

The Machiavellian Dimension of Auditors: An Exploration of Ethical Dilemmas in Auditing

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ABSTRACT

Intense competition in the field of auditing necessitates the enhancement of auditors' skills and professional qualities, given their critical role in financial oversight and fraud prevention. This study examines the Machiavellian traits among auditors by conducting in-depth interviews with three informants from the Big Four public accounting firms. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research aims to delve into the complex nature of auditors' behaviors and ethics. The study utilizes source triangulation to validate the data, involving interviews with three seasoned auditors. The findings indicate that maintaining client relationships is deemed highly significant within the external auditing profession. Moreover, the research highlights that external auditors must embody independence and integrity, steering clear of manipulative and deceptive practices. The implications of this study stress that both junior and senior external auditors are required to adhere strictly to established professional standards and ethical codes. This adherence is crucial to mitigate the influence of Machiavellian tendencies that could compromise the integrity of audit outcomes.

Keywords: Machiavellian dimension; Audit ethics; Compliance with professional standards.

Dimensi "Machiavellian" Sang Auditor

ABSTRAK

Persaingan yang ketat menuntut auditor untuk meningkatkan keterampilan dan kualitas profesional. Peran penting auditor dalam kontrol dan pengawasan keuangan mengharuskan mereka mematuhi standar profesi akuntan publik untuk mencegah terjadinya *fraud*. Penelitian ini mendalami dimensi *Machiavellian* sang auditor melalui wawancara mendalam dengan tiga informan yang berasal dari kantor akuntan publik Big Four. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologi. Penelitian ini menggunakan triangulasi sumber untuk memperoleh keabsahan data melalui wawancara kepada tiga informan yang memperoleh hasil bahwa seorang klien dalam profesi auditor eksternal dinilai cukup penting. Selain dinilai cukup penting, seorang auditor eksternal juga harus memiliki sikap independen dan berintegritas. Auditor eksternal juga tidak boleh manipulatif dan licik dalam profesinya. Data ini dibuktikan melalui wawancara kepada ketiga informan. Implikasi penelitian ini adalah para auditor eksternal tingkat junior maupun senior, harus mematuhi standar dan kode etik yang berlaku untuk menghindari dimensi *Machiavellian* yang dapat memengaruhi hasil audit.

Kata Kunci: Dimensi *Machiavellian*; Etika auditor; Kepatuhan standar profesi.

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INTRODUCTION

Intense competition within the auditing profession necessitates continuous improvement in professional skills and quality (Hartanto, 2018). Auditors are tasked with collecting, analyzing, and testing the correctness of audit evidence (Hardies et al., 2021). They play a critical role in financial control and supervision, where providing accurate information and maintaining independence in decision-making are essential (Bao et al., 2020). The credibility of an auditor is judged based on their performance and integrity in executing these duties.

Given the increasing complexity and variety of fraud within companies, auditors must be vigilant and adept at detecting various fraud types and addressing these issues effectively (Yusica & Sulistyowati, 2020). The Association of Certified Fraud Examinations (ACFE) identifies three primary categories of fraud: corruption, asset misappropriation, and fraudulent statements, with the latter being particularly prevalent in corporate practices. It is the auditor's responsibility to detect these frauds and provide recommendations based on their findings (Salma, 2022).

Auditors must adhere to strict ethical codes and audit regulations aligned with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) (Ar'Reza et al., 2020). However, the personal attitudes and characters of auditors, especially those with Machiavellian traits—characterized by aggression, manipulation, and exploitation for personal gain—can significantly impact their professional conduct (Yessie, 2021) (Triantoro et al., 2020). Such traits can undermine ethical standards, leading to increased fraudulent activities within companies (Urumsah et al., 2016) (Utami et al., 2019).

The Fraud Triangle Theory, which outlines the conditions under which individuals commit fraud—pressure, opportunity, and rationalization—provides a theoretical framework for understanding these behaviors (Afrianto et al., 2023). Auditors with Machiavellian tendencies may exploit opportunities to engage in fraudulent acts, thereby increasing the risk of fraud within their companies (Tutino & Merlo, 2019). Thus, addressing these personal traits and ensuring strict adherence to ethical and professional standards is crucial for maintaining the integrity of financial audits.

