CONTABILITA
Journal of Accounting and Finance

Volume 02, No. 02, October 2026
ISSN 3123-6499

Do Personality Traits Shape Ethical Judgment? Experimental Evidence from Tax Consultants in an Emerging Economy

Lodovicus Lasdi [1*], Teodora Winda Mulia [2]
[1*] Accounting Study Program, Faculty of Business and Huminity, Satu university Bandung, Indonesia
[2] Accounting Study Program, School of Economics and Business Telkom University, Bandung, Indonesia
[1] lodovicus.lasdi@univ.satu.ac.id, [2] windalasdi@telkomuniversity.ac.id
* Corresponding Author: lodovicus.lasdi@univ.satu.ac.id

Abstract:
Ethical judgment is critical in tax consulting because professionals must reconcile client interests with legal, professional, and public responsibilities. This study examines whether Machiavellianism and locus of control influence the ethical judgment of professional tax consultants in Indonesia. Using a quantitative experimental approach, the study employed a 2 × 2 factorial design involving 145 tax consultants who were members of the Indonesian Tax Consultants Association (IKPI). Participants evaluated a standardized tax-related ethical dilemma and completed validated measures of Machiavellianism and locus of control. The findings indicate that Machiavellianism negatively affects ethical judgment, suggesting that consultants with stronger Machiavellian tendencies are more likely to prioritize instrumental and self-interested considerations when evaluating ethically sensitive tax decisions. In contrast, an internal locus of control positively influences ethical judgment, indicating that consultants who perceive greater personal control over outcomes demonstrate stronger accountability and greater adherence to professional and ethical considerations. The findings highlight that ethical judgment in tax consulting is shaped not only by technical competence and regulatory knowledge but also by enduring psychological characteristics. This study contributes to behavioural accounting research by providing experimental evidence from professional tax consultants in an emerging economy and offers practical implications for strengthening behavioural ethics, professional development, and ethical decision-making in tax practice.

Keywords: Machiavellianism; Locus of Control; Ethical Judgment; Tax Consultants; Behavioural Accounting.

INTRODUCTION

The growing complexity of tax systems and increasing demands for regulatory compliance have transformed tax consultants from technical advisors into strategic professionals who must balance clients' interests with broader public accountability. Although tax consultants are expected to assist clients in achieving legitimate tax efficiency, they are also required to uphold professional integrity and comply with ethical standards. This dual responsibility creates ethical dilemmas when commercial interests conflict with legal and professional obligations, making ethical judgment an important determinant of professional conduct. Unethical decisions may undermine public trust and

Volume 02, No. 02, October 2026
ISSN 3123-6499

the integrity of tax administration systems (Muliawaty & Sari, 2021) ; (Ratri Widiyanti & Suhendra, 2025)

Evidence from Indonesia demonstrates that unethical professional behaviour among tax consultants remains a significant concern. Several publicly reported cases have involved tax consultants participating in bribery, fictitious tax invoices, fraudulent tax reporting, and other misconduct that resulted in substantial financial losses for the government. Although these cases differ in their legal characteristics, they reveal a common behavioural pattern in which professional judgments are influenced by personal or client interests rather than professional ethical obligations. These incidents indicate that unethical conduct cannot be explained solely by insufficient technical knowledge but is also likely to be associated with individual behavioural characteristics that shape ethical judgment during professional decision-making.

Ethical judgment in tax consulting cannot be explained solely by technical knowledge or formal professional standards. Tax practitioners frequently encounter situations in which client expectations, professional responsibilities and ethical considerations compete with one another. Previous research suggests that ethical decision-making is influenced by both situational and individual factors, including professional ethics, ethical climate and personal characteristics (Doyle et al., 2022; Musbah et al., 2016; Owusu & Korankye, 2023). In this context, personality traits are particularly relevant because they may shape how professionals interpret ethical dilemmas, assess consequences and determine the extent to which they accept responsibility for their decisions.

