# Ethics And Social Responsibility as Performance Indicators of The Accounting Professional in The Ecuadorian Environment

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Abstracts: The work performance of accounting professionals, under traditional paradigms, was measured by their ability to analyze financial statements and determine the economic performance indicators of organizations, however today, in addition to technical aspects, they must possess related competencies. to social responsibility and ethics, in such a way that their work has a positive impact on society by carrying out work with transparency that allows keeping clear accounts. With the objective of evaluating the importance of the qualities social responsibility and ethics in the evaluation of the performance of the accounting professional in the Ecuadorian environment, a systematic review was carried out, through the bibliographic consultation of 200 articles in the database of indexed journals in Scopus, Latindex, Scielo, and Google Scholar, selecting the articles that describe the importance of considering social relevance and respect for ethical standards and values, within the professional actions of Ecuadorian accountants. As a result of the review, 36 articles were selected, which highlight that in Ecuador, despite the existence of a code of ethics for the profession, the paradigm shifts that tend to measure the efficiency of companies due to their relationship with society, respect for environment and transparent management of accounts, in addition to the well-known financial indicators, forces a change in the profile of the Ecuadorian accounting professional and with it the training plans of university institutions, this new vision of the accounting practice leads to the conclusion that an exercise of greater transparency will be observed during the financial analysis of companies, especially those linked to the public sector, which are characterized by high levels of corruption.

Keywords: Ethics, Social Responsibility, Indicators of Performance, Professional, Accountancy, Ecuadorian.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Under traditional management paradigms, the success of organizations was measured by their economic performance, which was quantified through the calculation of financial indicators obtained from balance sheet analysis. These indicators include profitability<sup>1</sup>, liquidity<sup>2</sup>, solvency<sup>3</sup>, and debt capacity<sup>4</sup>, which are competencies inherent to the practice of accounting and are essential for mitigating the effects of economic, social, cultural, and environmental factors on the organization's economic performance. The analysis of control and auditing allows accountants to identify the reasons behind negative performance, if any exist.

However, modern management paradigms have expanded the evaluation of organizational performance beyond economic considerations. Aspects such as social responsibility<sup>5</sup>, environmental sustainability<sup>6</sup>, and adherence to ethical values<sup>7</sup> are now taken into account. The goal is to align the objectives of the organization with the quality of services to meet customer demand, drive societal transformation, and operate with transparency, particularly in the public sector where corruption and lack of financial transparency<sup>8</sup> have contributed to administrative failures.

In this sense, the profile of the public accountant in the Ecuadorian context must change because being a professional implies, in addition to being responsible for reviewing that the financial statements lead to optimal economic performance of the entity's structuring, ensuring that the company complies with its environmental and social obligations, as well as operating with a transparent approach, has been essential.

In this context, the role of accountants in Ecuador must evolve. In addition to ensuring that financial statements contribute to optimal economic performance and that companies fulfill their environmental and social obligations, accountants must also operate with transparency and adhere to ethical and moral standards. The code of ethics, also known as the code of conduct, outlines the proper professional conduct for accountants. Non-compliance with these standards can result in sanctions. Therefore, ethical training and competencies related to social responsibility are crucial in the education of accountants.<sup>9</sup>

In line with the premises mentioned previously, the new role of the public accountant implies that their responsibilities go beyond simply recording accounting, economic, and financial data on a computer to understand the economic situation of a company, but these professionals must fulfill a social function to contribute to the development of the country and act under criteria of transparency, integrity, and social commitment.<sup>10</sup>

The importance of considering ethics and social responsibility in the professional performance of the public accountant is due to the fact that these are terms that define the behavior of individuals in a given environment, and that are essential for the professional's actions to be socially relevant. In this sense, states that the study of ethics as part of the curriculum structure in the training of accountants began to be valued from the year 2000 as a result of the collapse of some flagship corporations in the United States. This forced a revision of the content of the accounting curriculum and, based on this analysis, determined the depth with which these aspects were addressed in the teaching-learning process in order to promote the necessary curriculum changes.<sup>11</sup>

In relation to responsibility, authors such as Rodas-Hidalgo<sup>12</sup> indicate that it should involve actions that produce commitments, obligations, agreements, both legal and ethical, and that compliance should include positive and negative acts in favor of the social conglomerate, as mechanisms for restitution for the negative effects that the actions of the company can cause. This is particularly important for addressing two major problems that affect Ecuadorian society: social inequalities<sup>13</sup> and environmental degradation<sup>14</sup>.