As auditors, adherence to the standards set by the Indonesian Institute of Public Accountants (IAPI) is crucial. This compliance directly influences the recommendations provided to company management following audits. Machiavellian traits, often viewed negatively in the auditing profession, can severely impact an auditor's reputation if they are not cognizant of the detrimental effects of such traits (Oktavia Ruwu & Sujana, 2023). Research by (Hadian et al., 2022) suggests that social factors significantly influence an individual's character and traits, highlighting the necessity for auditors to maintain integrity in line with IAPI standards to effectively minimize and prevent fraud.

Machiavellian traits vary in expression, depending on potential personal gains in different situations (Sihombing, 2012). An auditor exhibiting manipulative behavior demonstrates a lack of independence and integrity, crucial failings in the profession (Haeridistia & Agustin, 2019). Auditors must base their work on data and facts, avoiding personal biases with clients to uphold professionalism (Hartati,

2012). The success of an auditor's career is intertwined with the rigorous application of audit procedures, the meticulous collection of audit evidence, and the consequential impact of audit recommendations (Umar et al., 2017).

Auditors should display characteristics of integrity and independence, ensuring no suspicions of audit result manipulation arise (Mahayani & Merkusiwati, 2016). Instances of fraud in companies often reflect an auditor's failure in their supervisory and control roles (Alkautsar, 2014). A pronounced Machiavellian tendency in an auditor can lead to manipulative behaviors, potentially resulting in falsified audit outcomes to safeguard personal, company, or client interests (Kartim, Sutisman, 2022).

According to a 2019 survey by the ACFE Indonesia Chapter involving 239 respondents, the most frequent types of fraud were corruption (64.4%), asset misuse (28.9%), and financial misreporting (6.7%). This research aims to explore the link between fraud occurrences and an individual's character traits, particularly focusing on the Machiavellian traits of auditors. Identifying such connections is imperative to consider new factors contributing to fraud, thus necessitating further examination of this phenomenon.

Research by (Savitri et al., 2022) using quantitative methods has found that individuals with high Machiavellian traits are less likely to make ethical decisions or carry out tasks professionally. This is consistent with findings from (Erdawati et al., 2022), which indicate a significant positive relationship between Machiavellian traits and the propensity for fraud. Similarly, (Ayunda & Helmayunita, 2022) observed that higher levels of Machiavellian traits increase the likelihood of accounting fraud.

Despite these insights, there is a notable reliance on quantitative research methods, which is problematic given that Machiavellian traits are deeply intertwined with personal characteristics and behaviors that are not easily quantifiable. While quantitative approaches provide valuable numerical data, they often fail to capture the complex psychological elements of these traits. In contrast, qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, offer more comprehensive insights into the motivations, underlying reasons, and experiences that inform Machiavellian behaviors. These methods can explore the social, cultural, and organizational contexts that influence such traits.

This approach not only enriches our understanding of how Machiavellian traits might affect an auditor's performance and the likelihood of fraud but also aids in developing more effective policies and regulations to ensure the integrity of the auditing process. Therefore, future research should consider incorporating qualitative methodologies to gain a deeper understanding of the Machiavellian dimension in auditing. This could significantly enhance strategies for improving audit quality and fraud detection.

RESEARCH METHODS

The researcher adopted a qualitative methodology using a phenomenological approach to explore the underlying essence of experiences as perceived by individuals directly involved (Molina, 2015). Phenomenology, particularly the transcendental variant developed by Edmund Gustav Alburucht Husserl (1855–

1939), focuses on understanding individual attitudes and characters through mental self-awareness or transcendence (Soeprapto, 2007) (Noviriani et al., 2018). The choice of this approach was driven by the researcher's intent to delve deeply into the informant's conscious experience and interpretation of the phenomenon under study. To facilitate data analysis, a structured sequence was employed, comprising intentional analysis, noema, noesis, epoche (bracketing), and eidetic reduction (Maskur et al., 2023).

