

## Strategies for Controlling Unethical Behaviour among Professional Accountants in Tanzania

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**Abstract:** This research study delves into the strategies aimed at effectively controlling unethical behavior among professional accountants in Tanzania. In light of the growing significance of ethical conduct within the accounting profession, it is imperative to gain a comprehensive understanding of the strategies that can be employed to curb such behavior. By focusing on the unique context of Tanzania, this study seeks to shed light on the ethical frameworks and guidelines that shape the behavior of professional accountants in the country. Ethics play a fundamental role in maintaining the integrity and credibility of the accounting profession. The actions and decisions of professional accountants can have a profound impact on the financial well-being of individuals, organizations, and society as a whole. Consequently, it is essential to explore effective strategies that can prevent and address unethical behavior among accounting professionals in Tanzania.

This qualitative study focuses on exploring strategies to effectively control unethical behavior among professional accountants in Tanzania. The research is guided by the ethical leadership theory, which emphasizes fair and just decision-making for all stakeholders. To gather data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 accounting leaders representing various sectors in Tanzania.

The research methodology employed coding techniques and included member checking to ensure the reliability and credibility of participant responses. From the analysis, three key themes emerged as significant factors in controlling unethical behavior: leveraging internal controls, providing staff education on ethical decision-making, and the influential role of leadership in fostering an ethical climate. These findings offer valuable strategies that can be implemented to mitigate unethical practices within organizations. By adopting these strategies, accounting professionals, regulators, and business practitioners can benefit from improved ethical conduct and enhanced operational integrity. This research study contributes to social change by emphasizing the importance of ethical decision-making. By promoting and implementing these strategies, organizations can advance their missions while upholding ethical standards. Additionally, this research has broader implications for society as a whole, as it emphasizes the significance of ethical conduct in organizational settings.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The accounting profession plays a critical role in upholding the integrity and transparency of financial information. Nevertheless, unethical behavior among professional accountants can have severe consequences, including damage to reputation, financial losses, and a loss of public trust. Addressing and preventing unethical conduct is crucial, particularly within the Tanzanian context, where tailored strategies are necessary. Unethical behavior in the accounting profession extends beyond scandalous acts and encompasses decisions and actions that impede an organization's mission and result in reputation damage (Pendse, 2012). The profession has faced significant challenges in maintaining ethical standards, partly due to high-profile corporate scandals and unethical practices by prominent accounting firms, which have cast a shadow over its reputation (Koumbiadis & Okpara, 2008).

In their study titled "Ethics and Accounting Profession: An Exploratory Study of Accounting Students in Post-Secondary Institutions," Koumbiadis and Okpara (2008) delve into the perception of ethics within the accounting profession. Their research sheds light on the negative effects of recent corporate scandals and unethical practices, emphasizing the impact on the profession's reputation.

Recognizing the need to address unethical behavior, ethics has become an integral component in accounting (Cavazos & White, 2012). Regulatory measures, such as the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002

have been implemented to enforce ethical conduct and hold corporate officers accountable (Jackson, 2011). Despite these efforts, unethical behavior remains prevalent (Pendse, 2012). The Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, enacted in 2010, aimed to address governance and regulatory issues in the financial sector (Jackson, 2011). However, anonymous reporting, crucial for whistleblowing practices, remains limited even with provisions for whistleblower protection (Pope and Lee, 2013).

Integrating ethics education into accounting curricula is crucial to equip professionals with the knowledge and values necessary for ethical decision-making. Accounting students now face ethical dilemmas and are encouraged to develop ethical reasoning skills (Rutherford et al., 2012). However, merely including ethics courses is insufficient to ensure ethical behavior, and additional measures are required to reinforce ethical conduct within organizations.

Regulatory frameworks play a vital role in promoting ethical behavior and deterring unethical practices. For example, the Sarbanes-Oxley Act enhances corporate governance and financial reporting requirements to prevent fraudulent activities (Jackson, 2011). Similarly, the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act aims to combat bribery and corruption in international business transactions. While these regulations lay the foundation for ethical behavior, organizations must go beyond mere compliance and foster a culture of ethics throughout all levels of the organization.

Whistleblowing practices serve as a crucial mechanism for detecting unethical behavior early on. The Dodd-Frank Act introduced provisions to protect whistleblowers and provide incentives for reporting fraudulent activities (Jackson, 2011). However, the underutilization of anonymous reporting suggests that employees may still fear retaliation or lack confidence in the effectiveness of the reporting system.

