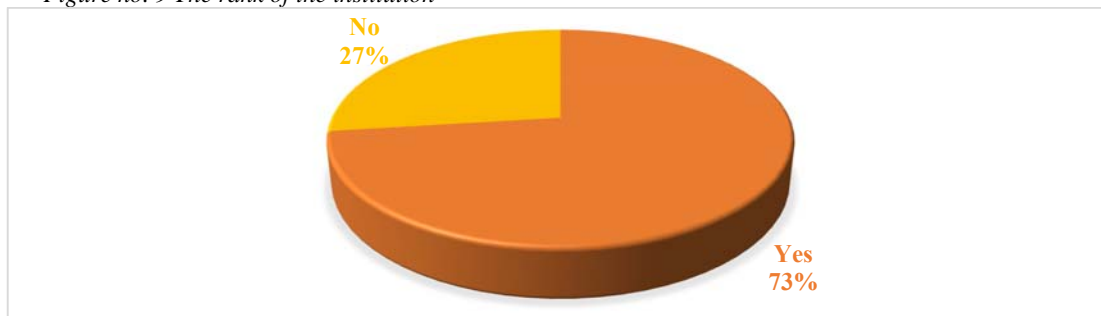
Figure no. 8 The impartiality of staff evaluation



Source: questionnaires

When asked about the ethical behavior of leaders, 73% of the respondents answered affirmatively, followed by 27% who answered negatively (Fig. 9).

Figure no. 9 The rank of the institution

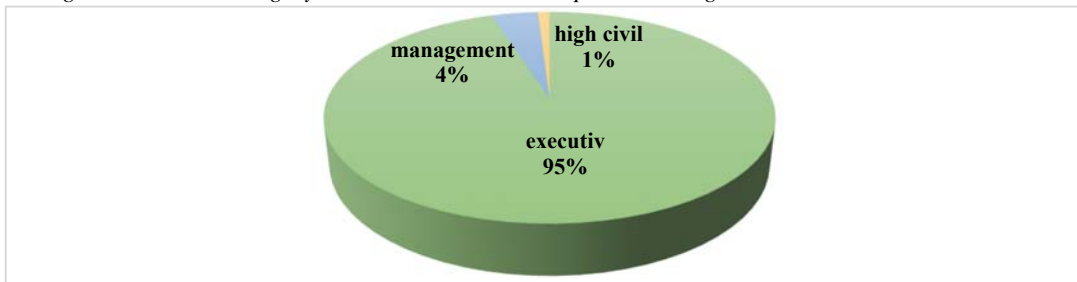


Source: questionnaires

In any situation, the staff of the organizations must adopt a behavior based on respect, impartiality, honesty, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, openness and diligence towards the citizen and without interferences that affect the public interest, legitimate interests and rights of citizens or institutional prestige. In the book Guide to business ethics (Duncan, Sarah, 2021, p.162), she states that you don't have to be perfect to behave ethically. In order to become better, the honesty of employees is compared with the honesty of organizations.

Regarding the category to which the interviewed person belongs, 95 are executive civil servants, 4 are management civil servants and 1 person is a senior civil servant. (Fig.10).

