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## Crisis of national ethical models – implications on learning business ethics in Romanian universities

Radu Florin Ogarcă<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, University of Craiova, 13 A. I. Cuza Street, Craiova, 200585, România

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### Abstract

According to the Corruption Perceptions Index, computed by Transparency International for 2011, Romania is on the 75-th place from 183 analyzed countries, with a score of 3.6 from 10 (in European Union, it is on the 25-th place from 27 states, being surpassed by Bulgaria and Greece). On the same basis, Global Corruption Barometer offers other worrying data for 2010: business environment/ private sector is perceived as a corrupt one (a score of 3.6 from 5); only 2% of the respondents trust the business environment/ private sector. In these conditions, present cannot offer many ethical models, especially from business. Worse, neither tradition seems more generous, two examples being relevant in supporting this assertion: in Romania, outlaw (in fact, a form of theft) was excessively overrated as a myth; in popular culture, there can be found elements being expression of some collective character flaws (see the Romanian proverb „Uncaught thief honest merchant.”). On this background, the following questions arise: How can we teach business ethics to students living in such a society? How can we convince students of the relevance/ utility of business ethics issues, when around them, things happen totally different? Trying to answer these questions, present article aims to investigate how anti-models can be used to build, over time, some valid models..

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### 1. Background

In Romania business men (business, in general) are regarded with reserve, if we gently express, respectively there is the quasi-generalized opinion that they accumulated their wealth in occult ways, beyond the limits of the morality and even of the law.

In order to not remain at the level of some simple considerations, we insert the synthetic results of several statistical studies related to this issue.

Thus, a sociologic study developed during the year 2012 (Dâncu, 2012) shows that 61% of the respondents have a bad opinion about rich people. In the same time, the respondents identify the following factors that generate the richness: 62% breaking the law, 15% relationships, 8% the luck and only 10% among them consider that work and personal merit are behind the accumulation of fortunes.

Another statistical study that was very recently realized, (in August 2012), on a sample of 1000 persons (exclusively from the urban environment), reveals similar aspects, worrying in the same measure: 65% of the

Corresponding Author: Rodu Florin Ogarca Tel: 37745747  
E-mail: [raduogarca@gmail.com](mailto:raduogarca@gmail.com)

respondents consider that the entrepreneurs are getting rich at the expense of the employees (74% of the persons with elementary education and only 53% of those with higher education); 56% of the respondents consider that in Romania only those who are stealing are getting rich (satisfying, if one may say so, that only 51% of the respondents aged between 18 and 34 years and 41% of the respondents with higher education). On the basis of these synthetic results, Anghel Enescu, the president of the Association Triple Helix, one of the program partners “Champions in business”, having as declared purpose the identification of some true performer entrepreneurs, commented: “This difference of perception is explained by the lack of models from the public visor, coming forward only those who speak well and those who work are away, they work, are with the sleeves rolled up”.

To change these social representations, it shall correctly identify the causes. In the previously mentioned statistic study is formulated the observation that in Romania we are dealing with a Christian culture, where is well-known the biblical commandment: "It is easier to pass a camel through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven".

This is an important point to start in the understanding of the causes that determine the aversion (at least to the declarative level) face to rich people, respectively the bad image of business men.

In the same study it is shown that, beyond the religious influences, the negative perception is determined by the self-perception of a lower status, explained with predilection by individuals through exogenous factors (destiny, generalized corruption).

We do not think that these are the only causes. Somewhat on the same coordinates with the aforementioned first cause, we can speak (it is true that the subject is a delicate one which does not need a more ample debate), at least as working hypothesis, about the deficiencies of collective character found in the Romanian society (in support of this hypothesis can be brought the elements of popular culture: the excessive mythicization of the phenomenon of Outlawry, in fact a form of theft, the existence of Romanian proverbs like "uncaught thief, an honest merchant") (Bălașa, 2007; Georgescu, 2010; Ogarcă, 2012).

Another cause could be the communist propaganda against the private initiative, very active for 40 years. Somewhat correlated with this, another possible explanation for the popular adversity face to entrepreneurs, could be related to the controversial biography of the initiators of the first private business after the revolution of 1989 (as startups or questionable privatization of former state enterprises) that, in large part were more or less connected with the old system (a rigorous analyze of the phenomenon realized by Stoica, 2004; a fresco of it is shown in the documentary film "Kapitalism: Our Improved Formula", of the Romanian stage director Alexandru Solomon, also known in the European space, being broadcasted, in the year 2009, by the channel Arte).

Finally, a last cause could be the high level of corruption in Romania in the last years. Romania is situated, according to the Corruption Perceptions Index calculated by the Transparency International for the year 2011, on the 75 place of 183 analyzed states, with a score of 3,6 of 10 (in the European Union occupies the 25 place of 27 states, being passed only by Bulgaria and Greece). On the same coordinates the Global Barometer of the Corruption for the year 2010 supplies other worrying information: the business environment/ the private sector is perceived as a corrupt one (a score of 3,5 of 5); only 2% of the respondents have confidence in the business environment/ the private sector.

Gabriel Liiceanu, a known philosopher in the current period, joins in an interesting and metaphorical way the last two elements: “The Communist regime in the Ceausescu version is today - hallucinating situation at first sight – regretted just on the background of the new corruption generated and redoubled by the offspring which were let alive and which came in cohort from the belly of the killed monster. Their recycling in two precise directions – business men and politicians – compromised in the same time the businesses and the politics and let a double false impression: a) either the business itself lead to the impoverishment of the majority and that the politics is a dirty thing; b) or that theft, thrive and corruption have ethno-metaphysical substance and, in Romanian, they are inevitable.” (Liiceanu, 2006, p. 70)

To keep our objectivity and do not come into a fatalistic note, should be noted that many of the phenomena mentioned above are not specific to Romania, they being encountered in all former communist countries in the temporal horizon of the transition.

Romanian students grew and educated in this environment, could not be influenced by these social representations. Under these conditions the study of business ethics in universities can be easily seen as futile,

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