This study focuses specifically on the Tanzanian context, aiming to provide valuable insights into the ethical frameworks, guidelines, and strategies that shape the behavior of professional accountants in the country. By examining the unique challenges and opportunities within the Tanzanian accounting landscape, this research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on ethical behavior in the accounting profession.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents literature review focusing on strategies for effectively controlling unethical behavior among professional accountants in Tanzania. It begins by clarifying and defining key terms associated with ethics and professional accountants. Subsequently, it delves into a comprehensive analysis of both theoretical and empirical literature related to the topic. By examining the existing body of knowledge, this chapter establishes a foundation for the research, offering insights into the current state of strategies employed to effectively control unethical behavior among professional accountants. Additionally, it identifies gaps in the literature, providing opportunities for further investigation and exploration in this critical area.

### 2.1. Definition of Key Concepts

In this study, three fundamental concepts emerge as key focal points: ethics, professional accountants, and strategies. Let us define each of these concepts:

**Ethics:** Ethics refers to a set of moral principles and values that guide individuals and organizations in determining what is right and wrong. According to Jones, Parker, and Bos (2005), the term "ethics" carries different meanings depending on an individual's profession, leading to a lack of a universal definition for business ethics. This variation in interpretation often results in significant confusion whenever business ethics is discussed. In a general sense, ethics can be broadly defined as the systematic examination of conduct based on moral principles, reflective choices, and standards that differentiate between right and wrong behaviors (Wheelwright, 1959). Ethics represents a system or a set of moral principles that guide individuals in making decisions, taking into account their personal motives and the consequences that arise from those decisions (Caldwell et al., 2010; Verhezen, 2010; Salterio & Webb, 2006).

**Professional Accountants:** Professional accountants are individuals who possess the necessary education, skills, and expertise in the field of accounting. According to IFAC, a professional accountant is an individual who possesses specialized expertise in the field of accountancy, acquired

through a combination of formal education and practical experience (IFAC, 2011). In the context of this study, the term "profession" refers to individuals who have undergone specific training, possess in-depth knowledge, and have developed requisite skills to effectively practice in the field of accountancy.

**Strategies:** Strategies encompass a comprehensive set of plans, tactics, or approaches utilized to attain specific goals or objectives (Nickols, 2016). While traditionally associated with business and marketing, strategies find utility in numerous facets of life. They empower individuals or organization to navigate complexities, optimize resources, and shape their desired outcomes. To develop an effective strategy, a clear understanding of the goal, available resources, and the challenges that lie ahead is essential.

### 2.2. Theoretical Framework

Codes of ethics established by professional accounting bodies serve as guidelines for their members, outlining the expected standards of behaviour (Harpham, 1999). These codes have evolved over time, transitioning from primarily governing interactions among members to placing greater emphasis on aligning members' conduct with public expectations. While instances of professionals being involved in corporate collapses and fraud scandals have had a negative impact on the accounting profession, it is important to note that the majority of professionals are not implicated in such incidents.

Numerous theories attempt to explain ethical and unethical behaviour, often based on different perspectives on human behaviour. For example, Hobbes argued for the necessity of a strong government, perceiving humans as inherently inclined towards negativity (Abizadeh, 2018). Other ethicists propose various definitions to support their arguments. These interconnected questions make it easier to determine if certain individuals are more predisposed to morality than others when there is a clear understanding of human behaviour.

The debate around dictating ethics to others involves the consideration of moral relativism versus moral absolutism. Moral relativism posits that morality is determined by the culture or subculture in which one exists (Puxty et al., 1994). This argument has been used to justify bribery in certain countries, citing it as an "acceptable business practice" within that particular context. On the other hand, ethical absolutists disagree with this notion and believe in universal standards or rules that prohibit bribery (Reiter, 1997). Both positions come with complexities. There are broader ethical issues beyond bribery, such as torture, genocide, and poverty, which make the discussion highly intricate. Absolutists struggle to consistently define and justify their stance, while relativists may overlook behaviours that are universally considered abhorrent. Moral relativism is grounded in a constructionist ontological basis, while moral absolutism stems from realism (Puxty et al., 1997). As a result, ethical theories can be categorized into normative theories of ethics and theories of rights and justice.

#### 2.2.1. Normative Theories of Ethics

Jeremy Bentham and Immanuel Kant are two significant figures in discussions on ethics. Bentham, along with J.S. Mill, is the founder of Utilitarianism, a movement that has also greatly influenced economic thought (Dellaportas et al., 2005). Utilitarianism asserts that an action is considered right if it maximizes utility, meaning it produces more pleasure or happiness and prevents more pain or unhappiness compared to alternatives. This perspective, also known as consequentialism or act-utilitarianism, focuses on the consequences of an action to determine its rightness (Puxty et al., 1994).