Among these individual characteristics, Machiavellianism and locus of control provide two complementary perspectives for understanding ethical judgment. Machiavellianism reflects a tendency to prioritise self-interest, strategic behaviour and instrumental outcomes, whereas locus of control concerns individuals' perceptions regarding whether outcomes are determined primarily by their own actions or external forces. Prior accounting research has associated Machiavellianism with ethical decision-making and professional behaviour (Shafer & Simmons, 2008; Svanberg & Öhman, 2019), while locus of control has been linked to professional judgment and ethical considerations. Recent evidence further indicates that individual traits remain important in explaining variations in ethical decision-making among accounting professionals (Kportorgbi et al., 2022) ; (Zakki Nur & Halim, 2023) .

Despite this evidence, important gaps remain. First, previous studies have predominantly examined auditors, accountants and accounting students, leaving tax consultants relatively underexplored as a distinct professional group. Second, much of the existing literature relies on survey-based approaches to capture ethical attitudes or perceptions (Windesi, 2016), providing limited evidence of how professionals respond when confronted with concrete ethical dilemmas. Third, although recent studies continue to examine personality and ethical behaviour, evidence regarding the role of Machiavellianism and locus of control remains context-dependent and requires further examination in emerging economies (Danysh Hashemi & Daneshfar, 2026; Rinaldi Bursan et al., 2025) (Bintang Shilayani et al., 2024) . These gaps are particularly relevant in tax consulting, where professional judgment is frequently exercised under client pressure and competing economic interests.

To address these gaps, this study employs an experimental design to examine how Machiavellianism and locus of control influence the ethical judgment of tax consultants. Experimental research offers an opportunity to move beyond self-reported attitudes and examine ethical responses under controlled decision-making conditions (Cahyonowati et al., 2020; Chan & Song, 2021; Michael, 2025). By focusing on tax practitioners, this study

Volume 02, No. 02, October 2026
ISSN 3123-6499

extends previous research on personality and ethical decision-making to a professional context that has received comparatively limited attention. The study contributes to the behavioural accounting literature in three ways. First, it extends ethical decision-making research to the underexplored context of tax consulting. Second, it provides experimental evidence on the role of personality traits in ethical judgment within an emerging economy. Third, it offers practical implications for professional associations and regulators seeking to strengthen ethical standards, professional development and ethical awareness among tax practitioners.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Ethical Judgment in Tax Consulting

Ethical judgment is essential to professional decision-making because it enables accounting professionals to assess the ethical acceptability of alternative actions. In tax consulting, however, ethical judgment extends beyond regulatory compliance, requiring practitioners to balance client interests and legitimate tax efficiency with professional integrity, public accountability, and the broader interests of the tax system (Radcliffe et al., 2018). Increasingly complex tax regulations and tensions between tax minimisation and responsible compliance further position ethical judgment as a core dimension of professional competence (OECD, 2023)

Tax consultants frequently face competing obligations between client expectations and professional standards. Ethical climate can shape responses to these competing demands (Doyle et al., 2022), while experimental evidence indicates that client pressure and professional standards influence tax professionals' recommendations (Fatemi et al., 2020). Thus, ethical judgment reflects the interaction of professional expectations, situational pressures, and individual characteristics rather than technical tax knowledge alone. Behavioural accounting research similarly indicates that individual characteristics, organisational climate, and moral intensity jointly influence ethical decision-making (Musbah et al., 2016). Recent evidence further highlights the role of individual and professional factors in ethical judgment (Kportorgbi et al., 2022; Owusu & Korankye, 2023).

Personality traits may therefore explain differences in ethical judgment among professionals facing similar situations. Machiavellianism is particularly relevant because stronger Machiavellian tendencies are associated with greater emphasis on self-interest, strategic outcomes, and instrumental considerations. Prior research links Machiavellianism to ethical decision-making among accountants and indicates that its effects may interact with the ethical environment (Shafer & Wang, 2018). Similarly, darrsonality research highlights the relevance of Machiavellian characteristics to ethical behaviour in accounting contexts (Svanberg & Öhman, 2019)

Despite these findings, tax consultants remain relatively underexplored compared with accountants and auditors, particularly in experimental research examining responses to concrete ethical dilemmas. Existing studies also rely heavily on survey-based measures, providing limited evidence of how stable personality traits shape ethical judgment under controlled conditions. Although experimental evidence confirms the importance of client pressure and professional standards (Fatemi et al., 2020), the role of specific personality traits in tax consultants' ethical judgment remains insufficiently established (Kportorgbi et al., 2022) (Owusu & Korankye, 2023). Accordingly, this study examines Machiavellianism and locus of control as individual-level determinants of ethical judgment among tax consultants. Using an experimental design, the study extends behavioural accounting research by providing evidence from tax consulting in

Volume 02, No. 02, October 2026
ISSN 3123-6499

an emerging economy and clarifying how individual psychological dispositions influence professional ethical judgment.