In light of the above, both ethics and social responsibility are two competencies that should be considered in the performance of the accounting professional in Ecuador, as the foundations that govern the actions of workers in their organization<sup>15</sup>, considering the universal values that human beings possess, such as responsibility, honesty, respect, discretion, among others, the application of which is very important in the work environment to improve the image of organizations. In the case of the Ecuadorian public sector, characterized by high levels of corruption<sup>16</sup>, the actions without ethical criteria of the public accountant have been largely responsible for this behavior.

One of the main problems that has led to considering ethics as a competence in the practice of accounting is that according to data provided in the Corruption Perceptions Index 2022, Ecuador is highly vulnerable to these corruption processes<sup>17</sup>. This means, with the aggravating factor that 93% of people consider corruption to be a widespread problem in the country, and 75% of Ecuadorians believe that this government has not fulfilled its campaign plan to eradicate corruption. Political parties are considered the most corrupt in the country, followed by assembly members and judges<sup>18</sup>.

Another problem generated by the absence of ethical criteria and that raises doubts in accountability is the corruption generated by tax evasion, which is estimated to cause losses of approximately 5.5% of GDP in Ecuador, which is related to the fact that accounting processes do not record the true profits generated by large national companies.<sup>19</sup>

Given the value that has been given to the competencies associated with ethics and social responsibility of the public accountant, this research evaluates its importance in the comprehensive performance of the public accountant in the Ecuadorian context, in such a way that, together with the development of the specific competencies of the profession for the timely analysis of financial results, it allows them to act in an integral manner and contribute to organizations working towards the social transformation of Ecuadorian society, and that their performance is carried out within a framework of respect for the values of transparency and honesty.

### 2. MATERIEL AND METHODS

In the process of carrying out this research, the methodology of bibliographic review was used through the technique of documentary exploration. During this review, previous works related to objectives and other relevant aspects were identified.<sup>20,21</sup>The research process was divided into two distinct stages. The first stage, known as the heuristic phase, focused on identifying the necessary sources of information for the development of this work. The second stage, called the hermeneutic phase, focused on the synthesis of the collected information and the generation of comments based on theoretical foundations.<sup>22</sup>

The methodological approach employed in this research allowed for the analysis of publications from various authors and the comparison of topics of interest. The multiple sources that facilitated the collection of bibliographic information are detailed, highlighting their different perspectives and the strategies used in the research and hermeneutic process. Additionally, the similarities and differences identified among different authors who address similar topics in their research are explained.

#### 2.1. Techniques Employed

The process of bibliographic search and retrieval was carried out thoroughly and professionally. Once the relevant publications were located, each section of these publications was carefully analyzed to identify key themes. This allowed for categorizing the impact in order to provide a direct and in-depth evaluation of each publication. Subsequently, the most relevant information was extracted from each source and appropriate comparisons were made.

#### 2.1.1. Exclusion Criteria

During the source selection process, rigorous exclusion criteria were applied. Publications that deviated from the content of this study or lacked logical coherence were discarded. Additionally, publications lacking a solid scientific foundation and those derived from non-research-related products were excluded. Abstracts, conference presentations, and theses were also omitted, focusing on sources that met the criteria of relevance and scientific rigor necessary for the study.

### 2.1.2. Inclusion Criteria

The works that included text referring to the title of the work under review were taken into consideration. These publications not only met the established requirements for the study but also fit within the specified time period. In the process of searching for information, relevant terminology was taken into account, limiting the search to expected results and previous works related to the importance of social responsibility and ethics in the performance of public accounting professionals in Ecuador. These articles were analyzed in digital journals that were part of databases such as Google Scholar, Latindex, and Scielo. Articles published between 2018 and 2023 that addressed the importance of ethics and social responsibility as performance indicators for accounting professionals in the Ecuadorian context were considered.