The evaluation of an action's rightness is based on the value of its consequences. However, one criticism of act-utilitarianism is that it appears to justify the means with the ends, neglecting the ethical evaluation of the action itself (Lindawati, 2005). As a response, rule utilitarianism was developed. Rule utilitarianism assesses the value of consequences by considering a cost-benefit analysis based on following the best rule of conduct (Dellaportas et al., 2005). Unlike act-utilitarianism, rule-utilitarianism focuses on general rules rather than specific actions. This can be a disadvantage in certain circumstances where general rules may not provide appropriate guidance. Additionally, determining the best rule can be a complex process. However, rule-utilitarianism has long been regarded as a valid approach to assessing ethical behavior (Lindawati, 2005).

### 2.2.2. *Rights and Justice Theories*

The theory suggests that "right" should be understood as an entitlement rather than a duty or obligation. John Rawls, an American political and moral philosopher, focused on the social and legal agreements that would lead to a more just society (American Accounting Association, 1990). His work falls within the realm of social ethics and his ideas on social justice are considered highly influential in twentieth-century political philosophy. Rawls developed a concept of social justice called "justice as fairness" and reintroduced the idea of a social contract, which consists of rules that society deems necessary for a just and fair community (American Accounting Association, 1990).

These rules are established to protect the least advantaged members of society and are motivated by the uncertainty of one's future position (referred to as the "veil of ignorance"). Societies uphold these rules to safeguard themselves in case they end up in the less advantaged category. Two principles emerge from Rawls's theory: justice and fairness (Lindawati, 2005). The first principle asserts that every person should have an equal right to the most extensive system of basic liberties, compatible with a similar system for all. The second principle addresses social and economic inequalities, aiming to benefit the least advantaged while adhering to the principle of just savings, and ensuring equal opportunities for all in accessing positions and offices. The first principle takes priority over the second. Rawls's theory has faced criticism from various perspectives, including those who argue that he overlooks individual property rights or neglects community interests (Lindawati, 2005).

### 2.2.3. *Moral Development Approach*

An alternative perspective on ethics, which is relevant to the present study, focuses on the decision-making processes and the level of moral reasoning involved (Cheffers & Pakaluk, 2005). This approach is particularly useful when examining the ethical behaviours of accountants, as decision making is a central aspect of their work. Lawrence Kohlberg, an American educational theorist, adopted this approach in his study of moral development, which has been applied to various fields (Blackburn, 2001).

Kohlberg's framework emphasizes the moral development of individuals as reflected in their reasoning during decision making. He identified three hierarchical levels of moral development, each consisting of two stages. Individuals progress through these levels as they advance in their moral reasoning through social interaction. The levels include the pre-convention level (the lowest), the conventional level, and the post-conventional level. The focus is not solely on the decision itself (whether it is a yes or no), but rather on the underlying reasoning behind the decision (American Accounting Association, 1990).

This approach provides valuable insights into understanding the ethical behaviours of accountants by examining the moral development and reasoning processes they employ when making decisions. By applying Kohlberg's framework, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the ethical decision-making capabilities of accountants and how these capabilities evolve as individual's progress through different levels of moral development.

## 2.3. **Empirical Studies**

The accounting profession places a significant emphasis on ethical decision-making due to its direct impact on the reliability and trustworthiness of financial information (Jones & Abraham, 2007). Professional accountants often encounter complex ethical dilemmas that require careful consideration and discernment (Zuckerman, 2001). These dilemmas arise from various factors, such as conflicts of interest, data manipulation pressures, and balancing stakeholder interests. Professional accountants must navigate these complexities to ensure transparent and credible financial reporting, contributing to the overall integrity and public perception of the accounting profession.

Ethics serve as the foundation of the accounting profession, ensuring transparency, trust, and accountability in financial reporting (Nwakpa, 2010). Professional accountants are expected to adhere to a code of ethics that guides their decision-making process (Nwagboso, 2008). The literature highlights the importance of ethical decision-making in maintaining public confidence and upholding the integrity of financial information (Harpham, 1999).

Numerous factors influence the ethical decision-making process of professional accountants. Research indicates that personal values, organizational culture, professional guidelines, and external pressures all play significant roles (Godfrey, 1996). Individual accountants' moral development, ethical awareness, and cognitive biases also shape their decision-making frameworks.

Ethical decision-making in the accounting profession faces challenges. Studies reveal common dilemmas faced by professional accountants, including conflicts of interest, client pressure, auditor independence, financial reporting fraud, and whistleblowing (Chan, 2009). These challenges present significant moral and ethical dilemmas that require careful consideration and judgment.