Personality Traits and Ethical Judgment

Personality traits provide an important behavioural explanation for differences in ethical judgment among professionals facing similar situations. Ethical judgment is shaped not only by professional standards and situational pressures but also by individual characteristics that influence how professionals interpret dilemmas, evaluate consequences, and assume responsibility for their decisions. Research confirms the relevance of individual traits to ethical decision-making and highlights the interaction between individual characteristics and professional contexts, particularly in emerging markets (Kportorgbi et al., 2022; Owusu & Korankye, 2023). This perspective is particularly relevant to tax consulting, where practitioners must reconcile client interests with professional and public responsibilities.

Machiavellianism is particularly relevant because it reflects self-interest, strategic behaviour, and instrumental decision-making. Such tendencies may influence evaluations of ethically sensitive alternatives, especially under client pressure. Evidence indicates that Machiavellian characteristics are associated with ethical decision-making in tax consulting and that individuals with stronger Machiavellian tendencies are more likely to accept ethically questionable actions (Shafer & Wang, 2018). Moreover, Machiavellianism may interact with the ethical environment in shaping accountants' ethical responses (Svanberg & Öhman, 2019). Thus, personality may influence both the recognition of ethical issues and the evaluation of competing interests.

Locus of control provides a complementary perspective by reflecting whether individuals perceive outcomes as determined primarily by their own actions or external forces. Individuals with an internal locus of control tend to perceive greater personal responsibility for decision consequences, potentially strengthening ethical considerations. Prior research indicates that locus of control influences professional judgment, particularly under ethical and social pressures (Nasution & Östermark, 2012) In tax consulting, client pressure may create tension between professional standards and client expectations, making experimental evidence on tax professionals' recommendations particularly relevant (Fatemi et al., 2020)

Despite these findings, evidence remains fragmented in context and methodology. Previous studies have largely examined Machiavellianism, locus of control, and ethical judgment among accountants and auditors, while evidence concerning tax consultants remains limited (Christie & Geis, 1970) ;(Shafer & Wang, 2018). Moreover, the predominance of survey-based research provides limited evidence of how individual dispositions operate when professionals confront concrete ethical dilemmas. Experimental research offers stronger evidence of how personality operates under comparable ethical and professional pressures (Fatemi et al., 2020; Nasution & Östermark, 2012) . Accordingly, this study examines Machiavellianism and locus of control simultaneously as individual-level antecedents of ethical judgment among tax consultants. This positioning is particularly relevant in an emerging economy, where practitioners face tensions among client advocacy, professional standards, and public accountability. The following sections develop hypotheses concerning the effects of Machiavellianism and locus of control on tax consultants' ethical judgment.

Hypothesis Development

Machiavellianism and Ethical Judgment

Machiavellianism reflects a disposition characterised by self-interest, strategic manipulation, and the pursuit of personal objectives through calculated behaviour. In

Volume 02, No. 02, October 2026
ISSN 3123-6499

accounting and taxation, such tendencies may conflict with expectations of integrity, objectivity, and public responsibility. Tax practitioners must advocate for clients while maintaining professional standards and protecting the legitimacy of the tax system, creating tensions between commercial and ethical considerations (Radcliffe et al., 2018). Accordingly, Machiavellianism may shape ethical judgment by influencing how practitioners interpret dilemmas and weigh personal, client, and professional interests.

This relationship is consistent with ethical decision-making theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which posits that behavioural beliefs about expected consequences shape attitudes and subsequent behavioural intentions (Ajzen, 1991). Individuals with stronger Machiavellian tendencies may place greater emphasis on instrumental benefits and strategic outcomes, making financially or professionally advantageous actions appear more acceptable despite conflicts with ethical standards. This reasoning aligns with behavioural accounting research identifying individual traits as important sources of variation in ethical decision-making (Kportorgbi et al., 2022; Owusu & Korankye, 2023).

