

# **ETHICS, CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR THE MODERN ACCOUNTANT IN THE DIGITALIZATION AND ESG ERA**

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## **Abstract**

The paper provides a synthesis of recent literature on the accounting profession, bringing together ideas from the field of professional ethics, corporate governance and professional responsibility. It shows how digitalization and sustainability requirements are reshaping both the work and the professional identity of contemporary accountants. The paper aims to propose a conceptual model that goes beyond fragmented descriptions of the accountant's current role. Methodologically, we carefully reviewed the literature, extracting recurring concepts and grouping them inductively into three dimensions: normative (standards, codes of ethics and regulations), functional (assurance activities, internal control, consultancy, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) reporting, and the responsible use of artificial intelligence) and identity-related (values, professional identity, and the social role of accounting work). The results show how compliance pressures, technology and societal expectations are transforming the profession from task-oriented execution to a pronounced advisory role. The paper also explains how governance mechanisms rely on accounting to enhance transparency and to support sustainability objectives, for example under the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), where accountants coordinate the collection and validation of ESG indicators across internal and external processes. The contribution of the paper lies in the creation of a conceptual model and in its implications for education, standard setting, and organizational design.

## **Keywords**

professional ethics, corporate governance; professional responsibility, professional identity, digitalization and AI in accounting, sustainability/ESG reporting

## **JEL Classification**

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**Introduction**

The accounting profession is being reshaped by the combined pressures of digitalization (AI, automation and data-driven reporting), expanding sustainability and ESG requirements, and increasingly complex regulatory and governance expectations. As a result, accountants are moving beyond traditional financial processing toward roles that emphasize professional judgment, transparency, and advisory support for decision-making (Kokina et al., 2020; Yigitbasioglu et al., 2022). In this evolving context, three interdependent dimensions become central to understanding the modern accountant's profile: professional ethics as a normative compass for trustworthy conduct, corporate governance as the organizational architecture for accountability and control, and professional responsibility as the practical commitment to the public interest, compliance, and sustainability outcomes (Walker, 2016; Schaltegger & Zvezdov, 2015; Johri et al., 2024). As noted by Hopwood (2007), academic accounting research has evolved in ways that sometimes reduce its relevance to practice, underscoring the need for more integrative and socially grounded research approaches.

This paper integrates these dimensions into a conceptual model that clarifies how the accountant's identity and functions are being redefined under digital and ESG-era pressures.

Existing studies have examined these transformations from partial perspectives, focusing either on technological change and skills (Kokina et al., 2020; Yigitbasioglu et al., 2022), on professional ethics in isolation (Romero-Carazas et al., 2024; Walker, 2016), or on governance and sustainability reporting frameworks (Schaltegger & Zvezdov, 2015; Krasodomska et al., 2024). However, the literature lacks an integrated conceptual framework that simultaneously connects professional ethics, corporate governance and professional responsibility under the combined pressures of digitalization and ESG regulation. This paper addresses this gap by proposing a unified model that captures these interdependencies.

The purpose of this article is to conduct a conceptual analysis of the correlation between professional ethics, corporate governance and professional responsibility, by integrating theoretical and empirical perspectives from the contemporary international literature. The paper highlights the way these three dimensions contribute to redefining the role of the accountant in the digital and sustainable era, shaping a modern profession, focused on added value, trust and transparency.

**Research objectives.** Given the profound reconfiguration of the accounting profession under the impact of digitalization, international regulations (Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive – CSRD, International Financial Reporting Standards – IFRS), as well as increasing demands on ethics and sustainability (Krasodomska et al., 2024; Johri et al., 2024), this paper aims to develop an integrative conceptual framework that reflects the multiple transformations of the role of the modern accountant. The main research objectives are:

- To identify and classify recurring themes in the relevant contemporary literature on professional ethics, corporate governance and professional responsibility, through a structured thematic analysis (Romero-Carazas et al., 2024; Jackson et al., 2022; Hossain et al., 2024);

- To explore the interaction between these dimensions and systemic external factors – technology (AI, Robotic Process Automation (RPA), blockchain), sustainability, regulations, globalization and workforce dynamics (Eisikovits et al., 2024; Zhao & Wang, 2023; Schaltegger & Zvezdov, 2015);
- To propose a conceptual model of the modern accountant – as an ethical, strategic and responsible actor – that integrates normative values with the functional and identity-related demands of the profession (Walker, 2016; Kokina et al., 2020);
- To analyze the theoretical, educational and organizational implications of this model for the development of accounting skills, sustainable corporate governance and ESG reporting (Hadid & Al-Sayed, 2021; Imjai et al., 2024; Yigitbasioglu et al., 2022).

The paper thus contributes to enriching the literature by providing an original integrative framework, with applicability both in academic reflection and in professional practice, but also in the training of future accountants.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative, conceptual research design based on a structured thematic analysis of contemporary academic and professional literature. The paper is organized as follows: Section 1 reviews the main drivers of change shaping the accounting profession; Section 2 explains the research methodology and analytical framework; Section 3 presents and discusses the proposed conceptual model and its implications; the final section presents conclusions, limitations and directions for future research.

## **1. Review of the scientific literature**

The transformation of the accountant's role is the result of a combination of factors that are redefining both the expectations regarding the profession and the necessary skills. Recent literature highlights seven main directions of influence, which are discussed below, as analytical categories rather than exhaustive or mutually exclusive determinants.