### 3. RESULTS

According to the documentary review conducted, a total of 36 articles were identified and selected, as illustrated in Figure 1. These articles address the importance of social responsibility and ethics in the work of public accounting professionals in Ecuador during the period from 2018 to 2023. These works were categorized into six different categories, which are analyzed below.



Figure 1. Categories addressed to analyze the importance of ethics and social responsibility as performance indicators of accounting professionals in the Ecuadorian context.

The first 6 articles are referred to the importance of social responsibility in the performance of accounting professionals in the Ecuadorian context, which are summarized in table 1 and their main findings are described later.

Titulo	Año	Autores	Base de datos
Relationship between Corporate Social	2019	Gordon y Torres	Google Scholar
Responsibility and Financial Performance in			
Ecuadorian Companies with Sustainability			
Reports from the Period 2014 to 2018.			
Professional profile of the public accountant.	2019	Elizalde	Latindex
Professional profile of the public accountant	2020	De Pelekais et al.	Scielo
from their professional training context.			
Corporate Social Responsibility in Business	2020	Changuan et al.	Google Scholar
Profitability.			
Application of corporate social responsibility	2020	Morales et al.	Google Scholar
in Ecuadorian companies in the last decade.			
The theoretical approach of university social	2022	Villareal et al.	Scielo
responsibility (USR) in public accounting			
programs.			

When examining the connection between corporate social responsibility and financial performance in Ecuadorian companies that have issued sustainability reports from 2014 to 2018, Gordon and Torres<sup>23</sup> concluded that this initiative was not conceived with the intention of generating profits for the companies. Rather, it is a management approach designed to improve the quality of life for people through the implementation of socially responsible policies. The benefits of this approach extend to all stakeholders within an organization, who can leverage these policies to establish sustainable governance and strengthen their relationships with private 1761

companies by developing projects with a social, economic, and environmental focus.

Considering the importance of social responsibility, Elizalde<sup>24</sup> states that it should be part of the professional profile of the public accountant and should be focused on considering that the social value of a profession is based on the combination of essential theoretical foundations of the discipline with the application of specific technical tools, which allow for providing solutions to social needs.

Following this same line of thought, De Pelekais and Farfán<sup>25</sup> affirm that, within the professional profile of the public accountant, the training of a public accountant must be rooted in values and principles that ensure responsibility in their actions. Consequently, a public accountant is required to be capable of influencing reality from their professional field, in order to align their actions with the demands and requirements of society.

The social responsibility according to Changuan<sup>26</sup> in the corporate realm is key, as it positively impacts business profitability. Therefore, these authors conclude that social responsibility is a fundamental concept for sustainability, and it is necessary for managers to understand the importance of training accounting professionals.

Given the importance of social responsibility, Morales<sup>27</sup>, when analyzing its application in the last decade, companies in Ecuador have chosen to incorporate it into their operations of product and service delivery. This has allowed them to stand out as attractive organizations for the community, not only due to the excellence of their products, but also thanks to their friendly approach and commitment to the local communities in which they operate.

Considering all the benefits that can be derived from the application of social responsibility in the business environment, Villareal<sup>28</sup> consider it essential that the training of future Public Accountants includes the development of these competencies, which encompass practices to improve communication with the institutional and business environment. In this way, the graduate's profile will be aligned with the demands of the contemporary world and will allow them to play a fundamental role as drivers of social change and advocates for the environment.

The following set of 6 articles focuses on highlighting the relevance of ethics in the work of professional accountants in Ecuador. These studies are summarized in Table 2, and below, descriptions of their main findings will be provided.