The research utilized the triangulation technique to enhance the accuracy and validity of the findings. Triangulation involves corroborating evidence from different sources to increase the reliability of the data (Alfansyur & Mariyani, 2020). In this study, the researcher compared interview data across various informants to ascertain the veracity of the information gathered. Three informants from the Big Four public accounting firms (KAP) were selected based on several criteria including the scale and complexity of their work, the diversity of their experiences and perspectives, their professional abilities and skills, and the firms' reputable standing in the industry. This comprehensive approach ensured a robust examination of the phenomena related to auditor experiences in the context of their professional environment.

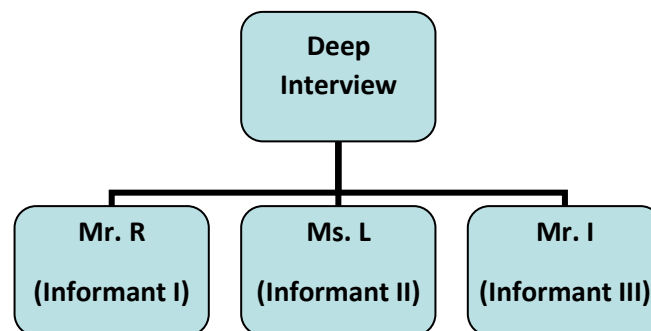


Image 1. Triangulation Source

Source: Informant Data, 2024

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with three key informants from different Big Four KAPs, representing varied levels of experience: Mr. R (senior external auditor), Miss L (junior external auditor), and Mr. I (former external auditor). The objective of these interviews was to explore and compare perspectives on Machiavellian traits across different auditor seniority levels. This choice of informants was strategic, aimed at investigating the implications of the Machiavellian dimension within the auditing profession. Machiavellian traits, often linked with unethical behaviors such as manipulation and fraud, pose significant concerns regarding audit quality and public trust in the auditing profession (Agustina et al., 2021).

Through these interviews, the researcher aimed to deepen the understanding of how Machiavellian characteristics influence auditor behaviors and the potential detrimental effects on the quality of audits and public perception

of auditors. The findings from these discussions highlighted several critical aspects of the Machiavellian dimension among auditors, which include:

According to Mr. R, searching for and exploring information regarding the Machiavellian dimensions of the external auditor is done by using epoche. In the session with Mr. R, the researcher started the interview by asking Mr. R about his views on the importance of clients in the external auditor profession. When Mr. R was asked how important the client was, Mr. R stated that: "Personally, from an external auditor's perspective, it is very important. Because what does that become? ... If you say that, right, it's a source of income for public accountants. Right? It's true that we serve clients according to their needs. But that doesn't mean that because they are considered important, we also have important things. And this is an audit standard. For example, independence and transparency. So even though clients are important, they cannot control their public accountants. We must stick to the standards of the public accounting profession (SPAP)."

From the initial statement (noema) delivered by Mr. R, Mr. R realized that clients are very important in his current profession. According to researcher, there is an interesting thing where the words "very important" and "source of income" are found. Based on the statement given, Mr. R said that clients are very important from an income perspective. Which means that if there are no clients, the source of income for this public accountant is very limited. However, the client is not just a very important word. In this case, according to Mr. R, an external auditor's duties must be carried out by referring to applicable audit standards and public accounting professional standards (SPAP) in order to maintain independence and transparency. Based on Mr. R's statement, as an external auditor, it is also necessary to carry out a background check on the client to accept Mr. R as a client. If it is inadequate or does not pass the background check, the client can be rejected. During his tenure, Mr. R also said that an external auditor should not carry out marketing activities to maintain independence. maintaining the attitude and character of an external auditor, which can be explained as follows:

"So yes, there are times when we have to say, Oh, this year we will be clients; next year we won't be our clients anymore. But even though he is not our client, we still have a good relationship with this client. So, for example, if he is not an audit client, we can still provide non-audit services again. For example, accounting consultants or IT consultants So take turns. As for who audits, other parties must provide consultation. We cannot audit and consult at the same time because this is not independent. Just as you are the one providing consultation, you are also the one doing the inspection. So, it's like you believe in yourself. That's not allowed. So, when we're not auditing, we provide consultations like that."