### **1.1. Technological changes**

Disruptive technologies such as AI, blockchain, big data and RPA are profoundly transforming the work of accountants. Eisikovits et al. (2024) warn against the risks related to ethics and errors in the use of AI, but also highlight the opportunities for efficiency. Kokina et al. (2020) describe the emergence of the accountant as a “digital innovator”, capable of interpreting and integrating complex data, not just recording it. Garanina et al. (2021) analyze the impact of blockchain on traceability and transparency, and Hossain et al. (2024) emphasize the combination of AI and blockchain as a driver of accounting reform. Zhao and Wang (2023) discuss the use of ChatGPT-type tools in reporting, warning about the loss of professional control if they are not applied correctly.

### **1.2. Business globalization**

Globalization brings increasingly uniform requirements regarding reporting and corporate governance, but also diverse cultural and commercial pressures. Hossain, Hasan and Hasan (2024) provide a comprehensive analysis of corporate governance as a global phenomenon, highlighting the accountant's adaptation to international standards (e.g. IFRS, CSRD) and multi-jurisdictional practices. In the same sense, Moschella et al. (2022) show how accountants in SMEs contribute to risk management in a globalized

environment, where value chains and reporting requirements are increasingly interconnected.

### **1.3. Regulatory and ethical requirements**

The pressure from ethical and financial regulations has increased significantly. Aluwi et al. (2023) show how organizational ethics influence the quality of reporting, and Romero-Carazas et al. (2024) signal the perception of ethics as a “gray” area for public accountants. Al-Hattami et al. (2024) provide empirical evidence on the correlation between digital accounting and improved corporate governance.

### **1.4. Strategic business partnership**

The accountant’s role is expanding beyond accounting records toward strategic consulting. Samanthi and Gooneratne (2022) show the transition from “bean counter” to “value-adding business partner”, while Hadid and Al-Sayed (2021) emphasize the importance of organizational culture and information systems in supporting this new role. Yigitbasioglu et al. (2022) explore the transformation of the accountant into a business advisor, who adds value through analysis and interpretation, not just through reporting. Johri et al. (2024) link strategic accountants to sustainable governance.

### **1.5. The transformation of accounting skills**

Professional evolution requires a new range of digital, analytical, ethical and soft skills. Jackson et al. (2022) describe how professional training must include critical thinking, adaptability and collaboration. Imjai et al. (2024) identify the emerging need for skills in big data, forensic accounting, and financial diagnostics for Generation Z. Digital transformation does not only involve the adoption of new tools, but also redefines the very nature of accounting skills. According to the systematic review by Kroon, Alves and Martins (2021), emerging technologies – such as AI, blockchain or big data – impose new roles on the accountant, related to innovation, strategic analysis and digital collaboration. These changes determine a reconstruction of the professional profile, in which digital skills are intertwined with ethical discernment and critical thinking. Paisey et al. (2024) highlight the importance of active listening in the ethical and relational training of future accountants, while Poje et al. (2025) draw attention to the different ethical predispositions among students, suggesting a need for a reformed curriculum.

### **1.6. Sustainability and ESG reporting**

The social and environmental dimension of accounting is becoming increasingly relevant. Schaltegger and Zvezdov (2015) define accountants as “gatekeepers” of sustainability information, and Mistry et al. (2014) highlight the contribution of accountants to sustainable development.

Krasodomska et al. (2024) analyze the reaction of professionals to the new European Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), and Johri et al. (2024) demonstrate how management accounting can support sustainable governance. Thus, the accountant becomes an important factor in ESG reporting and in the management of non-financial performance.

### **1.7. Labor and talents dynamics**

The workforce is transforming alongside with digitalization and generational shifts. Zharfan and Harmain (2023) explore how millennials and Society 5.0 are changing the nature of professional motivation and expectations. Mujiono (2021) discusses the transition to a workforce prepared for digital disruption, and Seseli et al. (2023) highlight the link between digitalization, efficiency, and job satisfaction. Based on these dynamics, talent recruitment and retention are becoming strategic challenges for accounting organizations.

Taken together, these seven drivers illustrate that the transformation of the accounting profession is not driven by a single dominant force, but by the cumulative interaction of technological, regulatory, organizational and societal pressures. While each factor reshapes specific aspects of accounting work, their combined effect is a redefinition of professional roles, competencies and expectations. This integrative perspective allows the analysis to move beyond a descriptive listing of influences and to focus on the internal professional dynamics that mediate these external pressures, namely professional ethics, corporate governance and professional responsibility.

Recent literature confirms that the role of the accountant is undergoing a profound transformation, driven by technology, global demands, and regulations, as well as by societal cultural and value shifts. The modern accountant is no longer a simple technician, but a strategic partner, an applied ethicist, and a connector between sustainability, governance, and economic performance. The multiple transformations identified in the specialized literature – from technological progress and business internationalization, to increasing regulatory requirements, social responsibility and sustainability – paint a clear picture of the external pressures shaping contemporary accounting practice. However, to understand in depth the nature and direction of this transformation, it is essential to analyze the internal dynamics of the profession – more precisely, the values, principles and professional roles that define the new profile of the accountant. In this sense, three fundamental concepts – professional ethics, corporate governance and professional responsibility – become the theoretical core that supports the identity redefinition of the accounting profession.