Titulo	Año	Autores	Base de datos
Training in ethics for the professional of	2019	Castro	Google Scholar
public accounting			
Ethical performance in the professional	2019	Luna	Latindex
practice of the accountant and the			
application of corporate social			
responsibility			
Ethical training from the university	2020	Castillo et al.	Google Scholar
institution. A proposal for the student of			
the Bachelor's degree in accounting and			
finance.			
Virtue ethics versus normative	2020	Benavides	Google Scholar
insufficiency in accounting practice			
Essay on the importance of ethics in the	2021	Gamboa	Google Scholar
work of the public accountant in times of			
pandemic			
Ethics in accounting practice. Its influence	2022	Rodas y Villamar	Scielo
on good management			

Table 2. Ethics and performance of the accounting professional in the Ecuadorian context.

Castro<sup>29</sup>, in studying the importance of ethics training for the professional accountant, points out that if this training is achieved through the participation of higher education institutions, it would be possible to form individuals of integrity who would serve society. These citizens would be imbued with values that not only protect national and business assets, but also contribute to the development of the country and society as a whole. To achieve this, it is necessary to have individuals who are less tolerant of corruption, fraud, and deceit, which would lead us to build a more just and equitable community for all.

The training of professionals in ethical values is important, as authors like Luna<sup>30</sup> consider ethical behavior to be an essential pillar in professional practice, and therefore, accountants must align themselves with this moral principle. In this sense, in the professional training of accountants, ethics should be the main consideration, given that companies tend to favor professionals who contribute more significantly to the organization's utility and to a better positioning and image in society.

In this regard, Castillo<sup>31</sup> consider ethical instruction to be an essential and indispensable element in the education of accounting students. Therefore, educational institutions must adopt strategies that promote the improvement of knowledge and the application of professional ethics in future generations of accountants, and that integrate with the technical aspects inherent to the practice of accounting.

Despite the importance of ethical training and the existence of codes and standards for the proper practice of accounting, Benavides<sup>32</sup> argues that ethics in the professional practice of public accountants has experienced a significant deterioration due to a lack of values in their professional performance, creating distrust to the detriment of the profession's image in society, especially in the field of public administration, where corruption continues to be one of the main problems in state-owned companies.

The poor perception of the application of ethical criteria in the practice of accounting leads Gamboa<sup>33</sup> to affirm that legal, moral, and ethical responsibilities alone are not enough, as they must stem from the willingness to adhere to them. To achieve this, it is essential to assume roles with responsibilities based on interest and a deep professional conviction. This leads to gaining respect and recognition from society.

Based on all the previous arguments, Rodas conclude that for effective management, it is necessary to have an accounting team with high ethical standards. This enables the making of optimal decisions that benefit not only the organization but also society and the country as a whole. Therefore, this is a key quality when evaluating the performance of accounting professionals.

The third set of 6 articles focuses on highlighting the relevance of transparent management in the work of accounting professionals in Ecuador. These studies are summarized in Table 3, and below, descriptions of their main findings are provided.

Titulo	Año	Autores	Base de datos
Accounting impact of the application of NICSP 17 in the National Councils of Rural Parish Governments in Ecuador: Case of CONAGOPARE Loja	2019	Astudillo et al.	Latindex
Harmonization of public financial information (NICSP) in the Autonomous Decentralized Governments of Ecuador	2020	González et al.	Google Scholar
Buenas prácticas empresariales en Ecuador.	2022	Ramírez	Latindex
Quantitative approach to performance factors of local governments that influence the level of trust of citizens in the urban area of Cuenca canton in	2022	Tapia y Alarcón	Google Scholar

Table 3. Transparency as an indicator of performance for accounting professionals in the Ecuadorian context

Ecuador			
Determining factors of sustainability in a sugarcane	2022	Reyes et al.	Scielo
company in Ecuador			
Transparent accounting: implementation of NICSP	2023	Morocho y Torres	Latindex
17 and harmonization in the Orianga Parish GAD.			

Astudillo<sup>34</sup>, when evaluating the accounting impact of the application of NICSP 17 in the National Councils of Rural Parish Governments in Loja, Ecuador, affirm that, as has happened in other countries in the region, over the last decade, several countries have implemented reforms to improve financial management in the public sector, mainly in the areas of budget management and fiscal policy. As a result, the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) have become accounting standards.