To address these challenges, various strategies have been proposed to guide professional accountants in their ethical decision-making process. These strategies include ethical training and education, the establishment of strong ethical cultures within organizations, the implementation of robust internal controls, professional judgment frameworks, and the promotion of ethical leadership (Burns & Scapens, 2000). Additionally, ethical decision-making models, such as the framework proposed by Rest (1986), provide a structured approach to resolving ethical dilemmas.

Business ethics continue to play a crucial role in governing the accounting profession, both in Tanzania and worldwide. Extensive research establishes a strong correlation between accounting and ethics, emphasizing their interdependency (Boston et al., 2011; Omoyele, 2010; Fodio, Ibikunle & Oba, 2013; Ogbonna & Ebimobowei, 2012). The achievement of organizational accounting goals is inseparable from ethical considerations, as highlighted by Meymandi et al. (2015). Accountants, as key players in business operations, capital markets, and the economy, bear the responsibility of upholding ethical standards (Smith, 2003). Consequently, the information provided by accountants should possess the qualities of reliability and impartiality (Meymandi et al., 2015).

The study of business ethics and unethical practices among professional accountants continues to receive significant attention globally. Ethics forms the foundation of any society, and without it, the societal structure would crumble (Smith, 2003). The concern for corporate ethics has intensified in recent times due to high-profile accounting scandals involving companies like Enron, Tyco, and WorldCom. Research conducted on large accounting firms reveals the serious impact of client biases on accountants, demonstrating that no one is immune to such influences (Bazerman, Loewenstein, & Moore, 2002). Banaji, Bazerman, and Chugh (2003) further discovered that unconscious biases can distort decision-making processes. Consequently, organizations today recognize the necessity of comprehending and managing ethical factors, leading to an increasing number of them taking action. Even top managers are not exempt from the consequences of unethical conduct, as demonstrated by the case of former Barclays CEO Bob Diamond, who resigned due to ethical scandals.

### **2.4. The Approach to Promote Ethical Behaviour among Professional Accountants**

Studies have highlighted the challenges posed by diverse ethical standards in different countries and accounting bodies. This diversity can sometimes lead to friction when addressing ethical issues. To ensure a more streamlined and consistent approach, it has been suggested that all ethical guidelines be consolidated into a uniform set of global ethical standards (Karaibrahimoglu et al., 2009).

While laws and regulations play a crucial role in promoting ethical behaviour, there is a growing concern that an excessive focus on legal compliance may overshadow the underlying moral principles. Striking a balance is important, as overly strict laws and company rules can hinder accountants' ability to engage with their own personal moral standards and navigate ethical dilemmas effectively (Stansbury and Barry, 2007).

In response to the ethical crisis within the profession, accounting education has been identified as a potential solution. The role of accounting educators in teaching ethics has been extensively discussed, emphasizing the need for critical thinking and decision-making skills in ethical contexts, moving beyond relying solely on codes of professional conduct (Jennings, 2004).

There is a consensus among experts that ethics education should be integrated into pre-qualifying programs, both as a dedicated unit and as an integral part of other courses. This aligns with recent calls for mandatory accounting education within curricula, as seen in the USA (Swanson, 2005).

## 2.5. The Regulatory Authority Overseeing the Accountancy Profession in Tanzania

The regulation of the accountancy profession in Tanzania is overseen by the NBAA (National Board of Accountants and Auditors). Established under the Auditors and Accountants Act, the NBAA operates as both a regulator and a professional accountancy body. It consists of a governing board with 12 members, where the chairman is appointed by the President of the United Republic of Tanzania for a renewable three-year term. The Minister of Finance, in consultation with the NBAA, appoints the remaining 11 members (Mkasiwa, 2011). However, this arrangement lacks non-accountant public oversight. However, the effectiveness of the NBAA is hindered by technical and financial resource constraints. As a result, it faces challenges in fulfilling its role as both a regulator and a professional accountancy body. Additional capacity is needed for the NBAA to effectively carry out monitoring activities, ensure adequate practical training, and enforce compliance with accounting standards among accountants (Mkasiwa, 2011).

## 2.6. The Ethical Guidelines Governing Accountants in Tanzania

Accounting is a profession that rests heavily on the need to exhibit high sense of accountability and stewardship, hence the emphasis that all members be guided by professional code of conduct (Nwagboso, 2008). A Code of ethics helps to clarify the profession's values provides a reference point for decision making and can be used as a framework for discipline (ibid). Most Codes of ethics are principles based, providing guidance as to the principles on which professional judgment and decisions should be based, rather than a rigid system of rules (Godfrey, 1996).