The following section presents an analysis of the interconnection between these three dimensions, highlighting how they contribute, together, to the formation of an integrated conceptual model of the modern accountant, capable of responding to the current demands of the economic, technological and social environment.

### **1.8. The interconnection between ethics, governance and responsibility: the foundation of the conceptual model of the modern accountant**

This transformation builds on earlier insights that conceptualized accounting as a socially embedded and institutionally shaped practice (Hopwood, 2007; Walker, 2016).

To truly understand the transformation of the accounting profession, it is not enough to analyze only external pressures, such as digitalization, regulation or sustainability. It is essential to understand the relationship between the fundamental principles that govern the behavior and the role of the accountant in society: professional ethics, corporate governance and professional responsibility. These concepts are often analyzed separately

in the specialized literature, but their integrated approach provides a coherent picture of the new identity of the accounting professional.

### **1.8.1. Professional ethics - the basis of public trust**

Professional ethics provide the value base of the accounting profession. The IFAC Code of Ethics defines integrity, objectivity, professional competence, confidentiality and ethical behavior as essential pillars for public trust. In the context of automation and AI, ethical risks increase exponentially. Eisikovits et al. (2024) warn us that the uncritical use of AI in accounting can lead to the loss of human responsibility. On the same note, Romero-Carazas et al. (2024) demonstrate, through a phenomenological approach, that accountants' perceptions of ethics are influenced by cultural factors, organizational pressures and normative ambiguity. Amidst these challenges, ethics becomes not just a compliance requirement, but an essential competence in decision-making (Aluwi et al., 2023), an active moral filter, that is indispensable in the accountant's relationship with the organization and society.

### **1.8.2. Corporate governance – the framework for applying ethics and responsibility**

Corporate governance is the mechanism by which organizations are managed, controlled and supervised responsibly. In this system, the accountant occupies a key position by ensuring transparency, information accuracy and internal control. Hadid and Al-Sayed (2021) emphasize that the involvement of the accountant in the strategic decision-making processes is increasing, especially in organizations that adopt modern governance practices. Hossain, Hasan and Hasan (2024) propose a global vision of corporate governance, emphasizing the need for a coherent regulatory framework and for professionals who can support accountability in reporting. Shil and Chowdhury (2024) highlight the fact that deficiencies in management accounting practices can weaken the effectiveness of corporate governance. The authors argue that, in order to strengthen governance structures, it is essential for the accountant to actively engage in correcting these gaps, in particular through better integration of internal control, transparency and information accountability. This proactive role redefines the accountant's position in the decision-making architecture of organizations.

Specifically, governance creates the institutional and decision-making space in which ethical values can be applied and professional responsibility can be exercised.

### **1.8.3. Professional responsibility – the practical manifestation of ethics**

Professional responsibility reflects the accountant's ability to assume the consequences of decisions, to respect the public interest and to actively contribute to the well-being of the organization. This includes not only compliance with regulations, but also a proactive attitude towards sustainability, governance and innovation (Johri et al., 2024).

Samanthi and Gooneratne (2022) outline the profession's shift from compliance-oriented execution to value-adding partnership, while Mistry et al. (2014) highlight the importance of accounting's contribution to sustainability reporting. Moreover, in the era of digital transformation, responsibility involves the need to continuously update skills and to maintain integrity in the face of technological pressures (Zhao & Wang, 2023; Mujiono, 2021).

## **2. Research methodology**

This paper adopts a qualitative, conceptual, and exploratory design that critically synthesizes recent literature in accounting, professional ethics, and corporate governance. The main objective is to propose an integrated theoretical model that reflects the transformation of the accountant's role in the current context, characterized by digitalization, sustainability, regulatory pressures and increased ethical requirements. No primary data were collected; the synthesis draws on a corpus of more than 30 peer-reviewed sources complemented by professional standards (e.g., the International Ethics Standards Board for Accountants (IESBA) Code of Ethics issued by the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC)). The selection of sources was guided by topicality, argumentative rigor and thematic relevance.

### **2.1 Method justification**

A conceptual method is appropriate given the theory-building aim of this study and the multi-causal nature of the phenomenon (technological, institutional, ethical, socio-cultural). The transformation of the accounting profession is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, simultaneously influenced by technological, institutional, ethical and socio-cultural factors; therefore, a reflexive approach, based on content analysis and thematic correlation, is more appropriate than a traditional quantitative method.

Conceptual research is frequently used in economic sciences to formulate or reconfigure theoretical models in the face of paradigm shifts (Jackson et al., 2022; Kokina et al., 2020). In this case, the transition from the traditional accountant (“bookkeeper”) to a strategic and ethical partner involves a redefinition of values, skills and responsibilities, which cannot be captured by empirical indicators alone.

To enhance transparency and rigor, the literature review followed a structured screening protocol. Academic sources were identified using major databases such as Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar. The search focused primarily on publications from approximately 2014–2025, in order to capture the most recent developments related to digitalization, ESG and professional transformation. Key search terms included combinations of “accounting profession”, “professional ethics”, “corporate governance”, “professional responsibility”, “digitalization”, “AI in accounting” and “ESG reporting”. Only peer-reviewed journal articles and authoritative professional documents (e.g., the IFAC/IESBA standards) published in English were included. Studies with a purely technical focus or lacking relevance to the professional role of accountants were excluded. The resulting model reflects:

- the need to conceptually correlate dimensions such as professional ethics, corporate governance and professional responsibility;
- the absence of recent integrative models that address the convergence of these themes in the context of digitalization and ESG reporting;
- the need for a useful explanatory framework for understanding the new accounting professional identity.