Empirical evidence supports the relevance of Machiavellianism to ethical judgment. Machiavellianism is associated with accountants' ethical decision-making, while the ethical environment may influence how these tendencies translate into ethical responses (Shafer & Wang, 2018) . Research on dark personality characteristics similarly highlights the relevance of Machiavellianism to ethical issues in accounting (Svanberg & Öhman, 2019). In tax contexts, Machiavellianism and professional ethical considerations have been linked to tax-related decision-making (Cahyonowati et al., 2020) while ethical climate and professional norms may constrain the translation of self-interested tendencies into unethical responses (Doyle et al., 2022; Radcliffe et al., 2018).

The relationship is particularly relevant under client pressure and competing professional demands. Experimental evidence indicates that client pressure and professional standards influence tax professionals' recommendations, demonstrating that ethical judgment is shaped by both individual dispositions and decision contexts (Fatemi et al., 2020). Evidence on locus of control and social pressure further indicates that individual characteristics influence professional judgment under pressure (Nasution & Östermark, 2012). Thus, examining Machiavellianism under controlled conditions can clarify whether professionals with different personality dispositions respond differently to comparable ethical dilemmas.

Taken together, stronger Machiavellian tendencies are expected to be associated with lower ethical judgment because they may encourage an instrumental and self-interested evaluation of ethically sensitive alternatives. However, experimental evidence involving tax consultants remains limited, as previous research has predominantly examined accountants and auditors using survey-based approaches. This study addresses this gap by experimentally examining whether Machiavellianism influences ethical judgment among tax consultants under controlled decision-making conditions. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_1 : Machiavellianism is negatively associated with tax consultants' ethical judgment.

Locus of control and ethical judgment

Locus of control refers to the extent to which individuals perceive outcomes as determined by their own efforts and decisions or by external forces (Rotter, 1966). Individuals with an internal locus of control tend to perceive greater control over outcomes, whereas those with an external locus are more likely to attribute outcomes to chance, circumstances, or other people. This distinction is particularly relevant to ethical

Volume 02, No. 02, October 2026
ISSN 3123-6499

judgment in tax consulting, where practitioners face client expectations, social pressure, and competing professional interests. Under such conditions, perceptions of personal control may influence how individuals evaluate alternatives and assume responsibility for their decisions (Ajzen, 1991)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) provides a theoretical basis for this relationship by proposing that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control shape behavioural intentions and subsequent actions (Ajzen, 1991). Perceived behavioural control is conceptually related to locus of control because both concern individuals' perceived capacity to act despite external constraints (Rotter, 1966) . Accordingly, tax consultants with a stronger internal locus of control may exercise greater independent judgment rather than conforming to client demands or external pressures. Their stronger sense of personal agency may also increase attention to the ethical consequences of alternative decisions.

This reasoning is consistent with the ethical decision-making perspective. Individuals with an internal locus of control tend to perceive outcomes as linked to their own actions, strengthening personal accountability and sensitivity to the consequences of professional decisions (Nasution & Östermark, 2012). Conversely, individuals with an external locus of control may attribute outcomes to factors beyond their control, potentially reducing their perceived responsibility for ethically problematic decisions.

Empirical evidence supports the relevance of locus of control to ethical behaviour in accounting and taxation. Prior studies indicate that locus of control and professional ethics influence professional behaviour under conflict situations (Yovita et al., 2016), while tax-related research suggests that an internal locus of control promotes more ethical decision-making and greater consideration of the consequences of professional recommendations (Windesi, 2016). Recent evidence further indicates that internal locus of control enhances professionals' capacity to navigate complex ethical dilemmas and maintain ethical standards.

The importance of locus of control becomes particularly evident under social and situational pressure. Experimental evidence indicates that social pressure can affect professional judgment, while individuals with stronger internal locus of control may be better able to resist external demands and maintain professional objectivity (Nasution & Östermark, 2012). This is highly relevant to tax consulting, where client pressure may encourage aggressive tax positions. Consultants who perceive greater personal accountability are more likely to exercise independent judgment when evaluating ethically sensitive decisions (Nasution & Östermark, 2012).

