

Ethical Guidelines in Descriptive Accounting Research

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The concept of ethical integrity permeates descriptive accounting research, because, although this type of research is observational in its design, it nonetheless holds considerable responsibility because it relies on live financial information. Inaccuracy or prejudice to any degree can lose stakeholder credibility, as well as taint reputations and reputation of the research and the profession. In this chapter, the philosophy-based moral values including professional and philosophical theories of ethics are discussed with reference to the principles of integrity, objectivity, accountability, and confidentiality. It examines the real-life data managing, methodological Openness, and responsible reporting and deals with contemporary technological issues. The moral questions that could appear to researchers during their work find an illustration in a case study, confirming theoretical research and practical moral choice.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethics is the foundation of all plausible and rigorous research. Without ethical integrity, even technically sound studies will lose their legitimacy and will not be able to fulfill their purpose. Even though descriptive accounting research may initially appear to be ethically less complex than experimental, intervention-based or

behavioral research, it has its own ethical concerns (Bernardi and Bean, 2006a). This type of research is aimed at observing, summarizing, and analyzing patterns of real accounting data. Such trends may affect the choice of investors, corporate governance policies, influence regulators, and inform the general discussion of financial issues.

Since descriptive accounting studies tend to work with empirical evidence in terms of financial statements, regulatory reports, or proprietary databases, the stakes are high. The associated high stakes of financial reporting are replicated in the literature on earnings management, which states that manipulations of financial statements can undermine the stakeholder trust and jeopardize any long-term sustainability, even when the manipulations are used to meet short-term objectives. However, omission or even the hint of bias can be misleading to decision-makers, can be damaging to reputations and undermining to collective trust in the work of the researcher and the scientific institution in general. Fowler (2023) notes that the manipulations, even minor in the eyes of the outsiders in financial reports may weaken the confidence and viability, thus when the data remain based on real-world accounting figures, the ethical stakes associated with descriptive research are quite high. The consequences of such ethical slip-ups, intentional or not may thus impact the industry and the policymaking process at a systemic level (Carberry et al., 2018). This ethical ideal, however, is constantly challenged by the intense pressures within the academic environment, such as the competition for funding and the demanding “publish or perish” culture.

The responsibility of ethical awareness proceeds beyond the institution review boards and the academic supervisor as the plan to check and monitor this behind the scenes of the graduate and doctoral learners is the obligation of ethical awareness that lasts. Academic studies are building on one another; thus, a study produces a body of knowledge on which future studies, professional practice and policy recommendations are built. Once such a foundation is weakened through ethical breaches, it can be a hard-said task trying to fix it. The chapter will focus on how the tension between ethical duties and institutional pressures (e.g., career incentives) drives many of the problems discussed.

1.1 Ethical Foundations in Descriptive Accounting Research

According to the International Ethics Standards Board for Accountants (IESBA, 2023), observance of the fundamental principles and fulfilment of the requirements peculiar to the Code help professional accountants ensure that they honor their duty to uphold the best interest of the general population. This claim shows the most important purpose of ethical models in guiding the actions of professionals, including accounting researchers. Ethics incorporates such principles as integrity,

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