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ETHICS AND DEVELOPMENT. PECULIARITIES IN THE CASE OF POSTAL SERVICES IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

In this paper we analyse the correlation between ethics and development with a case study on post services. The paper has the following chapters: the current state of research in the field, Business ethics in the successive stages of development. Ethics in postal services, Brief history of postal services in their connection with ethical norms and social development, The future of ethics of postal services. Parameters on the ethics of postal services, Correlation of ethics with other parameters of social development, A brief analysis of the application of ethical norms, Objective factors of the provision of postal services in the 21st century, The ethics of postal as a part of business norms of ethics as a new field of research.

Keywords: postal services, ethics, company, development, history.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to take a step forward in researching the problems of the correlation between ethics and development based on the particularities in the field of postal services. Scientific and doctrinal discussions, as well as applied studies on the general norms of business ethics have progressed enormously lately. Through the ideas expressed we try to take a step forward in knowing and understanding specific elements of ethics in a specialized field of business, that of postal services. It is an opportune opening for a field of research with great possibilities for future evolution. Postal services are a concrete segment of the business world. Moreover, postal services are a segment that has always had an important share in the national economy. We can also accept the idea that postal services have been and continue to be a barometer of the state's interest in a fundamental human need, communication and the spatial movement of material goods.

We have chosen to present in our article the issues of postal service ethics both from an intradisciplinary perspective, respectively in their connection with general ethics, business ethics, and from an interdisciplinary perspective, in connection with economic and social theories applicable to development. We also considered useful a brief foray into the evolution of the application of the rules of postal service ethics in the past. Thus, we have included references of a historical nature, but we have not forgotten the present and the look to the future in terms of the correlation between the norms of the ethics of postal services and development.

This study is an independent scientific approach. We want to be unbiased with our research and with all those who will read this article so we want to mention that the authors have some experience (shorter or longer) in the postal services in Romania. There are advantages and disadvantages from this point of view. Future evaluations will tell whether it is good or not for employees or former employees to carry out scientific studies on the activity of the company in which they worked.

The current state of research in the field

We will comment only briefly on research on business ethics in specific areas. As we have noted, there are valuable studies in several areas of ethics. We find well represented academic ethics (Gherasim et al., 2019) or the wider field of higher education (Chirilă & Warter, 2019), ethics in the field of health (Ioan, 2020), etc. The peculiarities of the development stages of the postal services in Romania are treated both nationally (Minescu, 1916; Enciu, 1984; Ionescu, 1903) and regionally (Braia, 2016; Maxim 2008; Maxim 2013, Maxim 2015; Munteanu, 1980; Micuță, 2020; Tiron & Țoldan, 2008; Țoldan, 2008). There are analyses of the implications of postal services in local development in Romania (Dragotescu, 1998). There are also studies on post-specific management issues (Lăzărescu, 2008; Lăzărescu 2015; Schioparlan, 2000), but also forecasts on the evolution of postal services in the context of new technological generations (Lăzărescu, 2010). Old texts on ethics have entered the scientific circuit. Among these is Aristotle's first work *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, 2012). An important part of ethics is now the business ethics (Craciun, Morar & Macoviciuc, 2005).

Business ethics in the successive stages of development. Ethics in postal services

The importance of ethical norms is, first of all, depending on the usefulness of the goods. From the perspective of economic doctrine, the value or utility of goods depends on two factors: the human well-being it generates (the degree of well-being that depends on that good) and the effort made (uselessness in the rigid terminology of economic theory). More simply, the second factor can be called the *sacrifice* made to benefit from a certain economic good (Bohm-Bawerk, 2021). The sacrifice for the postal service of the individual customer consists of the price paid, the time and effort to reach a postal unit (determined primarily by the distance to the postal unit), the length of time in which his message reaches the destination. In the recent history of the post office, the object of activity was also the sending of material goods of small values.