Despite these findings, experimental evidence directly examining the effect of locus of control on tax consultants' ethical judgment remains limited. Accordingly, this study conceptualises internal locus of control as an individual-level determinant of ethical judgment. Because stronger internal control is expected to enhance personal accountability, perceived agency, and resistance to external pressure, it is expected to positively influence ethical judgment. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_2 : Internal locus of control is positively associated with tax consultants' ethical judgment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative experimental design to examine whether Machiavellianism and locus of control influence tax consultants' ethical judgment. The experimental approach enables the study to observe participants' responses to a controlled ethical dilemma while reducing the influence of uncontrolled contextual factors

Volume 02, No. 02, October 2026
ISSN 3123-6499

and providing stronger evidence than survey-based measures of perceptions or stated intentions. This approach is particularly relevant to tax consulting, where ethical judgment may be shaped by competing client interests, professional obligations, and regulatory expectations (Fatemi et al., 2020). By presenting participants with a realistic tax-related ethical scenario, the study examines whether individual personality characteristics explain variations in ethical judgment.

The experiment employs a 2 × 2 factorial design to assess the effects of Machiavellianism and locus of control on ethical judgment. This design enables the examination of the independent effects of each personality trait while comparing ethical evaluations across their combined conditions, consistent with behavioural accounting research emphasising controlled decision-making environments (Nasution & Östermark, 2012). Machiavellianism and locus of control are measured using validated psychological scales, after which participants are classified into high and low Machiavellianism groups and internal and external locus of control groups. Ethical judgment is subsequently compared across the four experimental conditions to determine whether different personality profiles produce systematic differences in ethical evaluations.

Table 1. 2 × 2 Factorial Experimental Design of Machiavellianism and Locus of Control

	Internal Locus of Control	External Locus of Control
High Machiavellianism	Scenario 1	Scenario 3
Low Machiavellianism	Scenario 2	Scenario 4

Experimental Scenario

This study develops a standardized experimental scenario based on a realistic ethical dilemma encountered by tax consultants, focusing on the tension between client interests and professional responsibilities when evaluating an aggressive tax strategy that may provide economic benefits but conflict with ethical principles and professional standards. Consistent with prior experimental research in accounting and taxation, participants were presented with a professional tax dilemma and asked to evaluate the ethical acceptability of the proposed recommendation (Fatemi et al., 2020; Nasution & Östermark, 2012). Participants assumed the role of a tax consultant advising a corporate client and received identical information regarding the client's circumstances, applicable tax conditions, and potential consequences of alternative decisions. Ethical judgment was measured using an ethical acceptability scale, with higher scores indicating stronger perceptions that the recommended action was ethically appropriate.

To strengthen the scenario's realism and validity, its content was grounded in professional tax practices and reviewed by academic experts and experienced tax practitioners. A pilot test was conducted before the main experiment to assess clarity, realism, and comprehensibility, after which the finalized scenario was administered under controlled experimental conditions. The standardized design enabled the study to isolate the influence of individual personality characteristics on ethical judgment while minimizing variation arising from differences in professional contexts.

Participants and Procedure

The participants were professional tax consultants who are members of the Indonesian Tax Consultants Association (IKPI), the largest and longest-established professional association for tax consultants in Indonesia. Participants were selected

Volume 02, No. 02, October 2026
ISSN 3123-6499

using purposive sampling and were required to be active IKPI members with experience in providing tax advisory services.

The experiment was administered online. After providing informed consent, participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental scenarios. They first evaluated a tax-related ethical dilemma by completing the ethical judgment measure, followed by the Machiavellianism and locus of control questionnaires and demographic information. The questionnaire sequence was designed to minimise response bias by measuring ethical judgment before personality traits. Participants who failed the manipulation check were excluded from the final analysis to preserve the experiment's internal validity.