In this same line of thought, González<sup>35</sup> found that by harmonizing public financial information (NICSP) in the Autonomous Decentralized Governments of Ecuador, it is possible to carry out good business ethical practices that align with the organizations' goals. These organizations explicitly state in their mission the values of honor, reputation, and transparency as part of their corporate responsibility, thereby enhancing their image within society.

Considering the success of ethical standards application in the practice of accounting, Ramirez<sup>36</sup> asserts that values represent the essential foundation of organizational culture, as ethical beliefs constitute an integral part of this culture. This provides companies with a compass to guide their actions, preventing long-term deviation from their goals and promoting a higher degree of credibility. For these reasons, the majority of organizations believe that the proper application of ethics supports the creation of a conducive work environment for the growth of both individuals and the company.

The findings of Tapia and Alarcón<sup>37</sup> allow us to emphasize and substantiate the importance of ethics, as it has a positive impact on various aspects, such as the trust citizens place in their local governments, the quality of public services, the integrity of public officials, the fairness in the distribution of taxpayer resources, access to municipal information, and citizen participation.

Considering the results, Reyes<sup>38</sup> believe that the performance of the functions of a public accountant should demonstrate a comprehensive management approach that encompasses economic, environmental, and social aspects in harmony with the institutional governance structure. In this way, their professional practice should not be limited to financial and technical analysis but should be committed to societal development and the fulfillment of the quality standards demanded by citizens.

Given the success highlighted by the application and harmonization of NICSP standards, Morocho and Torres<sup>39</sup> point out that the implementation of these measures should be focused on the financial department, as it is the most suitable area for transparently managing assets. This, in turn, will contribute to a more accurate reflection of the organization's financial situation, resulting in more informed decisions by the authorities.

The fourth group of 6 articles is related to the importance of effective accountability in the performance of accounting professionals in the Ecuadorian context, which is summarized in Table 4, and their key findings are described later.

Titulo	Año	Autores	Base de datos
In the face of corruption: transparency, accountability, and	2019	Navarro	Google Scholar
participative democratic institutions.			
The relationship between social responsibility and	2020	Arias	Scielo
accountability, from the perspective of entrepreneurs in the			
province of Imbabura, Ecuador.			

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Historical and legal analysis of external control of public	2020	Pérez	Latindex
administration in Mexico, Colombia, and Ecuador.			
Governmental accounting as a management tool for non-	2020	Saeteros-Molina	Google Scholar
financial public institutions.		et al.	
Analysis of Public Sector Accounting Techniques for Public	2021	Moreno-Salazar	Google Scholar
Management Evaluation and Monitoring.		et al.	
State modernization in public administration: A systematic	2022	Ghiggo et al.	Scielo
review.			

Accountability is key in the practice of accounting. In this regard, Navarro<sup>40</sup> considers that transparency and accountability could be integrated into the actions of participating institutions to ensure that their actions yield legitimate results. This goes beyond the organization's planning and should permeate the conduct of those responsible for the actions, in this case, public accountants, aiming to address the levels of corruption observed in public organizations.

Arias<sup>41</sup> points out that accountability is a part of social responsibility, which is assumed as a voluntary commitment by companies to ensure sustainable economic, social, and environmental growth. To achieve this, it is necessary to determine the responsibility of business owners in terms of accountability, as well as that of citizens, particularly regarding publicly-owned companies whose image or reputation is questioned by society.

Given the importance of accountability, Pérez<sup>42</sup> highlights the efforts of various social and political groups to build efficient and effective control mechanisms to combat corruption. These efforts have been ongoing but not successful, as this phenomenon is more complex due to being a multifactorial issue with a multitude of elements involved, including social, political, economic, psychological factors. The practice of accounting, while a key element, is just one aspect that can influence this problem.

Despite the poor image of public enterprise management, Saeteros-Molina<sup>43</sup> assert that in recent years, the country has witnessed the implementation of a new management system that encompasses the provision of quality services by public entities. This effective management is grounded in two essential principles: transparency and accountability, which have been adopted since the promulgation of the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador in 2008. The application of these principles has allowed for an improved perception of citizens towards some public management companies.