The importance of postal services and the observance of ethics within them can be highlighted through a combined connection with general economic theory and the results of recent research in the social field. Entrepreneurship as a fundamental element of the modern market economy is essentially an act of discovery, of discovering an opportunity. Following the discovery of the opportunity, the resources that were potentially underused are allocated to a goal that capitalizes on them better (Kirzner, 2020). We thus find a brief justification for the transition from the operation of a public institution to that of a company with a commercial profile with state capital.

The position and importance of postal services can also be viewed synthetically on the basis of economic arguments. For a long time, the post office was a powerful tool to make business easier. The importance of postal services was also manifested in the circulation of intellectual property, facilitating access to works in all fields of human thought, discoveries in all sciences, the beauties of art and the useful goods of industry. The role of the postal office was so great that it effectively conditioned the functioning of industry and commerce. Without postal services, it was estimated at the beginning of the 20th century that *peoples could return to primitive life through decay* (Minescu, 1916).

Historically, business between people has been perceived as a necessary exchange for life. There is a history of at least six thousand years, after the attestation from the documents left by the Sumerians, which lead us to the conclusion that "the exchange of goods involves, since the early stages of civilization, minimum rules of conduct between participants in this type of activity." (Kramer, 1962). Under these conditions, we can argue that ethics is not new to business. It is also not a novelty to include ethics among the subjects taught in education in all fields. We can say that ethics has been practiced and studied for a long time, but the new stages of development bring new aspects that must be understood. In the oldest known texts we find a real plea for ethics: "If, therefore, virtue is bent, an intellectual virtue and an ethical virtue, the former arises and grows primarily through teaching and therefore needs experience and time; but we acquire the ethical one by habit, whence it received its name, which is only slightly different from the word habit" (Aristotle, 2012).

One aspect of business ethics is *the category of need it covers*. Postal services arose from the need for human communication. With the advent of the state, it is also involved in the form of communication between people seen in isolation or associated in legal persons. Mail being a form of communication, is organized and provided by the state. Moreover, due to the importance of communication, postal services are among the first to be the subject of international agreements. The Universal Postal Union is the typical example of the involvement of international law in the regulation of vital services to people.

Communication is essential for humans. Thus, throughout its history, communication has been provided by specialists through specific means. In addition, communication between people was guaranteed by the state through specific legislation. Because postal workers had access to data on postal address addresses, the content of some, especially because they had access to the recipients' homes, it was always considered to ensure the confidentiality of this information. The confidentiality of the information was ensured by the permanent training of the employees on employment and during the employment contract. Maintaining confidentiality, an important aspect of ethics, becomes a duty of service. It is difficult to determine now whether there have been any forms of ethics training in postal services. However, we know, reading the legislation, that ethical issues had an important weight in the content of regulations.

Brief history of postal services in their connection with ethical norms and social development

Knowing the importance of postal services requires specialists in each country to thorough studies of each historical phase of their development. Based on such studies, it is recommended to mention both the success and the failure of the postal services.

Postal services have been provided in an organized manner since antiquity. Initially, they served the state through the daily need for information from all over its territory. But this service involved a large expense that could not be borne only by the state budget. The next step was to provide these services to the population. Operating under state protection and no means of public transport, the postal services also transported passengers by courier. In their millennial history, the transportation and sending of messages that provided communication has been a major issue for every state. For this reason, states at different stages of evolution have paid special attention to postal services and their specific rules of ethics. New means of transporting and transmitting messages were always sought. The social and economic importance of the post office has been and remains embedded both in the history of human communities and in the literature.

From a social point of view, the history of the Romanian post office highlights the importance of this service. It can be said that indeed, the modern post office was one of the most democratic institutions. Based on its object of activity, it served the most important

objectives with strict observance of ethical norms. The state services, the interests of the great merchants and industrialists as well as those of the humblest merchants, the interests of the townspeople, as well as those of the most insignificant village, the interests of the rich, as well as those of the poor, benefited equally from the postal services. By the fact that the mail, through ingenious combinations, transported all kinds of results of human activity throughout the world, it made any distance and border disappear (Constantinescu, 1916).