The NBAA Code of Ethics was issued for the first time in 1999 as a by-law to the Auditors and Accountants Act. The Code of Ethics has mandatory application to all the NBAA members. To bring it in line with IFAC, the NBAA Code needs updating in areas like application of principles to specific situations, responsibilities regarding the use of non-accountants, activities incompatible with the practice of public accountancy, rotation of lead engagement auditor, and auditor's independence. Further, the NBAA has a legal mandate to set accounting and auditing standards. Up to now, the national standards are generally modelled on IAS and ISA; and where there was no local standard, the international standards are mandatory (Godfrey, 1996). To strengthen accounting profession in Tanzania, the NBAA adopted wholesale IFRS/IAS and ISA in effect July 1, 2004 (ibid).

## 2.7. Conceptual Framework

The research study aims to explore strategies for controlling unethical behaviour among professional accountants in Tanzania. The conceptual framework for the study is based on Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development. The framework identifies three stages of moral development: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. Each stage has factors that influence whether an accountant is ethical, becoming ethical, or unbecoming ethical.

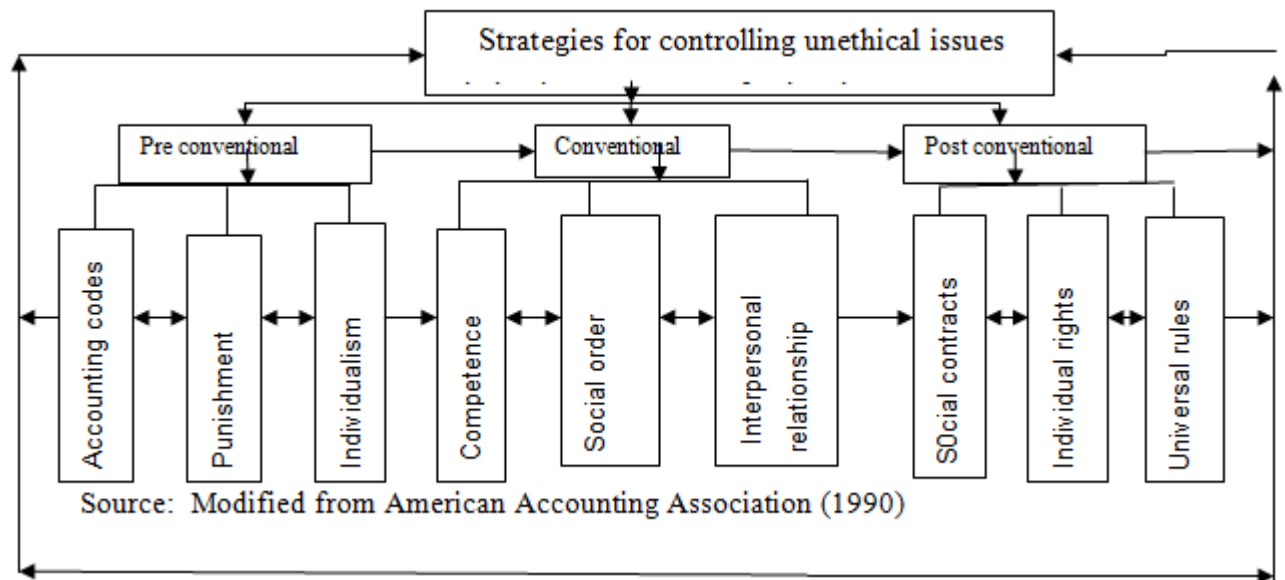
In the pre-conventional stage, individuals adhere to socially acceptable norms due to authority figures and rules. Punishment and obedience play a significant role in their ethical behaviour. In the conventional stage, individuals consider their own best interests and the social order. They act ethically based on competence, interpersonal relationships, and maintaining social harmony. The third stage, post-conventional, involves a genuine concern for the welfare of others and a respect for universal principles. Accountants in this stage see ethics as a universal issue guided by general rules.

Individuals generally progress through the stages sequentially, but not all reach the post-conventional stage. Critics argue about the universality and cultural biases of Kohlberg's theory, as well as its focus on moral reasoning rather than actions. However, despite the criticisms, the theory provides a useful framework for investigating moral reasoning and ethical conduct.

The conceptual model in the study combines pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional factors as interacting conditions that influence the ethical behaviour of accountants. Previous research has utilized Kohlberg's framework to investigate moral reasoning and ethical conduct among accountants.