### **2.2. Analysis method and limitations**

The analysis consisted of close reading and systematic extraction of recurring concepts from the corpus. These concepts were then inductively grouped into three analytical criteria (normative, functional, identity-related), which informed the model's three dimensions (professional ethics, corporate governance, professional responsibility). The result is a conceptual model that offers a holistic vision of how the three fundamental dimensions – professional ethics, corporate governance and professional responsibility – interact in shaping the new profile of the accountant.

Being a theoretical approach, the paper has the specific limits of conceptual research: it does not empirically validate the proposed model and is based on qualitative interpretations, influenced by the authors' perspective. However, the model can function as a tool for professional reflection and a starting point for future research, including quantitative or qualitative empirical studies.

While bibliometric and scientometric techniques can offer valuable quantitative insights into publication trends and citation networks, such approaches were not adopted in this study, because the primary objective was theory-building rather than mapping the structure of an established research field. The present research relies on an in-depth qualitative thematic synthesis, which is particularly suitable for integrating normative, functional and identity-related dimensions that are not easily captured through bibliometric indicators alone. Nevertheless, future research could complement the proposed conceptual model with bibliometric or network-based analyses to empirically explore the evolution and clustering of themes identified in this paper.

### **2.3. The method of analysis**

The analysis used in this research is thematic, with an inductive approach to identify, classify and correlate key concepts extracted from the specialized literature. This method is frequently used in conceptual qualitative research, especially when the objective is the construction of a theoretical model rather than the validation of a pre-established hypothesis. The process followed several stages:

a. As part of the analytical approach to building the conceptual model, we applied a thematic analysis to a corpus of more than 30 scientific and normative sources, selected according to their relevance to the research topic. The aim was to identify recurring concepts that are present transversally in contemporary literature on the accounting profession and to correlate them around the fundamental dimensions: professional ethics, corporate governance, and professional responsibility. The result of this stage was the identification of four central emerging themes, which reflect the main pressures and directions of evolution of the accounting profession. These themes are presented in the table below (Table no. 1), together with the relevant sources and the key ideas that support them.

**Table no. 1. Emerging themes identified in the literature**

Central theme	Relevant sources	Key Ideas/Contributions
The crisis of professional identity in the digital age	Kokina et al. (2020); Yigitbasioglu et al. (2022); Mujiono	The accountant is moving from a simple processor to a strategic partner, in a context dominated by AI,

	(2021); Zharfan & Harmain (2023)	RPA and profound cultural changes.
Increasing demands for ethics and social responsibility	Aluwi et al. (2023); Romero-Carazas et al. (2024); Walker (2016); IFAC (Codul Etic)	Ethics becomes essential in the era of technological and social pressures; responsibility towards the public interest and an active professional conscience are emphasized.
Involvement in governance structures and ESG reporting	Krasodomska et al. (2024); Johri et al. (2024); Mistry et al. (2014)	The accountant supports the integration of ESG into governance, contributing to internal control, transparency and sustainability.
The need for new skills – digital, analytical, ethical	Jackson et al. (2022); Imjai et al. (2024); Paisey et al. (2024); Poje et al. (2025)	Skills are being reconfigured: emphasis on digital skills, big data, active listening, critical analysis and continuous training.

Source: author’s conceptualization

These themes formed the basis for the construction of the conceptual model proposed in this paper, which were subsequently developed and articulated around the three major theoretical dimensions. They also reflect the priority directions of research and professional training for modern accountants.

b. The process of classifying concepts was an essential step in the construction of the conceptual model proposed in this research. Initially, following the thematic analysis of recent literature, several recurring themes related to the transformation of the accounting profession were identified: ethics, technology, sustainability, ESG reporting, strategic consulting, regulation, digitalization, professional training and others. These themes were extracted from a corpus of relevant scientific sources, such as Eisikovits et al. (2024), Johri et al. (2024), Romero-Carazas et al. (2024), Yigitbasioglu et al. (2022), Imjai et al. (2024), and IFAC (Code of Ethics), etc. In order to overcome a fragmentary descriptive approach, an inductive classification process was applied: the concepts were compared, related and subsequently grouped into three fundamental dimensions that reflect the essential functions of the modern accountant. To structure and interpret the conceptual data extracted from the specialized literature, the thematic analysis was organized around three analytical criteria: normative, functional, and identity-related (professional identity). This triad was selected to reflect the complexity of the accounting profession in transition, offering a coherent and multidimensional approach. The normative criterion captures the standards and values imposed by codes of ethics, international regulations and compliance requirements, being theoretically supported by sources such as IFAC (Code of Ethics) and Hossain et al. (2024). The functional criterion targets the concrete

transformations of the accountant's role in practice, from audit and consultancy to the integration of ESG reporting, in line with the works of Kokina et al. (2020) and Yigitbasioglu et al. (2022). Finally, the identity-related criterion explores the symbolic and transformative dimensions of the profession, highlighting the redefinition of values and the crisis of professional identity in the digital age, as examined by Jackson et al. (2022), Walker (2016) and Poje et al. (2025). The choice of this analysis grid allows for a rigorous correlation between the recurring concepts in the literature and the constitutive dimensions of the proposed model, thus strengthening the theoretical foundation of the research (Table no. 2).