Measurement

This study examines the effects of Machiavellianism and locus of control on ethical judgment. Machiavellianism and locus of control were measured as individual personality traits, whereas ethical judgment served as the dependent variable. All measurement instruments were adapted from widely validated scales in the behavioural accounting literature to ensure construct validity and comparability with previous studies (Fatemi et al., 2020; Kportorgbi et al., 2022; Owusu & Korankye, 2023). A summary of the variables and measurement instruments is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Measurement of Variables

Variable	Operational Definition	Measurement	Scale	Key References
Machiavellianism	Individual tendency to prioritise self-interest, manipulation and personal gain in decision-making	Adapted Mach-IV instrument	5-point Likert	(Christie & Geis, 1970; Shafer & Wang, 2018)
Locus of Control	Individual belief regarding whether outcomes are determined by personal effort (internal) or external circumstances	Adapted Rotter Locus of Control Scale	5-point Likert	(Nasution & Östermark, 2012; Rotter, 1966)
Ethical Judgment	Ethical evaluation of a tax consulting decision presented in the experimental scenario	Rating of ethical acceptability after reading the scenario	11-point scale (0 = very unlikely; 10 = very likely)	(Fatemi et al., 2020; Owusu & Korankye, 2023)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants' Characteristics

The final sample comprised 145 professional tax consultants who completed the experiment and passed the manipulation check. All participants were members of the Indonesian Tax Consultants Association (IKPI). The sample comprised 61.4% male and 38.6% female participants, with the largest age group being 31–40 years (40.0%). Most

Volume 02, No. 02, October 2026
ISSN 3123-6499

participants held a Type B tax consultant licence (66.2%), followed by Type A (22.1%) and Type C (11.7%). Approximately 66% had more than seven years of professional experience, while 53.8% managed 6–25 active clients, indicating substantial practical experience and regular involvement in tax advisory services. Overall, the sample provides an appropriate empirical basis for examining ethical judgment among professional tax consultants.

Table 3. Participants' Characteristics (N = 145)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	89	61.4
	Female	56	38.6
Age	< 30 years	33	22.8
	31–40 years	58	40.0
	41–50 years	36	24.8
	> 50 years	18	12.4
Tax consultant licence	Type A	32	22.1
	Type B	96	66.2
	Type C	17	11.7
Professional experience	< 3 years	12	8.3
	4–6 years	37	25.5
	7–9 years	50	34.5
	> 10 years	46	31.7
Number of clients	< 5	22	15.2
	6–25	78	53.8
	26–50	27	18.6
	> 50	18	12.4

Preliminary Analysis

Before hypothesis testing, preliminary analyses were conducted to assess the quality and validity of the experimental design, including treatment-group allocation, manipulation checks, and homogeneity of variance. Participants were randomly assigned across the four 2 × 2 factorial conditions, with 37, 34, 36, and 38 participants in Scenarios 1–4, respectively, indicating relatively balanced randomization and limited risk of systematic group bias. Of 164 submitted responses, 19 participants failed the manipulation check and were excluded, resulting in 145 valid observations and supporting the internal validity of the experimental manipulation.

Homogeneity of variance was assessed using Levene's test. The results indicated that the assumption was satisfied for both Machiavellianism ($F = 0.152$, $p = 0.698$) and locus of control ($F = 0.156$, $p = 0.693$), as both p-values exceeded 0.05. Accordingly, the homogeneity assumption was supported, providing a basis for the subsequent factorial ANOVA.

Table 4. Distribution of Participants Across Experimental Conditions

Machiavellianism	Internal Locus of Control	External Locus of Control
High	37	36
Low	34	38

To ensure the validity of the experimental manipulation, a manipulation check was administered after participants completed the experimental task. Of the 164 responses

Volume 02, No. 02, October 2026
ISSN 3123-6499

received, 19 participants failed the manipulation check and were excluded from further analysis. Consequently, 145 valid observations were retained for hypothesis testing, indicating that the remaining participants adequately understood the ethical dilemma presented in the experimental scenario (Table 5).

Table 5. Manipulation Check

Description	Frequency
Correct responses	145
Incorrect responses	19
Total responses	164

Prior to hypothesis testing, the assumption of homogeneity of variance was assessed using Levene's test. As shown in Table 6, the variance was homogeneous for both Machiavellianism ($F = 0.152$, $p = 0.698$) and locus of control ($F = 0.156$, $p = 0.693$). Since all significance values exceeded 0.05, the homogeneity assumption was satisfied, supporting the use of factorial ANOVA in the subsequent analyses.