The researcher asked if an auditor provides consultation or assessment of whether there is client urgency in the sense that the client only wants a WTP (unqualified) audit report. Based on Mr. R's explanation, it depends on our relationship with the client, because we still have a code of ethics and standards that we must follow.

"Because if we look at it, this accounting actually has a loophole, right? Or do we have gray ones that we can use for, for example, achieving certain goals?"

When we are in taxation, it's called tax planning; there is also accounting planning like that. But as long as it doesn't violate the law and doesn't violate the regulations, we can do that. For example, let's say, eh, what if we want to increase sales? So, let's not make fictitious sales, but how can we create a good business scheme that can increase sales? For example... ehh... we can use the example of buy one get one, like that. Well, if that's the case, sales can increase. But on the one hand, the get-one will later be a deduction from the sale. But there is one number that goes up and one number that goes down. Even though the net income remains the same as that. But in terms of financial reports, sales have increased, right? Even though the profit means it still increases the same, "this means that there are many gray things that we can use to achieve a goal as long as it doesn't violate the law."

Moving on to the next question regarding the Machiavellian attitude and character, which often become a person's dual personality in achieving goals without paying attention to applicable regulations, Mr. R gave his initial opinion (noema) as follows:

"Actually, there are quite a lot of these regulations, and they overlap, if you know. This rule says A, this says B, and this says C. But sometimes if we look at it, we must see which one is the most rigid, or which one is the most, like, the most...hm... in other words, provides the most space. small for us; it's the gray one, like that, right? Well, currently, there are no laws regulating company accounting. Because accounting is regulated by accounting standards...hmm... issued by the Indonesian Accountants Association Standards Council. But the law only stipulates that we must comply with these accounting standards. Well, that's all there is to it."

Mr. R expressed his opinion that he had complied with the applicable code of ethics, standards, and audit procedures. According to Mr. R, this gray area can be tricked by accountants as long as they don't violate the regulations. From this explanation, Mr. R then explained the meaning of the gray area, which can be interpreted as having a negative connotation; however, as long as it does not violate the law, this does not fall into the Machiavellian dimension. In the epoche process, the researcher found an intentional analysis of the statement conveyed by Mr. R as follows:

"If the financial report contains many material misstatements or many material misstatements, that will affect next year. Whether we will still accept the company as a client or not. Of course, if we are going to accept it again, we must see first. The client or company has the intention or desire to improve it or not. As long as they don't have the will to improve, we can't accept it, right? Yes, the assumption is, wow, this is already a lot of damage. In the financial report, it's been misrepresented left and right. Next year, we probably won't receive any more. If they don't have the will to fix it, in my experience, several client companies also have disclaimer opinions for the first year. But when we do an audit, we will give it a management letter. The management letter is a letter to management. Which asks for audit findings that they must correct. For example, there is a control deficiency. Or the control is not working properly. So, we always give that to management and also provide input on what needs to be done. So, from there, we asked management to provide a response. So, we will see from that response. Oh,

are they right or not? They don't really want to fix it. If you don't have the intention, maybe next year you won't be our client anymore."

The conclusion (eidetic reduction) that I have determined, as previously stated, is based on Mr. R's understanding and experience regarding the Machiavellian dimensions in attitudes and character that often occur in companies. Another big thing but being an auditor can also be one of many ways to solve problems without having to break the rules, or you could say there are many gray things that have positive value and do not violate the law to beautify and adjust your financial reports. If the client does not want to follow the auditor's regulations, then according to the informant, the client will not be accepted again for assignments in the following year.

Just like in the previous session with Mr. R, in the interview session with Miss L, the researcher started with how important the presence of clients is in her current profession. When asked how important the presence of clients is in the external auditor profession, Miss L stated that the presence of clients in supporting her profession is currently considered quite important because an external auditor provides audit services for clients, and that is the external auditor's job. Hearing this statement, the researcher wondered whether the client's statement was important enough, so there was an approach Miss L had with the client to support her current profession. Then Miss L gave the following statement:

"Yes, oh, that's there; for example, when we're fitting work with a client, we definitely discuss it with them, and we continue to chat with them, like that, which is related to our work; sometimes outside of that, sometimes they also like to ask if this is the right thing." What about it, like that, yes, that... there is something like that, like that, but as long as the fit work is related to our work, it's just straight away."