In order to achieve proper accountability, Moreno<sup>44</sup> assert that accounting emerges as a crucial tool to provide continuous, organized, and predictive information, both for citizens and the government. Therefore, the government should have up-to-date and robust oversight bodies focused on their specific responsibilities. This entails not only safeguarding their own capital but also considering how public sector activities impact society and the environment. For this, comprehensive accountability should be considered, not solely focusing on the monetary aspect.

Efforts towards transparent accountability, according to Ghiggo<sup>45</sup>, are driven by the need for increased transparency and accountability in response to widespread corruption. This is where digital tools play a fundamental role in implementing adaptation processes, which not only involve transparency in accountability but also the modernization of public administration to enhance the services they provide to citizens, which are currently inefficient.

The fifth set of 6 articles focuses on the importance of ethics and social responsibility, as well as their relationship with the perception of service quality in the professional performance of accountants. These studies are summarized in Table 5, and descriptions of their key findings in various economic areas will be provided below.

The Principle of Quality: Its challenges from administrative

Titulo	Año	Autores	Base de datos
Evaluation of pharmaceutical care service in four private	2019	Rincón et	Latindex
pharmacies in Riobamba, Ecuador.		al.	
Social responsibility and community tourism in the province	2019	Sarabia et	Google Scholar
of Santa Elena.		al.	
Social Responsibility Model for the elite automotive sector	2020	Reino et al.	Latindex
company in the city of Cuenca, Ecuador.			
Service quality as a key element of social responsibility in	2020	Rojas-	Scielo
small and medium-sized enterprises.		Martínez et	
		al.	
Improvement of public services in strengthening municipal	2020	Gaviria y	Google Scholar

 Table 5. Ethics and Social Responsibility and Their Relationship with the Perception of Service Quality in the

 Work Performance of Accounting Professionals in the Ecuadorian Context.

Rincón<sup>46</sup>, when evaluating the quality of pharmaceutical care service in four private pharmacies in Riobamba, Ecuador, identified shortcomings due to the lack of compliance in terms of pharmaceutical care, which constitutes a significant barrier to achieving an essential means of improving the quality of life for this population. This deficiency is related to social responsibility and ethical aspects of pharmaceutical services. Despite achieving optimal financial performance, the overall performance is rated as negative.

2021

Delgado

Latindex

Barba-

Tamavo

Sarabia<sup>47</sup>, when analyzing the relationship between social responsibility and community tourism in the province of Santa Elena, found that the results indicate that tourist practices are dominated by accumulated experience, political organization, and emerging best practices, which represent, among other things, the application of the principle of social responsibility that is part of the sustainable development model.

While Reino<sup>48</sup> assessed the social responsibility model for the elite automotive sector company in the city of Cuenca, Ecuador, they demonstrated that this approach to social responsibility towards consumers establishes commitment standards from employees to society. This will contribute to adding value to the organization due to the emphasis on quality service, which will result in enhanced corporate image credibility and consumer trust. This encompasses aspects such as the quality of spare parts, transparency in information, and delivery times.

Similarly, Rojas-Martínez<sup>49</sup> demonstrated that service quality plays a pivotal role in the social responsibility of small and medium-sized enterprises, and it is based on ethics, public image, environmental improvement, and resource availability. It is emphasized that, for any company, it is crucial to promote a high level of customer service quality.

In this regard, to enhance service quality, especially in public administration, Gaviria and Delgado<sup>50</sup> conclude that changes in public administration should always be oriented towards the citizen, with the aim of achieving satisfaction and high-quality outcomes. This should consider customer typologies, characteristics, and geographic conditions, which align with the principles of social responsibility declared in the mission of Ecuadorian public administration.

Therefore, Barba-Tamayo<sup>51</sup> asserts that control, evaluation, and quality advisory systems play a pivotal role in the evolution of public management. Although a significant portion of administrative theory originated in the private sector, it has been adopted by public administration, adapting its beneficial advances to enhance the provision of public services in line with the changes demanded by society.