Table 6. Homogeneity of Variance

Variable	Levene's F	p-value	Decision
Machiavellianism	0.152	0.698	Homogeneity supported
Locus of Control	0.156	0.693	Homogeneity supported

DISCUSSION

Machiavellianism and Ethical Judgment

The results show that tax consultants with higher Machiavellian tendencies exhibit significantly lower ethical judgment than those with lower tendencies, supporting H_1. This finding indicates that individuals with stronger self-interested orientations are more likely to prioritise personal or client benefits over professional responsibilities when evaluating tax-related ethical dilemmas. Thus, ethical judgment is shaped not only by technical competence but also by individual personality characteristics.

The finding is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which posits that behavioural intentions are influenced by individuals' evaluations of expected outcomes (Ajzen, 1991). Tax consultants with stronger Machiavellian tendencies may place greater value on the economic benefits of aggressive tax positions than on their potential ethical or reputational costs, resulting in more instrumental rather than ethically oriented judgments. This interpretation is also consistent with moral reasoning theory, whereby ethical evaluations involve cognitive assessments of competing alternatives before behavioural intentions are formed.

The findings corroborate prior behavioural accounting research linking Machiavellianism to lower ethical judgment (Shafer & Wang, 2018; Svanberg & Öhman, 2019). They also align with (Fatemi et al., 2020), who show that client pressure can encourage tax professionals to recommend more aggressive tax positions, and with (Muliawaty & Sari, 2021), who find that Machiavellian characteristics increase support for aggressive tax planning. (Kportorgbi et al., 2022) further identify personality traits as important predictors of ethical decision-making across accounting professions. Collectively, these findings indicate that ethical behaviour cannot be explained solely by technical expertise or regulatory knowledge.

Volume 02, No. 02, October 2026
ISSN 3123-6499

Unlike predominantly survey-based studies, this research employs a controlled experiment with practising tax consultants in an emerging economy, providing stronger evidence of the behavioural effect of Machiavellianism on ethical judgment. The findings therefore extend behavioural accounting research beyond auditor settings and demonstrate the relevance of personality traits to professional ethical judgment in tax consulting, where commercial pressures frequently intersect with professional obligations.

Locus of Control and Ethical Judgment

The results indicate that tax consultants with an internal locus of control demonstrate significantly higher ethical judgment than those with an external locus of control, supporting H2. Individuals who perceive professional outcomes as determined by their own actions tend to assume greater responsibility for decision consequences and are therefore more likely to evaluate tax-related ethical dilemmas according to professional standards, even under commercial pressure or conflicting client interests (Rotter, 1966). This finding is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior, particularly perceived behavioural control, which suggests that individuals who believe they can control their behaviour are more likely to act consistently with their ethical intentions (Ajzen, 1991)

The finding also corroborates behavioural accounting research showing that locus of control influences professional judgment. Nasution and Östermark (2012) found that auditors with a stronger internal locus of control produced higher-quality judgments under social pressure, while Rotter 1966) showed that internal locus of control enhances ethical judgment through greater professional responsibility. Similarly, Kportorgbi et al., 2022; Owusu & Korankye, 2023 highlight individual psychological characteristics as important determinants of ethical judgment and decision-making, while (Windesi, 2016) demonstrates their relevance among tax practitioners. Extending this literature, the present experimental evidence from practising tax consultants in Indonesia provides stronger causal support than predominantly survey-based research and shows that internal locus of control remains an important psychological mechanism for maintaining ethical judgment amid regulatory complexity and client pressure. Accordingly, ethical practice in tax consulting requires not only technical competence but also personal accountability and professional responsibility (Fatemi et al., 2020) (Radcliffe et al., 2018)

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Machiavellianism and locus of control significantly shape the ethical judgment of professional tax consultants. Higher Machiavellianism is associated with lower ethical judgment, whereas an internal locus of control is associated with higher ethical judgment, indicating that ethical decision-making extends beyond technical competence and regulatory knowledge to include enduring psychological characteristics. By employing a 2 × 2 factorial experiment with professional tax consultants in Indonesia, the study extends behavioural accounting research beyond its predominant focus on auditors and survey-based designs, while providing evidence from an emerging economy.