Based on the initial statement (noema) that Miss L conveyed, Miss L said that every auditor must have a first approach so that the client feels comfortable and does not appear stiff. Miss L also emphasized that outside of their discussion hours, clients are still not allowed to ask questions outside the audit area. The researcher was also curious and asked, in approaching clients, Miss L gets clients with different points of view and backgrounds, but with things like that, does Miss L have a choice of clients whose specifications must be considered? The following is a statement delivered by Miss L.

"How about it, because all this time in my office it's like...ehh... we are the ones who are assigned to team A to handle client A, like that, we never choose which client we want to go to, like that. So maybe if "This is what we are talking about... hmm... what is the way my office chooses clients? Well, maybe that's a different matter; if that's the case, there must be a background check on the client first."

Miss L does not have the authority to select clients because Miss L, an external auditor, only carries out work according to orders and must follow directions without selecting clients according to Miss L's specifications. Miss L is also a junior external auditor in one of the Big 4. Based on Miss L's statement, this client selection cannot be done just like that. Even at the partner level, sometimes the audit team and its clients cannot make their own selection, or it could be said

that no one knows which audit team the client will be included in. Because in one of the Big 4, there is something called a research manager whose job it is to plot who the audit team is and which clients.

Then the next question, namely the interventions that are often experienced by an external auditor in carrying out their duties, is closely related to the Machiavellian dimension of the auditor. Then Miss L gave an initial statement (epoche) regarding intervention, which was closely related to the Machiavellian dimension of the auditor as follows:

"Oh, okay, I've never done anything like that. I mean, hmm, yeah, whatever happens like that, whatever happens during the speedwalk, whatever we encounter, that's it. Report it actually, just according to the actual fact, and so far, I've never "Until I meet a client or...hmm, the boss makes me feel like I have to give a report that doesn't match the original, so I never get used to it."

Based on the statement submitted, the researcher was curious about Miss L's statement, which stated that Miss L, as an external auditor, did not intervene, which resulted in fraud, which usually occurs in companies and harms many parties. The researcher captures the point that auditors who feel that they are always restricted and under pressure will be disturbed and will even tend to follow management's wishes by giving opinions that are not in accordance with existing facts (Alhakim & Yendrawati, 2016). Based on the explanation that Miss L gave, the researcher was curious and asked about "fraud, which is closely related to the Machiavellian dimension of the auditor." This question is also an intentional analysis. The statement made by Miss L is as follows:

"This is it... hmmm... let's say, like yesterday's example. You know, this is the KAP that was involved in the case. ... hmm... one of its partners got into trouble, so his audit practice permit was suspended. Because one of his clients is in the insurance industry, it was proven that there was an item in his financial report whose figures, let's say, did not match the actual figures. Well, from my point of view, in my opinion, yes, that one thing is clearly wrong. Secondly, it's like this, every... hmm. How is that? The partner signs the audit report, makes sure that it is as it should be, and has checked it up to the level of the working paper, that is, the working paper that was carried out by his team. Whether it is okay or not, there are numbers. What should it be? Is there a misstatement there or not? That's how it is. Yes, so, like an example of a case like that, it's a bit... hmmm. It's strange. I mean, really, people at that level, at partner level like that, can't detect that there's a misstatement like that. There's a misstatement like that, but it just slipped through the cracks. So, yeah, ... I mean, in my opinion, as an auditor, like the level of skepticism, maybe that's a consideration. I mean... you should be able to... Detect that, but apparently it wasn't detected, or it wasn't detected, or maybe he actually knew, but no, no, it's okay, he didn't consider the risks; if it turned out to be that misstatement, it would have such a big impact when it was presented, when it was handled like that. . And what else can I do? Actually, if we talk about it like this, it's a bit difficult and uncertain because... hmmm...Yes, that was the code of ethics. Like every time an audit report is released, that's right. Actually, the partner has already considered that. What are the risks if, for example, he knows that there is actually a misstatement there but doesn't adjust it? Actually, usually he can always