Overall, the conceptual framework based on Kohlberg's theory offers valuable insights into understanding and studying the moral development and ethical behaviour of accountants

Strategies to mitigate unethical behaviour among accountants as summarized in Figure 1



### 2.8. Explanation of Conceptual Framework

The purpose of the study is to explore strategies to mitigate unethical behaviour among accountants in Tanzania. It will also investigate on the factors influencing unethical and ethical dilemma among professional accountants in Tanzania. To address this matter, the study has a conceptual framework with three types of the variables which are input variable, intervening variables and output variables as shown above. It shows that ethical issues revolve around individuals, policies, legislation and institutions. Accordingly the study will analyze the variables which are Pre-conventional, Conventional and Post-conventional in which the study will examine how professional accountants adhere to ethical conduct. However, ethical conduct can be manifested in the employees' qualifications and competence.

According to the model/conceptual framework the factors which affect ethical conduct also need to be considered. The features have been distinguished as the Pre conventional, Conventional and Post conventional in the model above. In analyzing these features the study will consider things like (i) accounting codes, (ii) competence (iii) interpersonal relationships or social contacts.

### 2.9. Gaps in the Literature

The gap in this review is the absence of an in-depth analysis of the specific strategies or interventions that can be employed to control unethical practices among professional accountants in Tanzania.

Several studies have explored the intersection of ethics and accountancy. In 2007, Cooper and Leung conducted a study titled "Professional accounting bodies' perceptions of ethical issues, causes of ethical failure, and ethics education." Another study by Yinka et al in 2015 focused on "Unethical Accounting Practice and Financial Reporting Quality: Evidence from Nigeria." However, there is a scarcity of research on ethical considerations in the field of accountancy specifically in Tanzania. Therefore, this present study aims to examine ethical issues within the accounting profession in Tanzania.

To bridge this gap, the review should delve into the existing literature on strategies that have been proposed or implemented in other contexts to mitigate unethical behaviour among accountants. It should also consider the unique cultural, legal, and institutional factors in Tanzania that may influence the effectiveness of these strategies in the local context. By examining and discussing specific strategies to control unethical practices among professional accountants in Tanzania, the review can provide valuable insights and guidance for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in the field.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Introduction

This section provides an overview of the procedures and techniques employed in conducting this study. The methodologies utilized in this study encompassed research design, sample size, and data collection instruments.

### 3.2. Research Method

The purpose of this study was to investigate strategies for controlling unethical behaviour among professional accountants in Tanzania. Specifically, the study aimed to critically examine how accountants are institutionally prepared to uphold ethical standards, and maintain ethics. The focus of the study was on individuals and their contextual settings within the working environment, exploring how these factors interacted to either support or constrain the delivery of services to clients. The study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the interplay between psycho-social factors, including beliefs, values, and views, and the working environment, with a subjective approach.

To collect data, interactive methods such as interviews and focus group discussions were used, allowing the participants to express their opinions on strategies for controlling unethical behaviour among professional accountants in Tanzania. A sample size of 10 respondents was chosen, and institutions selected for the study were required to have a nationwide presence. Accountants were selected based on their in-depth knowledge of ethics in accounting, professional roles, power, and access to networks, expertise, or experiences. Given that accountants are obligated to uphold ethical standards and are often seen as society's fraud detectors (Cohen, Ding, Lesage, & Stolowy, 2013), it was considered essential for accounting managers to possess the requisite knowledge to understand the context of the inquiries. Accounting professionals also have access to and can understand the results from the auditor's opinion provided in the audited financial statements of organization.

The study acknowledged the potential subjectivity of assumptions and biases. To address this, the researcher adopted a process of bracketing personal preconceptions and thoroughly analysing the data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the field, ensuring that the researcher's own perceptions did not unduly influence the findings. Any assumptions made by the researcher would be clearly declared.

The research was conducted in various entities, with a primary focus on Dar es Salaam. The choice of Dar es Salaam as the main target was due to its high concentration of institutions and accountants. As Tanzania's commercial capital and a regional business hub, it offered a suitable environment for gathering the required information. Additionally, Dar es Salaam served as the government administrative centre, hosting the headquarters of all government ministries and institutions, further enhancing the study's access to relevant data.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis encompasses the computation of specific measures and the exploration of patterns and relationships within groups of data (Kothari, 2004). In the context of this study, data analysis will involve a comprehensive examination of the data, including reading and understanding its content, segmenting meaningful portions through coding, categorizing related codes into groups, identifying relationships between categories to establish thematic patterns, documenting the final themes derived from the dataset, and presenting patterns of interconnected themes (Patton, 2001). The analysis will incorporate visual representations such as direct quotes from participants. Additionally, some data will be presented in tabular form to facilitate the computation of percentages and frequencies. To streamline the data analysis process, a data analysis program will be utilized.