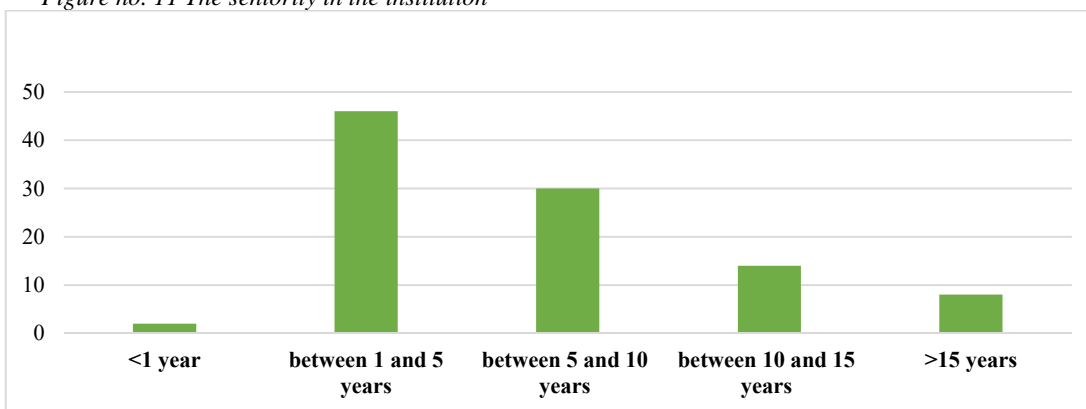
Figure no. 10 The category to which the interviewed person belongs



Source: questionnaires

Regarding the seniority of the respondents in the institution, 2% <1 year, 46% between 1 and 5 years, 30% between 5 and 10 years, 14% between 10 and 15 years and 8% >15 years. (Fig.11).

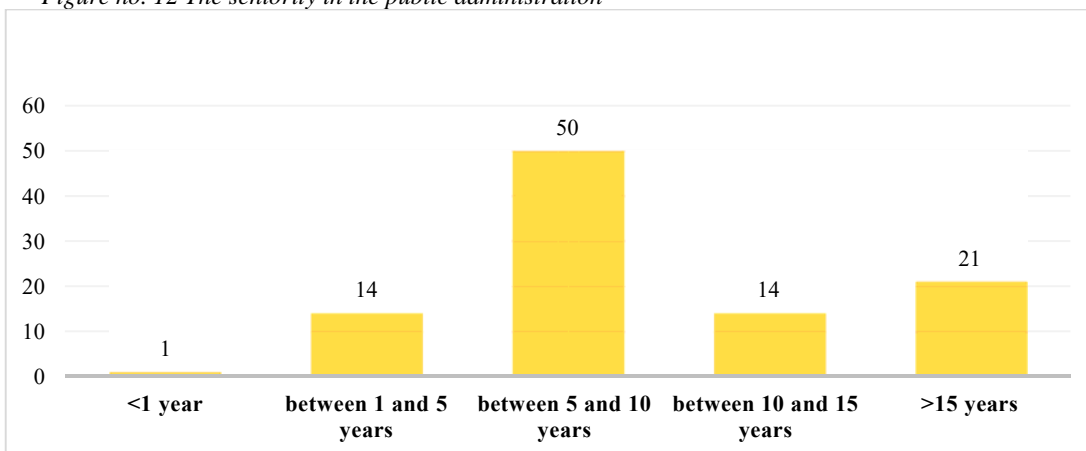
Figure no. 11 The seniority in the institution



Source: questionnaires

Regarding the seniority of the respondents in the public administration, 1% <1 year, 14% between 1 and 5 years, 50% between 5 and 10 years, 14% between 10 and 15 years and 21% >15 years. (Fig.12).

Figure no. 12 The seniority in the public administration



Source: questionnaires

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, the rank of the institution centralizes a lot of information regarding the institutionalization of ethics and the ethical behavior of employees.

The success of implementing ethical behavior is influenced by the differences between stated and practiced values. The greater the gap between the declared and practiced values, the lower the chances of success. The existence of codes does not guarantee moral behavior or the eradication of unethical behavior

Compared to developed countries, Romania does not excel in this chapter, but it is open to the institutionalization of ethics.

The benefits of business ethics include motivating employees and improving communication at all levels.

HR professionals play a vital role in promoting and enforcing business ethics and compliance within organizations. They ensure that employees are trained on ethics and compliance issues, monitor compliance with policies and investigate any violations.

The EU challenges us in the fight against corruption and the path to a new transitional stage in the process of institutionalizing ethics in public administration.

The institutionalization of ethics is important in the modernization of Romania.

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