consider that, but it's a mistake in a case like that, which is that pro, he... Didn't consider going there like that, or yes, at that time, when he signed, maybe he felt like this misstatement was still, still okay like that, still, the risk can still be handled like that. But apparently not, because apparently after that it was discovered and what, it turned out to be a big problem because the client was an insurance company, right, which held a lot of money from customers like that. Yes, that's what it is. So far, what I can respond to is that, if asked about whether he was wrong or not, what he did was clearly wrong. Then, yes, that was it. Maybe his level of skepticism is not there anymore. Is it... And the risk considerations weren't good either; that's why it got hit."

Miss L's intentional analysis was influenced by her experience and analysis as an auditor. According to Miss L, being an external auditor means not only fulfilling client requests but also having to carry out work in accordance with existing audit evidence and facts by implementing the applicable code of ethics and audit standards. In responding to this, Miss L felt that the KAP was not in line with the applicable code of ethics and standards. In the KAP case, there is a Machiavellian dimension that is evident and cannot be hidden. This dimension is proven by individuals who are not responsible and do it consciously.

The conclusion that I can draw (eidetic reduction) from Miss L regarding the Machiavellian dimensions of the auditor during the ongoing interview session is that Miss L stated that being an external auditor is not only limited to fulfilling clients, which are considered quite important, but there are rules that require external auditors to obey. and comply with applicable standards. If Miss L is based on the Machiavellian dimension of the auditor, this dimension does not occur in the Big Four public accounting firm at the junior level because, in selecting clients, a junior does not have the right to select his own client, which means that Miss L has an independent attitude and character and has no conflict of interest. Miss L with the client.

The researcher studied and asked former Big Four KAP external auditors. According to Mr. I, when he served as an external auditor, clients were quite important; without clients, an external auditor might not be able to increase income. "We put ourselves in the company's shoes; that's what it means, in the sense that if you are an auditor, for example, you really have to know everything about the client's business, what the business process is like, and what the business process is like because even if you know the business process flow and ask what the process flow is like, you can say, "What? It's like we can dig deeper into the company and have sufficient understanding, and from there you can find things the company needs to improve, so it's like that."

Mr. I also added that in client assignments, there must be a beginning between the external auditor and the client concerned. In this beginning, the auditor also has to adjust or be flexible with the situation for the client, so he has to know what kind of person he is, not just related to the company. That way, there must be an approach that can be taken. The researcher was curious and asked Mr. I whether, in his approach to clients, there were clients who did not want to follow the examination flow and only wanted the results straight away. Mr. I gave the following explanation:

"Actually, even though we are friends with the client, we still limit ourselves to that client, so we are just transparent with the client; for example, if there are findings, we reveal everything like that. Continue to protect, especially in the Big Four KAPs. We are quite brave; if, for example, there is something wrong, we will definitely report it, but for example, small things like that, right? We're not material, so that's what we're dealing with, right? But anyway, for example, if we're close to the client, it's speeding up the audit process; how come the results aren't? Yes, we're already independent, even though we're close to the client, but we still maintain those boundaries. I mean." Mr. I stated that it is the duty of an external auditor to have integrity when carrying out his duties (Wakefield, 2008). An external auditor also knows not only his company but, beyond that, the situation and circumstances of each individual client. Mr. I also added, however, that there are things that must be avoided, starting with closeness, which must be in accordance with the limits, because when carrying out audits of financial reports, there are concerns that external auditors will not have integrity and be independent in the audit results they issue. In Mr. I's opinion, maintaining boundaries with clients is required, and if an auditor violates them, the auditor's independence and professional integrity are lost. and continues to operate in accordance with the public accounting professional standards (SPAP) and applicable code of ethics. If this is violated by an auditor, then the auditor's independence and professional integrity are lost. If you characterize it, dimensions that are further apart than that are likely to result in attitudes and characters that ignore standards and codes of ethics, namely the Machiavellian dimension.