### 3.4. Limitation of the Study

Researching ethical issues can present certain challenges and limitations, which were anticipated in this study. Examining ethics among accountants may encounter resistance from those benefiting from unethical practices, making it difficult to obtain the necessary cooperation during the research process. Conducting research on business ethics can also pose challenges as governments and organizations may be reluctant to acknowledge or criticize their own actions. In essence, researchers often face negative reactions from the organizations under scrutiny. While accounting professional bodies and some organizations have ethical codes of conduct in place, individuals may be hesitant to participate in research on ethical issues, creating a risk of receiving unreliable or misleading information.

### 3.5. Ethical Issues

Prior to data collection, participants will be provided with a clear explanation of the study's objectives and asked for their voluntary participation. They will also be informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured as



participants will be assured that their names and the names of their institutions will not be disclosed in the report or any documentation of the data. Additionally, the data will only be accessible to those directly involved in the study and will not be shared with any unauthorized individuals (Collins et al., 2009).

#### 4. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The chapter is structured into subsections, focusing on the composition of respondents and presenting preliminary findings. In this qualitative study, the main objective was to explore effective strategies aimed at mitigating unethical conduct among professional accountants in Tanzania. The research involved conducting interviews with accounting leaders from diverse organizations to gather valuable insights. The findings not only identified successful approaches for promoting ethical decision-making among accounting managers and teams but also revealed a shared belief among participants that these practices should extend beyond the accounting staff and be applicable to all employees within an organization. This study provided comprehensive guidelines to enhance ethical behaviour throughout the entire workforce. The overarching research question driving the study was: Which best practices do you believe had the most positive and lasting to mitigate unethical conduct among professional accountants in Tanzania? To answer this question, ten semi structured were conducted. Utilizing a set of semi structured interview questions that included four questions to collect organization background data: three main themes or processes emerged from the interviews. The three themes that emerged were:

- i. The utilization and effectiveness of internal controls in minimizing opportunities for unethical decision-making;
- ii. Organization's concentrated effort to prioritize ethics through educational initiative; and
- iii. Tone from the top.

##### **4.1. Theme 1: the Utilization and Effectiveness of Internal Controls in Minimizing Opportunities for Unethical Decision-making**

The findings revealed that the implementation and efficacy of internal controls play a crucial role in reducing the chances of unethical decision-making. By having robust internal control systems in place, organizations can establish checks and balances that create a deterrent effect and limit the occurrence of unethical behaviour. These controls encompass various mechanisms such as segregation of duties, regular audits, and monitoring procedures to ensure compliance with ethical standards and prevent misconduct. The insights provided by the participants underscore the significance of effective internal controls as a preventive measure against unethical actions within accounting departments and organizations as a whole.

##### **4.2. Theme 2: Organization's Concentrated Effort to Prioritize Ethics through Educational Initiative**

The interviews highlighted the organization's focused and concentrated efforts in prioritizing ethics through educational initiatives. Participants emphasized the importance of providing comprehensive training and educational programs to enhance ethical awareness and understanding among employees. These initiatives included workshops, seminars, and ongoing training sessions that aimed to promote ethical behaviour, integrity, and professionalism within the organization. The findings underscored the significance of investing resources and efforts into ethics education as a means to cultivate a strong ethical culture and empower individuals to make ethical decisions in their roles. By emphasizing the importance of ethics through educational initiatives, organizations can foster a sense of responsibility and accountability among their employees, ultimately contributing to a more ethical work environment.

##### **4.3. Theme 3: Tone from the Top**

The interviews revealed a significant emphasis on the "tone from the top" within organizations. Participants recognized the crucial role that leadership plays in setting the ethical tone and establishing a culture of integrity throughout the organization. The tone from the top refers to the ethical values, behaviours, and attitudes demonstrated by top-level executives and managers. When leaders prioritize and exemplify ethical conduct, it creates a ripple effect throughout the organization,

influencing employees to adhere to ethical standards in their own decision-making processes. The findings emphasized the importance of leadership commitment and the influence it has on shaping an ethical work environment. By demonstrating and promoting ethical behaviour from the top, organizations can establish a strong foundation for ethical practices and foster a culture of integrity among all employees.

### **5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter serves as a comprehensive overview of the study, encompassing key findings, conclusions, recommendations, limitations, and suggestions for future research. The main objective of the study was to investigate strategies aimed at mitigating unethical behavior among professional accountants in Tanzania.

#### **5.2. Summary of the Study**

This study aimed to investigate strategies aimed at mitigating unethical behavior among professional accountants in Tanzania.

This study focused on exploring strategies to address unethical behavior among professional accountants in Tanzania. Through interviews with accounting leaders from diverse organizations, the study aimed to identify effective approaches for mitigating unethical conduct. The findings highlighted the importance of internal controls in reducing opportunities for unethical decision-making. Additionally, the study emphasized the significance of educational initiatives to prioritize ethics within organizations. Furthermore, the research underscored the influential role of leadership in setting the ethical tone and establishing a culture of integrity. The study provided valuable insights and guidelines for organizations seeking to promote ethical behavior among their accounting professionals in Tanzania.