Initially, postal services were non-market, being provided by the state for its interests. Over time, the importance of communication becomes indispensable and maintaining them is a big expense. Thus, the second phase was passed, the commercialization of postal services by offering them to the population for a fee.

Since ancient times, postal services were initially provided free of charge and later traded by the state in an organized manner and regulated by specific rules and laws. The purpose of their commercialization was first of all for the recovery of the expenses and later for the benefit that would allow their development.

In the monopoly phase, the commercialization of postal services aimed at maximizing profit. In this sense, the services offered had to be attractive to customers. The state through a specialized company had to ensure the need for communication in conditions of maximum confidentiality, a condition that could be offered with the service. This condition was ensured to the customers by specific regulations and laws and by the serving staff.

The provision of services in general and postal services in particular was regulated by specific regulations and laws but they did not regulate unforeseen situations. Under these conditions, personal initiatives were needed, the flair of each employee, but also a favourable environment to influence or maintain a culture and a favourable organizational behaviour for customers.

Today postal services are no longer in a monopoly state, being provided in the context of the postal market. The former sole supplier of the state that had this monopoly was transformed for a part of the postal market into a company with the majority or sole shareholder state.

We can understand the question or confusion of many people related to the provision of services of public interest, such as postal services, through the market, the market under public control, as is the case of postal services in Romania. We want to bring as an argument for the opening of the postal services market, as decided by the European Parliament, a banal observation present in the economic literature: the common man owes the improvement of his material condition to the inventor, who was often led in his discoveries of entrepreneurship (Mursa, 2020).

The future of ethics of postal services. Parameters on the ethics of postal services

Given that the future of postal services is computerization, we can adapt to the postal field the experience already established in this field. The main objectives of the implementation of new ITC technologies in postal services will be the elimination of repetitive activities, based on routine, operational access to data at the time of decision making, rapid flow of information during processing, securing existing data (Somnea & Calciu, 2004). Modern managerial practice has established that effective responsible action is based on strengths. Capitalizing on strengths is actually the sole purpose of the organization (Drucker, 2010). Among the strengths of today's national postal operator are the extensive national network and the existence of well-developed working procedures. Tradition is also a factor that forces the performance of that part of the human resource sensitive to moral motivation.

Among the objectives of today's postal services in Romania are digitalization, technology improvement, development of a new business strategy, development and

diversification. By increasing the degree of automation, the aim is to save resources and reduce costs (Stefan, 2022). All these have within them a business ethic specific to a new technological generation.

One of the trends already established in the business environment is the increasing complexity of the problems. Specialists say that we must learn to live and act in an increasingly complex world (Sargut & Mc Grath, 2012). This learning will take place at each level of the decision, starting with the top one up to the operational area, with decisions related to the Job descriptions. At the same time, the increasingly complex nature of organizations that fulfil the function of sole provider of universal postal service will generate, as the literature shows, stress on employees as individuals participating in institutional flows (Cole, 1998). What is required of this complex type of organizations is a greater degree of predictability, adequate explanation of the renewal processes. Thus we can understand the application of the system of ethical norms in the postal company - employee relationship.

Developments that will need to be validated in the future as related to the provision of postal services with an impact on ethical standards include:

- the transition from management based mainly on specific experience in postal services to large private company management;
- generalized imposition of corporate management norms designed by the Government for all public companies, including the company specialized in postal services (Government Emergency Ordinance, 2011)
- reducing employment flows for operational staff on the basis of graduating a form of education dedicated to postal services and increasing the share of employment based on competition or examination, only on the basis of skills.

Management specialists have established that a first feature of services, including postal services, is that of *quality*: the ethics of the service cannot be separated from the quality of the provider. The provider transmits through the quality of the service his qualification and competence at the time of providing the service. Exactly the same can be said about postal services: the quality of human resources involved in providing the postal service is decisive in the appreciation made by customers. In turn, the competence of the provider has as its main specific element in business the quality of the resources involved in providing the service. In terms of human resources, the most important in the economy but especially in services, motivation is important. It is therefore interesting whether the employee is motivated or demotivated depending on the management practiced in the press company of the service. Unfortunately, the postal services suffer from the point of view of motivation starting from elements independent of the quality of management. In the scale or hierarchy of value appreciation of time worked in a unit of time, postal services are on the lowest rungs.