Finally, the last set of 6 articles pertains to the legal framework governing the ethical behavior of accounting

management.

law in Ecuador.

professionals in the field. These articles are summarized in Table 6, and their key findings will be described later.

Titulo	Año	Autores	Base de datos
Governmental accounting and international	2019	Reinoso et al.	Google Scholar
accounting standards for the Ecuadorian public sector.			-
Comparison of municipal internal and external control	2020	Ponce et al.	Latindex
regulations between Ecuador and Argentina.			
Innovations in governmental accounting in Ecuador.	2020	Mariscal-León	Google Scholar
		et al.	
Ethical dilemmas in Latin America.	2020	Álvarez et al.	Google Scholar
Social responsibility and ethical practices of the public	2020	Camargo et al.	Google Scholar
accountant as a competitive advantage for the			
company.			
Legal accounting: A control strategy for detecting the	2022	González et al.	Scielo
preparation of false financial statements in public			
entities.			

## Table 6. Legal Framework Governing the Ethical Behavior of Accounting Professionals in the Ecuadorian Context.

First, Reinoso<sup>52</sup> highlights that the adaptation of public accounting in Ecuador to the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) aims to drive a significant change in public financial management. This implementation will have an impact on the accounting standards and principles that govern the entire financial subsystem of public entities, aligning them with IPSAS to enhance the quality and consistency of financial information in the public sector. The positive impact of implementing these standards is observed in the results of the investigated municipalities. However, there are deficiencies in following the access guidelines for the implementation of these standards, as problems that could delay the implementation were identified.

The regulations governing the practice of public accounting are governed by both internal and external controls, and they are applied similarly in different countries, as indicated by Ponce<sup>53</sup>. Based on the results obtained in their study of accounting standards in Ecuador and Argentina, they assert that in both countries, the activities and procedures related to internal control are defined in mandatory legal frameworks through internal regulations, rules, instructions, and regulations. Non-compliance with these regulations may lead to administrative, civil, and criminal liabilities.

Concerned about the high levels of corruption in the practice of public accounting, Mariscal<sup>54</sup> point out that the Ecuadorian government has developed its own accounting standards in the past, similar to other countries. However, over time, these standards were not updated in accordance with the original standards they were based on. For this reason, the government decided to revoke the national accounting standards and chose to adopt the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) as an effort to align public accounting in Ecuador with international standards and improve the transparency and consistency of financial information. These standards have been successfully applied in specific cases at the local level, as demonstrated during this research.

The adaptation of accounting standards responds to a common issue at all levels of Ecuadorian public management, as highlighted by Álvarez<sup>55</sup>. In the case studies analyzed by these authors, there is a consistency in the occurrence of significant economic losses due to deficient accounting and financial practices, often leading to cases of corruption. It is important to emphasize that the effects of these economic losses are uniform in terms of their impact on society, and it is Latin American citizens who bear the consequences. The application of codes and standards should guide public accountants to act ethically, maintaining their good name, honor, dignity, and professional competence.

In addition to the application of accounting standards and a code of ethics, Camargo<sup>56</sup> emphasize that the

social responsibility and ethical practices of the public accountant are competitive advantages for the company. Improved profitability results from the application of ethical codes and compliance with regulatory regulations, which are essential for establishing trust both within and outside the company. This is achieved by demonstrating accountability and transparent management, which is crucial to ensure the quality of accounting information and provide assurances about its integrity that the professional offers in this discipline.

Based on this, González<sup>57</sup> assert that during resource management, the State has the responsibility and duty to adhere to the principles of transparency and honesty, with the purpose of serving the interests of the entire population in an honest manner. This control is properly exercised through legal tools such as the Political Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, the Organic Integral Penal Code, the Law for the Prevention of Money Laundering, the Organic Law on Public Finance and Administration, and the Organic Law of the General State Comptroller. These legal instruments can detect possible false balances through audits, which demonstrate the anomalous performance of the accounting professional.