#### **5.3. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study delved into strategies aimed at mitigating unethical behavior among professional accountants in Tanzania. Through interviews with accounting leaders, valuable insights were gained regarding effective approaches to address this issue. The findings revealed the importance of implementing strong internal controls to minimize opportunities for unethical decision-making. By establishing robust systems and procedures, organizations can create a deterrent effect and uphold ethical standards.

Additionally, the study emphasized the significance of educational initiatives in promoting ethics within organizations. By providing comprehensive training programs and workshops, organizations can enhance ethical awareness and understanding among accountants, fostering a culture of integrity and professionalism. These educational efforts should extend beyond the accounting staff and be applicable to all employees, as participants believed that ethics should be a shared responsibility throughout the organization.

Furthermore, the research highlighted the crucial role of leadership in setting the ethical tone. When leaders prioritize and exemplify ethical behavior, it influences employees to make ethical decisions in their roles. Therefore, organizations should ensure that top-level executives and managers demonstrate a commitment to ethical conduct, creating a positive ripple effect throughout the organization.

Overall, this study offers valuable guidelines for organizations in Tanzania seeking to address and mitigate unethical behavior among professional accountants. By implementing strong internal controls, prioritizing ethics through education, and fostering a strong ethical tone from the top, organizations can create an environment that upholds integrity, professionalism, and ethical decision-making among their accountants and employees at large.

#### **5.4. Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study on strategies aimed at mitigating unethical behavior among professional accountants in Tanzania, the following recommendations can be made:

- i. **Strengthen Internal Controls:** Organizations should invest in robust internal control systems to minimize opportunities for unethical decision-making. This includes implementing mechanisms such as segregation of duties, regular audits, and monitoring procedures. Regular assessments should be conducted to identify any gaps in the internal control framework and address them promptly.
- ii. **Enhance Ethics Education:** Organizations should prioritize ethics education and training initiatives for their accountants and employees. This includes providing comprehensive workshops, seminars, and ongoing training sessions to promote ethical awareness, understanding, and decision-making. Ethical considerations should be incorporated into professional development programs and integrated into the organization's culture.
- iii. **Lead by Example:** Top-level executives and managers should set a strong ethical tone by demonstrating and promoting ethical behavior. They should act as role models for ethical conduct, displaying integrity and professionalism in their own actions. Leaders should communicate the importance of ethics and create a culture that values and rewards ethical behavior.
- iv. **Promote Whistleblowing and Reporting Mechanisms:** Organizations should establish clear and confidential channels for employees to report unethical behavior. Whistleblowing policies should be implemented, ensuring protection for those who report misconduct. Encouraging a culture of accountability and transparency will deter unethical behavior and facilitate prompt action when issues arise.
- v. **Regular Ethical Assessments:** Conduct periodic ethical assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of implemented strategies and identify areas for improvement. This can involve surveying employees' perceptions of the ethical climate, reviewing ethical incidents and responses, and analyzing relevant data to assess the overall ethical health of the organization.

The study on strategies aimed at mitigating unethical behavior among professional accountants in Tanzania yielded several key recommendations. It is crucial for organizations to strengthen their internal controls, establishing mechanisms that minimize opportunities for unethical decision-making. Furthermore, prioritizing ethics education and training initiatives is essential in promoting ethical awareness and understanding among accountants and employees. Additionally, leadership plays a pivotal role in setting an ethical tone, necessitating top-level executives and managers to lead by example and create a culture that values ethics. Implementing reporting mechanisms and encouraging whistleblowing can further enhance ethical accountability within organizations. Finally, conducting regular ethical assessments enables organizations to continually evaluate and improve their strategies for mitigating unethical behavior.

By incorporating these recommendations, organizations in Tanzania can work towards fostering an ethical work environment that upholds integrity, professionalism, and responsible decision-making among their accountants and employees as a whole.

### 5.5. Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of the study was to collect best practices to mitigate the unethical behavior among professional accountants in Tanzania. The population sample was limited to the perspective of ten participants from Tanzania. Though the participants believed their practices are applicable to all types of organizations, the findings in this study remain isolated to that specific population. Future research could take a different population and explore the same research question from the different geographical location to help to broaden the body of knowledge. Further study could entail a deeper look at one theme or best practice. . Effective internal control was the top theme identified. Future research on which specific internal controls influence ethical decision making could provide more specificity to organizations on what controls to maintain, enhance or develop.

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