Moving on to the question of when Mr. I still served as an external auditor at the Big Four KAP, the researcher are curious about the auditor's Machiavellian dimensions, which are often attached to the attitudes and character of external auditors. The researcher asked whether the scope of an external auditor's friendships makes an auditor not maintain his or her integrity. He stated it as follows. "So far, when I was at KAP Big Four, I wasn't exposed to things like that, hmm... we supported each other, even when I was at junior level, I was really supported by my seniors, so even when I was at senior level gathered with seniors, like that, with juniors I support each other, and even with a team of the same level, yes, even though, for example, we have a big client assignment, usually for the seniors there are a lot of people who really like that, right? Yes, we support each other like that; if there is no team collaboration like that, the audit won't be completed."

Based on Mr. I statement, within the scope of friendship, no one does anything outside of the applicable audit procedures, starting with juniors, seniors, and their peers, to support each other. This attitude and character are positive dimensions that continue to be implemented. The researcher then asked about Mr. I, who responded positively to the results of the interview and was far from fraudulent but decided to resign from the Big Four KAP. Mr. I explained the daily pressure he felt when he was an auditor, and, more precisely, the main reason was when Mr. I stated that being an external auditor means he doesn't have time for his family. Finally, Mr. I decided to resign from the Big Four KAP. According to Mr. I, spending time with children and family is very important. According to Mr.

I when you become an external auditor, you must have an attitude of self-sacrifice, be firm, and have good integrity to avoid deviant attitudes and double character. The conclusion that can be drawn (eidetic reduction) Mr. I understand well the importance of clients in his profession and is not only limited to knowing how the business process is and how the company is, but also must know the situation, attitude, and character of the client himself. Mr. I is of the opinion that becoming an auditor is not easy; however, with the code of ethics, audit procedures, and public accountant professional standards (SPAP), everything has been regulated and is required to follow binding rules.

Table 1. Triangulation Source

Question Items	Informant I	Informant II	Informant III	Interpretation
How important are clients to an external auditor, and what traits and characteristics must an external auditor have?	The client for an external auditor is considered very important. A client is one source of income for an external auditor who is considered to have quite a big influence in the external auditor profession. (Interview with Mr. I)	The client for an external auditor is considered quite important. Client satisfaction in the external auditor profession is very much needed to support the profession as an external auditor. (Interview with Miss L)	Informant III is a former external auditor. According to Informant III, the client is considered very important because without a client, the external auditor may not be able to increase his income (interview with Mr. I).	In general, a client is considered very important. Based on the results of interviews with three informants, it was said that an external auditor, whether senior or junior level, must definitely serve clients in an independent manner (having no other relationship with a client) to ensure an unbiased and objective assessment. This is an absolute must for auditors to maintain when interacting with clients. All three informants said the same thing: an external auditor must prioritize client service and try to meet their needs effectively.

Source : Interview Result, 2024

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Phenomenological research conducted with three informants from the Big Four public accounting firms (KAP) explored the Machiavellian dimension of auditors. Each informant, drawing on their unique experiences in the field, provided distinct perspectives on this dimension. Notably, the inclusion of a former external auditor offered valuable insights for comparing how Machiavellian traits can potentially harm various stakeholders. Overall, the informants demonstrated a strong understanding of how to avoid Machiavellian behaviors and emphasized the critical importance of adhering to the code of ethics and professional standards for public accountants (SPAP).

However, this study encounters several limitations concerning informant selection. All three informants were from Big Four KAPs, potentially overlooking the varied characteristics that smaller-scale, non-Big Four KAPs might exhibit. Factors such as the level of auditor expertise or the operational scope of the firm could influence the manifestation of Machiavellian traits differently in these contexts. Consequently, the findings from this limited sample may not accurately represent the broader auditor population.

Given these limitations, future research should aim to enhance the generalizability and thoroughness of findings related to auditor behavior. Expanding the pool of informants to include auditors from non-Big Four firms, exploring additional behavioral dimensions, and employing a mixed-methods approach that integrates both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques are recommended to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Machiavellian dimension in auditing.

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