Correlation of ethics with other parameters of social development

The ability of staff to adapt to advanced ethical norms can be seen in the sense of the multidimensional theory of human capital (Gardener, 2005) as one of the important skills needed by large organizations. To the extent that individuals of any kind assume the objectives of communities as their own, no matter how complex communities are, there is neither stress nor alienation. From that moment on, ethical norms can become an inseparable part of the community, including an organized community in the form of an enterprise.

In defining the parameters of ethical behaviour in business, it is very useful to distinguish between the legality and morality of an action, as presented in the economic literature (Gurgu, 2018). The first stage of ethics, its basic level, is when those in power, whether individuals or companies, respectfully follow the law, even if they have the opportunity to circumvent certain rules that are not convenient for them. The upper phase of

business ethics is when the strong, individuals or companies, follow manuals of good practice, rules of conduct, moral norms in one word. For each large company we can make an assessment of the position it occupies on the hierarchical scale of business ethics. After analysing the activity of the Romanian national postal service operator, we encountered numerous cases in which the raw text of the law was supplemented with international managerial practices taken over from multinational companies. Thus, each concrete action thus managed moves the national operator to a new stage in the field of business ethics.

Rigorous observance of ethical norms is possible in any type of service, including postal services, only within united organizations or collectives, where there is a high level of coherence in understanding problems and especially in establishing solutions. Recent developments in research have questioned and explained some concepts with great applicability in work teams in the field of services, such as cognitive empathy (Amodio & Lungu, 2020). Starting from a superior understanding of the connections that lead to the formation of real teams, highly complex services such as postal services can find forms and methods to improve cooperation and thus respect for organizational values, including ethical ones.

In the economic literature we identify a sketch of what is the creative dimension of economic activity: giving up the old (represented by routine, and tradition) and shifting the emphasis to the new (represented by innovation, originality, diversity) (Aceleanu & Cretu, 2010). As one of the ways of progress, creativity, is formulated, we can have a partially outlined image of what will happen or, more precisely, of the trajectory we want to set.

The correlation between ethics, integrity and social responsibility underlined in the literature as being valid for the university environment (Gherasim et al., 2019) is applicable to any field of activity, including that of postal services. The conclusion is also valid that a strong organization is one that has an integrative institutional culture, containing values, beliefs and behavioral norms proven over time to be beneficial. Although it has been subjected to great pressures from the business environment and not only, the Romanian national postal operator has proven that in certain segments its organizational culture is strong and can achieve performances that are difficult to accept.

As the previous practice summarized by the doctrine has shown, the dynamics of enterprises depend on their ability to assimilate technological progress. In principle, the ideas generated by innovation must correspond to the diversity of needs of enterprises (Iancu, 2003). At the same time, the skills of human resources must be in line with the technical and technological requirements of companies. Only those are actually useful for business development (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2003). Hence a set of ethical norms in the state-company relationship with the state as the majority shareholder and respectively in the relationship between the company and the employee. The definition of the ethics norm will be closely related to the observance of the real development needs of the company in the two types of mentioned relations.

The complexity of social relations generates the need to define a wide range of applications of ethics. Here we propose the concept of ethics in the relationship between the management of state companies and society. The stronger involvement of the ethical norms in the future evolutions of the postal services, as well as in many other fields of activity, supposes including the successive passage through the stages of professional management, corporate management, leadership. Differences in approach between manager and leader (Braicu & Neagu, 2012) can make the difference between evolution and development in the case of all complex activities, including that of postal services.

In the information economy we are going through, there is more and more talk about the contribution of companies and businesses to the wealth of citizens, through their access to

more material goods and services (Graf, 1990). If wealth is measured by the goods you have access to, it means that the post office has a special role: it facilitates access to them.