#### 4. DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of the results found aligns with what other authors, such as Curvelo<sup>58</sup>, have pointed out regarding the importance of ethics and social responsibility in the performance of accounting professionals in the Ecuadorian context. Ethics is considered to require not only the adherence to moral codes but also the construction of an educational perspective that reinforces the study of values, instilling in students criteria of relevance, respect for rules and laws, and, most importantly, the development of ethical principles that will safeguard public resources for the benefit of the community in the future.

Gantiva and Roque<sup>59</sup> agree with the findings of the review and mention that there should be a balance between social responsibility and transparency in accounting practice. The lack of transparency in financial reporting is the primary external risk factor that compromises the ethical integrity of accounting professionals. This lack of transparency is perceived by users of accounting services and jeopardizes the fiduciary function. As for internal risk factors, they are related to moral principles that affect the credibility of the accounting organization. In its social function, the accounting profession seeks to ensure the economic and social balance of the country, and the lack of transparency jeopardizes the economic interests of society and generates ethical conflicts.

For the proper performance of the functions of the public accountant, it is important to understand the processes that underlie their operation, and especially the controls, technical standards, and ethics that govern their application as a guarantee of transparency and social responsibility in the use of public or private resources. These actions are very relevant because in Ecuador, there have been cases of corruption in both the public and private sectors, resulting in significant financial losses for the country and contributing to tax evasion<sup>60</sup>, which is another mechanism used to undermine state revenues. In this regard, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL) in its 2022 report states that corruption represents approximately 7 billion dollars each year, money that could well be used for investment in citizen security, public infrastructure, or the improvement of education and healthcare services.

Despite the importance of ethics and social responsibility and their influence on the accounting profession, serious weaknesses are found in the application of the code of ethics and accounting standards in Ecuador. Corruption stands out as one of the main problems affecting Ecuadorian society<sup>61</sup>. This necessitates raising awareness about the importance of ethical and values-based education as an essential part of the professional profile of Ecuadorian public accountants.

Therefore, in response to the need to leverage the public function of the accountant on the basis of their ethical responsibility to society<sup>62</sup>, they believe that ethical behavior often has an objective dimension based on reason, where the rational foundation of this behavior is related to the "duty" or what is morally right from a logical and ethical standpoint. However, it is also important to consider the subjective aspect, which involves intentions, personal values, and individual consciousness. Ethics is not limited to fulfilling objective duties alone but also involves a personal understanding and adherence to ethical principles and values, contributing to a complete and 1768

genuine ethical behavior. It serves as a motivator of will through feelings, which should accompany the change in the professional profile mentioned in this research, as the aim is to change the accountant's behavior based on ethical principles that guide their actions.

The research results demonstrate that the role of the accounting professional is crucial for improving the quality of life for the population, as long as they act based on ethical principles. This should encompass not only the legal aspects but also the social commitment they have to society. Transparency in financial reporting becomes a driver for greater efficiency in corporate management and the improved delivery and quality of public services offered to the Ecuadorian society. Additionally, it contributes to enhancing the image and vision of Ecuadorian business organizations, making them more competitive.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Management of businesses in Ecuador was primarily focused on achieving optimal financial performance indicators such as profitability, liquidity, and solvency. This approach led to a disconnect between business management and the environment, forgetting the obligation of businesses to meet the needs of their customers and, most importantly, to have a positive impact on society. Meeting the mandates of social and environmental responsibility was often overlooked, and this management lacked ethical criteria that would enable transparent financial reporting, particularly in companies linked to the public sector.

As a result of shifting paradigms towards efficient management, valued not only through the analysis of financial statements but within the framework of corporate social responsibility and transparent performance in the work of public accountants, their actions should be evaluated accordingly. Therefore, their performance should be measured not only by their technical capabilities for preparing financial statements but also by their ability to work with ethics, transparency, and integrity, committed to the transformation of society.

Recognizing these changes, international financial standards and a code of ethics have been promoted to regulate the performance of accountants in their professional sphere, aiming to make their work more efficient. This underscores the need for commitment from educational institutions responsible for training accounting professionals. According to the profile described in this research, they should consider ethics and social responsibility as generic, cross-cutting competencies in the education of Ecuadorian public accountants.

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