**Table no. 2. Mapping the Analytical Criteria to Their Rationale and Supporting Literature**

Criterion	Reason for selection	Connection with literature
1. Normative – What “ought to be”	This criterion reflects the formal requirements and professional values imposed by deontological standards, ethical codes and international regulations. It is essential for understanding the formal basis of accounting behavior, especially in the context of increasing compliance pressures (CSRD, IFRS, IFAC Code).	IFAC (Code of Ethics), Aluwi et al. (2023), Hossain et al. (2024), Romero-Carazas et al. (2024), Olojede & Erin (2021)
2. Functional – What the accountant “does”	This criterion analyses the concrete role and practical contribution of the accountant in the activities of the organization: audit, control, consulting, ESG reporting. It is necessary to capture the practical transformation of the profession, especially in the face of technological and strategic changes.	Kokina et al. (2020), Yigitbasioglu et al. (2022), Hadid & Al-Sayed (2021), Krasodomska et al. (2024), Zhao & Wang (2023)
3. Identity-related – What it “means” to be an accountant	This criterion captures the profound and transformative dimension of the profession – the redefinition of values, professional consciousness and social meaning of the accounting work.	Jackson et al. (2022), Walker (2016), Zharfan & Harmain (2023), Poje et al. (2025), Imjai et al. (2024)

*Source:* author’s conceptualization

In order to deepen and clarify the conceptual model of the modern accountant, a correlation matrix was built between the three fundamental theoretical dimensions – professional ethics, corporate governance and professional responsibility – and the three selected analytical criteria: normative, functional and identity-related. This structuring allows for a layered reading of the accountant's role, beyond purely descriptive or linear approaches. The normative dimension reflects the regulatory framework, ethical codes and institutional obligations (e.g. IFAC Code, CSR standards, IFRS), providing the normative and legal basis for professional actions. The functional dimension captures the concrete way in which these principles are implemented in practice: audit, ESG reporting, ethical use of technologies or strategic consulting. Finally, the identity-related perspective shows how these processes contribute to the self-redefinition of the accounting professional, in a context marked by uncertainty, digitalization and increased social demands. Thus, the proposed model not only integrates disparate conceptual elements, but also provides a coherent, multidimensional and updated reading of the accounting profession in transition (Table no. 3).

**Table no. 3. Correlation matrix between the criteria and the dimensions of the conceptual model**

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Professional ethics</b>	<b>Corporate governance</b>	<b>Professional responsibility</b>
<b>Normative</b>	IFAC Code, moral principles (integrity, objectivity, competence, confidentiality, conduct).	Regulatory compliance (CSR standards, IFRS), role in audit and control.	Obligation towards the public interest, ethics applied in decision-making.
<b>Functional</b>	Decision filter in accounting practices, ethical use of AI, prevention of abusive behavior.	Participation in audit, internal control, fraud prevention, integration of ESG reporting.	Strategic consulting, management decision support, ESG reporting and contribution to sustainability.
<b>Identity-related</b>	Forming an ethical conscience, assuming the values of the profession in ambiguous contexts.	Involving the accountant in decision-making architecture and organizational accountability.	Reframing the accountant's identity as a value-creating partner rather than just a technician executing technical tasks.

Source: author's conceptualization

The three resulting dimensions are:

1. Professional ethics – includes all concepts related to values, moral judgment, ethical conscience and fundamental principles of conduct. The following elements were included::

- *Integrity and objectivity in the context of AI and automation* (Eisikovits et al., 2024; Zhao & Wang, 2023);
- *Moral judgment in uncodified areas* (Romero-Carazas et al., 2024; Aluwi et al., 2023);
- *Ethical conscience as an active internal responsibility* (Walker, 2016; Jackson et al., 2022);
- *Normative references to the IFAC Code and IESBA principles.*

This dimension has been treated in the literature as a foundation for maintaining public trust (IFAC, 2024) and as a critical response to the challenges of automation (Kokina et al., 2020).

2. Corporate governance – groups concepts related to transparency, control, reporting and compliance. Key elements identified include:

- *The accountant's role in fraud prevention and internal audit* (Hadid & Al-Sayed, 2021; Hassan et al., 2023);
- *Integrating ESG information into the decision-making structure* (Krasodomska et al., 2024; Johri et al., 2024);
- *Regulatory and control systems based on international standards* (CSRD, IFRS – Hossain et al., 2024; Olojede & Erin, 2021).

In this framework, the accountant is no longer just a technician, but an actor actively involved in organizational governance mechanisms.

3. Professional responsibility – brings together concepts that reflect the accountant's commitment to the public interest, sustainability and continuing professional development. The elements classified under this dimension include::

- *Taking responsibility for decisions and their consequences* (Samanthi & Gooneratne, 2022; Romero-Carazas et al., 2024);
- *Involvement in sustainability reporting and ESG* (Mistry et al., 2014; Schaltegger & Zvezdov, 2015);
- *The need for continuous training and digital learning* (Jackson et al., 2022; Imjai et al., 2024);
- *The role of a strategic consultant in business decisions* (Yigitbasioglu et al., 2022).