One important parameter of social development is the relation between the company and state. An important task of the state is the investment in state-owned companies. One issue that investments in modernization need to clarify is that of the correlation between companies' own business cycles, on the one hand, and the investment cycles and savings of the population, on the other. If there are reasonable assumptions about macroeconomics, such as the model Modigliani, Ando, and Brumberg (Miller & Pulsinelli, 1986), of investment cycles and population economics, the predominantly empirical approaches to companies' own business cycle are required. For postal services, the modelling of business cycles is focused on the analysis of the available data of the universal postal service provider correlated with the data collected rhythmically and rigorously by the specialized regulatory authority. Here comes the problem of the degree of predictability for employees and for those who are preparing to enter the labor market or in different segments of training. Normally the choice for a field (a branch) and a profession should be based on consistent data on the perspectives of the field and profession. Unfortunately, the combination of the prediction problems regarding the modernization of the postal services specified above and the administrative ones of transposing into reality their modernization requirements generates a high degree of insecurity on the labour market and on the education market, much higher than the one already admitted in today's society. However, we can say that this aspect appears mainly within the ethical norms between the company and the honest or competent employee.

A brief analysis of the application of ethical norms

The benefits and the risks regarding the application of the ethical norms have some particularity in comparison with other different types of nonconformities. Regarding the benefits of applying ethics we can mention the improvement of brand value, a better image on the labour market with implications on the efficiency of human resources-based processes, greater efficiency of the control function, better parametrization of activity, attracting customers sensitive to rules of ethics.

The risks for non-compliance with ethical norms also have certain peculiarities compared to other types of non-conformities. We refer here mainly to the sanctions that can be applied and to the possible patrimonial losses of the companies. Thus, in case of non-compliance with the rules of ethics, there can be no question of the existence of so-called operational risks, such as the suspension of activity or the occurrence of work accidents. Usually, the financial risks do not appear immediately. The biggest implications come from reputation risks. The negative impact on the brand can be major in case of non-compliance with ethical rules, but the effect is usually later. In the case of postal services, the supervisory authority is particularly vigilant. One of the usual non-conformities, poorer quality at the same price, does not go unpunished. For example, the deadlines for receiving correspondence are very closely monitored.

Regarding the observance of the ethical norms in the relationship between the company and the employees, we believe that the emphasis is on the observance of the legal norms regarding the knowledge and application of the internal regulations, the obligations regarding working time and rest time, scheduling rest leave, informing employees about the financial situation and future prospects etc.

Ethical norms mean also the morality of the staff involved in the provision of postal services. In the previous stages of the evolution of the postal services, those who worked in this field had to be people of great trust and of a special moral probity. Since ancient times, the postal services have received special attention from the state, the example of the Romans. They were appointed by the prefect of the praetorium for five years. They were chosen from

among the notable inhabitants of the cities, being obliged to fulfil such a function from which they could not withdraw until the expiration of the term. As a moral reward, they were awarded an honorary title”(Minescu, 1916).

In our days, by ethical norms all the people understand ethics in the employee-company relationship. It is accepted that one way to reduce pressure and stress in large organizations is through efforts to increase compatibility between employees and organizations. First of all, on the occasion of employment, recruitment specialists know that the candidate's compatibility with the organization must be tested, in addition to the traditional assessments of the qualification and essential competencies (Mihalcea, 2019). However, this field of research is, unfortunately, still in the phase of empirical studies. We hope that big companies, including companies in the field of post service, will try to understand this new path for the development.

Objective factors of the provision of postal services in the 21st century

Postal services have had a great influence on society and the economy. At the same time, postal services were in turn influenced by objective or subjective factors in society and the economy. The most relevant influences had on the postal services the form of organization, the transport infrastructure, the material basis of the transport services, the quality of the labour force involved (including the level of training and its ethical standards).

