ETHICS AND ACCOUNTING EDUCATION: A DIVERGENT DISCOURSE

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Abstract - Since the Asian financial crisis in 1997; international community; including thepolicy makers and researchers have raised concerns that accounting practices and standards lack adoption of adequate degree of ethical consideration in many countries. This concern is further augmented with the subsequent global financial crisis in 2007 -2008; together with collapses of large corporate entities. In this context, researchers have called for the need to increase the ethical decision making skills in managers (Canales et al, 2010, Cant, and Kulik, 2010, Nelson et al, 2012). The increased scrutiny from global community and the standards set by the various professional bodies have created pressure on the educators integrating 'ethics' in the accounting curriculum. Nevertheless, there appears a substantive contrast in terms of integration of ethics in curriculum between the developed and developing countries. Despite there is a variation of the delivery pedagogy; developed countries have either teach 'ethics' as stand-alone or integrated it in their accounting curriculum (Thomas (2012). In contrast; the empirical evidence obtained through this research suggests that there are more actions needed to place 'ethics' as a pivotal concept in accounting curriculum in developing countries.

This research has positioned the question of integration of ethics in accounting education from the following standpoints:

- Degree of awareness among accounting educators and policy makers as the importance of integration of ethics in accounting education.
- Views and perception of 'ethics' as a concept and its application in accounting practices.
- Concept of 'public interest' as a critical component of accounting foundation and policy making.
- Professionalism and ethical judgement in accounting practice.

Although at its preliminary stage; this study suggests that there exists a wide range of variation among accounting academics and students with regard to the concept of 'ethics'; as some perceive that 'ethics' is largely value driven; while others see it as a result of institutional enforcement of applicable rules and regulations. As part of empirical investigation, the discussion with a number of accounting academics and policy makers has demonstrated a mixed understanding; while a large majority of accounting academics have recognised the need for focusing more on the public interest issues faced by the accounting profession. There is a widespread belief that teaching 'ethics' in accounting subjects will help accountants to apply 'public interest' ineffectively undertaking their professional activities. It has also been observed that institutional framework governing accounting profession and applicable business regulations play critical role in promoting integration of ethics in accounting education. It appears that there exists a divergent perspectives in understanding the role of ethics and it's integration into accounting curriculum, include, among others, societal norms, peoples' perception, enforcement mechanism in place, and understanding and perception of 'ethics' as a concept at large.

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