This dimension has a normative and a pragmatic component, reflecting the evolution from passive compliance to professional proactivity. This classification enabled the coherent structuring of the conceptual model and led to an integrative approach, in which the accountant is simultaneously analyzed as an ethical actor, a governance agent and a responsible professional, in constant interaction with the pressures of the external environment (technology, regulations, sustainability, demographic changes, etc.).

c. After defining the three core dimensions – professional ethics, corporate governance and professional responsibility – the conceptual model was expanded by integrating a series of external systemic factors, identified in the specialized literature as major determinants of the transformation of the accounting profession. It is important to emphasize that these factors do not represent dimensions of the model itself, but rather

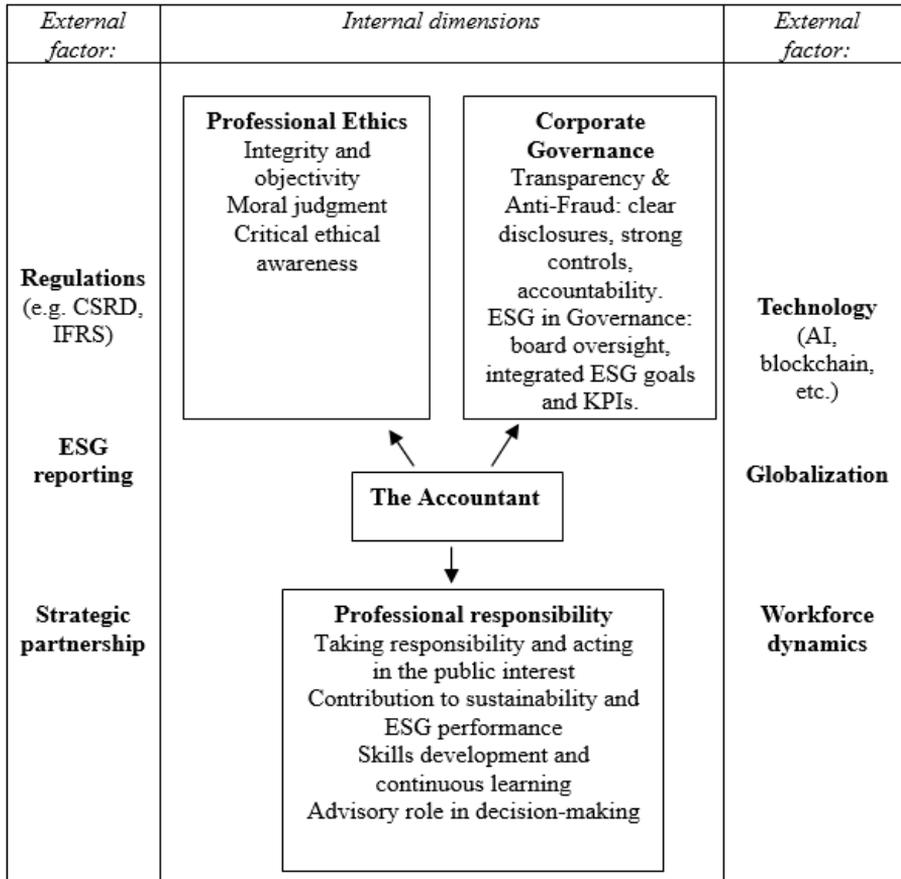
contextual shaping elements, which exert constant pressure on the way in which the three dimensions are defined, interpreted and applied in practice. Thus, international regulations (such as CSRD and IFRS) exert direct pressure on professional responsibility, through traceability, compliance and reporting extension requirements (Hossain et al., 2024; Krasodomska et al., 2024). Emerging technologies – such as artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain and automation (RPA) – are decisively influencing the ethical dimension, generating dilemmas related to the delegation of decisions and the preservation of human moral discernment (Eisikovits et al., 2024; Zhao & Wang, 2023). In parallel, globalization forces the adaptation of corporate governance to multicultural standards and normative convergence (Hossain, Hasan & Hasan, 2024), and ESG reporting transforms the accountant into an essential actor in the decision-making architecture of sustainability (Johri et al., 2024; Schaltegger & Zvezdov, 2015). Other factors such as workforce dynamics, strategic partnerships and skills transformation determine a profound redefinition of professional identity, imposing leadership, consultancy and continuous adaptation roles on the accountant (Yigitbasioglu et al., 2022; Imjai et al., 2024). We treat “strategic partnership” as an external driver insofar as it denotes boards’ and clients’ expectations for an advisory role. The enacted advisory role remains captured as an outcome under professional responsibility.

To summarize these influences, the conceptual model is graphically represented in (Figure no. 1), in which the three fundamental dimensions sit at the center, and external factors appear as influencing forces that interact with each dimension. This representation facilitates the understanding that the accounting profession does not evolve in isolation, but in close relation to the contextual transformations in the current economic, technological and regulatory environment.

Using a thematic review of recent literature, we develop a model that shows how the profession’s identity is being redefined in today’s digital context. This model places the accountant at the center of a theoretical structure formed by three fundamental dimensions – professional ethics, corporate governance and professional responsibility, that cumulatively define a reconfigured professional profile. Each of these dimensions fulfills a specific function within the model:

- Professional ethics provide the normative and value framework for action;
- Corporate governance positions the accountant within the institutional and decision-making architecture of the organization;
- Professional responsibility applies values and norms in the public interest.