From the point of view of the form of organization, it is known that for most of their existence, the postal services operated under a monopoly regime. At the beginning of the 21st century, the tendency to expand the influence of market rules also manifested itself in terms of postal services. The countries of the European Union have gone through three stages in this process. At the end of the twentieth century, the foundations were laid for respecting the quality of postal services and the concept of the internal market for postal services was launched (Directive, 1997). The correlation between the form of organization and the norms of ethics was observed. If different sectors appear in a market, the form of competition must be eliminated due to lower quality and lower price. In 2002, an important step was taken in the European Union towards the opening up of Community postal services to competition (Directive, 2002). In 2008 the foundations are laid for the full completion of the internal market of Community postal services (Directive, 2008). Thus, from a legal point of view, national postal authorities can operate within the competences left by the Community authorities under a key competitive mechanism for postal services.

Statistical data show that each stage of progress and development of postal services has been matched by progress in the areas of transport. Within this correlation, the infrastructure of all types of communications had a major impact on the postal services. With each revolution or upward stage of land communications there were new ways of providing postal services. New generations of road transport and the emergence of rail transport have represented advances in the speed and cost of providing postal services. Also, the emergence of air transport was another step towards the universal nature of postal services. Bringing costs and risks to an affordable level has made it possible to include shipping in the circuit of postal services.

It is known from history that the two major communication services, telecommunications and mail, have developed differently in terms of access to infrastructure. Telecommunications had the opportunity to develop on their own infrastructure, while postal services needed national infrastructure. Among the components of the infrastructure most needed for postal services today is the road. If the road infrastructure is developed it allows a better organization of the postal services.

The ethics of postal as a part of business norms of ethics as a new field of research

We are talking about the application of ethical norms when agents can behave freely, when they can decide and also act differently than they actually did. We speak in these cases of morally responsible decisions and actions (Singer, 2006). Such decisions are specific to the market economy. Perhaps also for this reason the expansion of the postal services market, the transition from monopoly to competition on an important segment of postal services is a step towards the application of general rules of ethics. The problem is that by expanding the market, only the ethics component regarding the relationship between provider and customer is solved. All other components of ethics remain in question even through extensive market services.

An important relationship is between ethics and effectiveness. In-depth analyses based on international managerial practice have shown that it is a misconception to believe that a fair business, conducted under the name of ethics, is not or cannot be profitable (Dedieu, Lechypre & de Witt, 2009). On the contrary, statistical data and business analysis show that always or at least in most cases, ethics is rewarded by the market.

By means of postal services, as in any other type of business, facts may appear that violate the norms of ethics, both on the part of the provider and on the part of the customers. These violations may have a higher or lower level of seriousness. Among the serious acts of violation of the norms of ethics imputed during the time of the postal service providers was the violation of correspondence. This violation consisted in opening letters, reading the contents of the correspondence, stealing the values from the envelopes, including picking up the contents of the correspondence. There is a risk that the recipient will no longer receive the mail or the values sent.

Because of the customer's fault, there was the practice of sending values by mail, the movement of which could be done according to the law by other means. There was also the sending by post of values that were prohibited for sale. We want to mention from now on the fact that the responsibility of postal units is limited based on several realities. As we have already mentioned, the postal service did not have its own logistics. It depends on the transport network and the performance of the available means of transport.

In addition, the postal service was a public one for a long time. He thus obeyed the norms issued by the state in the different periods of time. It is not moral to remove from the social and historical context the reading of correspondence by state authorities in a period of time when, according to legal norms, forms of free expression verbally or in writing were not allowed.

Such aspects will probably be the subject of our future research. We hope to develop the research in the field of business ethics, including postal services.

Conclusions

One aspect of business ethics is *the category of need it covers*. Postal services arose from the need for human communication.

The new stages of development bring new aspects of ethics that must be understood.

Statistical data show that each stage of progress and development of postal services has been matched by progress in the areas of transport. The development of postal services depended decisively on the performance of the means of transport and the level of training of employees.

The sacrifice for the postal service of the individual customer consists of the price paid, the time and effort to reach a postal unit (determined primarily by the distance to the postal unit), the length of time in which his message reaches the destination.

Unfortunately, the postal services suffer from the point of view of motivation starting from elements independent of the quality of management. In the scale or hierarchy of value appreciation of time worked in a unit of time, postal services are on the lowest rungs.

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