We analyze these components together, not separately, building the image of an adaptive, reflective and strategically engaged professional. Therefore, professional responsibility forms the base of the model, applying and integrating the other two dimensions. External factors also shape the model: emerging technologies (AI, blockchain), international regulation (CSRD, IFRS), globalization, ESG pressure, workforce dynamics, and expectations that accountants act as strategic partners. These are not internal dimensions of the profession, but dynamic contexts that constantly redefine how ethics, governance and responsibility are understood and applied.



**Figure no. 1: Conceptual model of the modern accountant: interaction between internal dimensions and external drivers**

*Source: author’s conceptualization*

The proposed model (Figure no. 1) reflects the dynamic relationship between the ethical-professional core of the accounting profession and the pressures exerted by contemporary external factors. External pressures (AI/blockchain, globalization, workforce dynamics) shape the profession’s internal pillars, which in turn determine roles and outcomes. These pillars are Professional Ethics (the normative compass: integrity, objectivity, moral judgment) and Corporate Governance (the operating system: transparency, controls, anti-fraud, board oversight, ESG targets/KPIs).

At the center, the accountant acts as an integrator and translator, turning regulatory/ESG and technological pressures into ethical judgments and governance practices. Thus, professional responsibility encompasses a public-interest focus, contributions to sustainability/ESG outcomes, ongoing learning and skill building , and an advisory role

that adds value to decision-making. ESG reporting links external requirements and internal processes: it is mandated from outside, implemented through internal governance, and grounded in ethics.

There is also an implicit feedback loop: stronger professional responsibility reinforces governance quality and ethical culture, thereby improving transparency and organizational accountability over time.

#### 2.4. Originality and contribution of the research

The paper proposes a conceptual model of the “modern accountant”, built through a thematic analysis of recent literature and relevant regulatory documents. Its originality lies in the convergent approach of three fundamental dimensions: professional ethics, corporate governance and professional responsibility, treated not as independent entities, but as interdependent elements, continuously influenced by external systemic factors such as digitalization, international regulations (CSRD and IFRS), ESG reporting, globalization, and organizational transformations.

Unlike previous research that separately explores technological impact (Eisikovits et al., 2024; Kokina et al., 2020), professional ethics (Romero-Carazas et al., 2024; Aluwi et al., 2023) or accountant responsibility in a digital context (Jackson et al., 2022), this study develops an integrative thematic synthesis that reflects the profession’s identity-related and functional transformation in the post-digital age. Moreover, the specialized literature does not offer a unified theoretical model to date that integrates the three major dimensions of the accounting profession in explicit correlation with contemporary external pressures. Kroon et al. (2021) discuss emerging accounting skills in a technological framework, and Shil and Chowdhury (2024) treat governance aspects through the lens of managerial control, but without proposing an articulated conceptual framework. In this sense, the model presented here makes an original, contextualized, and relevant contribution both to academic research and to educational and institutional development. Thus, the paper contributes to the reconfiguration of the current accounting paradigm by providing a conceptual framework capable of guiding future research, curricular updates, and professional policies in a constantly changing environment.

### 3. Results and discussion

The model proposed in this paper is not just a theoretical scheme, but provides a useful interpretive framework for understanding the major transformations of the accounting profession. By integrating the three dimensions – professional ethics, corporate governance and professional responsibility – the model generates multiple implications for accounting education, as well as for organizational practices and decision-making processes in institutions operating in complex and regulated economic environments.

To make the conceptual model more explicit and useful for future empirical research, it can be articulated through a set of theoretical propositions. **P1:** Strong professional ethics enhance the effectiveness of corporate governance mechanisms by supporting transparency, accountability and ethical judgment. **P2:** Corporate governance mediates the relationship between professional ethics and professional responsibility, translating normative values into organizational practices. **P3:** Under conditions of digitalization and

ESG pressure, professional responsibility expands toward advisory, sustainability-oriented and strategic roles.

### **3.1. Professional and educational implications of the model**

One of the major contributions of the model is the redefinition of professional accounting competencies towards integrative training, which goes beyond traditional accounting technicality. Recent literature emphasizes the need for accounting education to include ethical, critical and digital competencies, such as moral thinking, autonomous judgment in non-codified situations and the ability to work with emerging technologies (Jackson et al., 2022; Imjai et al., 2024). Thus, the model can guide the reform of the academic curricula and of the continuing professional development programs.

At the same time, it provides a solid normative basis for the reassessment and updating of professional standards, especially with regard to the IFAC Code of Ethics and its applicability in digitalized contexts (Eisikovits et al., 2024; IFAC, 2024). The subcomponent on critical ethical awareness indicates that simple compliance with rules is no longer sufficient and that deep anchoring in professional values and moral discernment is required (Walker, 2016; Romero-Carazas et al., 2024).

Furthermore, by including ESG reporting in the governance and professional responsibility structure, the model proposes an expanded vision of the accountant's role as a strategic actor in achieving sustainability objectives (Johri et al., 2024; Schaltegger & Zvezdov, 2015).

### **3.2. Practical relevance for organizations**

In the proposed model, factors such as digitalization, regulation, ESG pressures and workforce dynamics act as external drivers, while enhanced advisory roles, improved governance quality and sustainability-oriented decision-making represent key outcomes. The model can be directly applied by organizations to guide internal human resources policies, especially regarding recruitment and training processes. The focus on continuous learning, responsibility and strategic consulting provides a basis for assessing the new accounting skills needed in a digitalized and regulated environment (Zharfan & Harmain, 2023; Poje et al., 2025).

In the context of accelerated digitalization, recent literature highlights a clear transition from the role of the traditional accountant to one focused on analysis, interpretation and strategic consulting. Gonçalves et al. (2022) emphasize that digital transformation not only automates repetitive tasks, but also creates an environment in which critical, digital and interpersonal skills become essential for professional relevance. This mutation requires a reconfiguration of professional responsibility, but also a rethinking of educational preparation in the field.

In terms of corporate governance, the model provides clear guidelines for strengthening the internal audit functions, the control systems, and the coherent integration of ESG reporting into organizational strategy (Hadid & Al-Sayed, 2021; Krasodomska et al., 2024). In this sense, the modern accountant becomes an actor who directly contributes to the transparency and sustainability of the organizations, rather than merely to legal compliance. From an application perspective, the proposed model supports the involvement of accountants in identifying systemic dysfunctions in governance – an

approach also supported by the analysis of Shil and Chowdhury (2024), who propose a consolidation of management accounting practices as a tool for strengthening corporate governance.

Furthermore, through the dimension of professional responsibility, the model emphasizes the potential of accountants to become strategic partners for management, involving themselves in the decision-making process, the risk assessment process and in supporting the organization's ethical and sustainable mission (Yigitbasioglu et al., 2022).

For example, in organizations implementing CSRD requirements, accountants increasingly combine ethical judgment with governance responsibilities by designing ESG reporting processes, validating non-financial data, and advising management on sustainability risks. In this context, professional responsibility is manifested through advisory engagement and accountability for ESG-related decisions, rather than through compliance alone.

### **3.3. Challenges and risks in the application of the model**

However, the application of the model in practice is not without obstacles. A first major risk is the resistance to change, observed especially in organizations with a traditional accounting culture or in education systems that do not sufficiently integrate ethical and strategic dimensions (Paisey et al., 2024). There is also a significant gap between the current skills of many accountants and those needed to meet the new requirements: critical thinking, digital literacy, ethical responsibility and contribution to non-financial reporting (Imjai et al., 2024; Kokina et al., 2020). Last but not least, another important risk is the tension between commercial imperatives and ethical responsibility. Pressures for performance, cost reduction, or profit maximization may enter into conflict with professional responsibility, decision-making ethics or transparency requirements (Romero-Carazas et al., 2024; Aluwi et al., 2023).

### **Conclusions**

This paper proposes an integrative conceptual model of the modern accountant, built on a thematic analysis of recent literature in the fields of professional ethics, corporate governance and professional responsibility. The model has the merit of systematizing three interdependent dimensions – normative, functional and identity-related – in the context of external pressures generated by digitalization, sustainability, international regulations and socio-professional transformations. However, the research also presents several limitations that must be explicitly assumed.

First, as a theoretical and conceptual approach, framework, and the research does not validate the proposed empirical model. Although its construction is fundamentally based on a solid bibliographic foundation, the lack of quantitative or qualitative data from professional practice limits the immediate application of the conclusions. Second, the selection of the literature, although rigorous, may be influenced by the authors' perspectives and the availability of academic sources published in English in journals with international access. Thus, certain cultural or regional nuances in accounting practice may be insufficiently reflected.

At the same time, the proposed model has a general character, intended to provide an analytical and guiding framework for future research. It does not claim to be a universally

applicable model, but a platform for professional reflection on the profound transformations that the accountant's identity is undergoing in today's digital context. Despite these limitations, the article offers a relevant contribution to the specialized literature by:

- integrating professional ethics, corporate governance and professional responsibility into a contextualized framework (Walker, 2016; IFAC, 2024);
- emphasizing the external systemic factors that shape these dimensions (Hossain et al., 2024; Kokina et al., 2020);
- highlighting the urgent need for curricular reconfiguration, continuing education and active ethical awareness among accountants (Jackson et al., 2022; Imjai et al., 2024; Paisey et al., 2024).

From a practical perspective, the model offers several immediate implications. Professional bodies may use it to update ethical guidance and continuing professional development programs by explicitly integrating digital ethics and ESG-related judgment. Regulators and standard-setters could rely on the model to better align governance and sustainability reporting requirements with the evolving advisory role of accountants. Organizations may apply the framework to redesign accounting roles, performance evaluation criteria and training pathways, ensuring a closer alignment between ethical responsibility, governance quality and strategic decision-making.

The main conclusion is that the role of the accountant can no longer be understood through the traditional lens of technical compliance, but must be reconstructed in order to be seen as an ethical, strategic and responsible actor, integrated into the organizational governance and sustainable decision-making processes. This model can serve as a starting point for developing modern educational programs focused on ethical skills and ESG, guiding professional and regulatory policies and future empirical research to validate and test the components of the model in diverse contexts.

Future research could extend this study by applying bibliometric or scientometric methods (e.g., citation or co-word analysis) to quantitatively examine the diffusion of ethics, governance and responsibility themes across the accounting literature and to empirically test the relationships suggested by the conceptual model.

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