The findings support the Theory of Planned Behavior by highlighting the roles of outcome evaluation and perceived behavioural control in ethical judgment. Practically, professional associations, regulators, and tax firms should complement technical training with behavioural ethics, moral reasoning, and psychological awareness in professional education and continuing development. However, the online scenario-based design and reliance on IKPI members may limit generalisability to other professional and institutional settings. Future research should employ field or laboratory experiments, examine

Volume 02, No. 02, October 2026
ISSN 3123-6499

additional psychological factors such as moral identity, ethical ideology, and other Dark Triad traits, and conduct cross-country studies to assess the influence of institutional and cultural contexts on ethical judgment.

REFERENCES

Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *50*(2), 179–211. https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T

Bintang Shilayani, L. G. S., Suartana, I. W., Asmara Putra, I. N. W., & Hasibuan, H. T. (2024). Belief in Karma Phala as a Moderator of Machiavellian Traits and Love of Money on Tax Evasion Perceptions. *Journal of Economics, Finance And Management Studies*, *07*(08). https://doi.org/10.47191/jefms/v7-i8-39

Cahyonowati, N., Ratmono, D., & Dewayanto, T. (2020). Machiavellianism in a Synergistic Tax Climate. *The Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business*, *7*(12), 1175–1184. https://doi.org/10.13106/jafeb.2020.vol7.no12.1175

Chan, S. H., & Song, Q. (2021). Implications of tax audit risk, consequences, aggressive behavior and ethics for compliance. *International Journal of Accounting & Information Management*, *29*(5), 823–847. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJAIM-09-2021-0183

Christie, R., & Geis, F. L. (1970). *Studies in Machiavellianism*. Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/C2013-0-10497-7

Danysh Hashemi, S., & Daneshfar, A. (2026). Ethical mindset and the efficacy of tax ethical awareness initiatives. *International Journal of Ethics and Systems*, *42*(2), 299–311. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOES-11-2023-0247

Doyle, E., Frecknall-Hughes, J., & Summers, B. (2022). Ethical reasoning in tax practice: Law or is there more? *Journal of International Accounting, Auditing and Taxation*, *48*, 100483. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intaccaudtax.2022.100483

Fatemi, D., Hasseldine, J., & Hite, P. (2020). The Influence of Ethical Codes of Conduct on Professionalism in Tax Practice. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *164*(1), 133–149. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-4081-1

Kportorgbi, H. K., Kwakye, T. O., & Aboagye-Otchere, F. (2022). Ethical decision-making of tax accountants: examining the relative effect of religiosity, re-enforced tax ethics education and professional experience. *Cogent Business & Management*, *9*(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2022.2149148

Volume 02, No. 02, October 2026
ISSN 3123-6499

Michael, M. (2025). The Tax Audit, Discrimination, and Machiavellianism in Indonesian. *Studi Akuntansi, Keuangan, Dan Manajemen*, *5*(1), 231–242. https://doi.org/10.35912/sakman.v5i1.4391

Muliawaty, Y., & Sari, D. P. (2021). Sifat Machiavellian dan Locus of Control: Studi Eksperimen Keputusan Etis Konsultan Pajak. *Jurnal Buana Akuntansi*, *6*(2), 30–48.

Musbah, A., Cowton, C. J., & Tyfa, D. (2016). The Role of Individual Variables, Organizational Variables and Moral Intensity Dimensions in Libyan Management Accountants' Ethical Decision Making. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *134*(3), 335–358. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2421-3

Nasution, D., & Östermark, R. (2012). The impact of social pressures, locus of control, and professional commitment on auditors' judgment. *Asian Review of Accounting*, *20*(2), 163–178. https://doi.org/10.1108/13217341211242204

OECD. (2023). *Tax Administration 2023*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/900b6382-en

Owusu, G. M. Y., & Korankye, G. (2023). The state of ethical decision-making research in accounting: A retrospective assessment from 1987 to 2022. *Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility*, *32*(2), 419–434. https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.12519

Radcliffe, V. S., Spence, C., Stein, M., & Wilkinson, B. (2018). Professional repositioning during times of institutional change: The case of tax practitioners and changing moral boundaries. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *66*, 45–59. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aos.2017.12.001

Ratri Widiyanti, & Suhendra. (2025). PENGARUH ETIKA PROFESI, KOMPETENSI KONSULTAN PAJAK, MACHIAVELLIANISME TERHADAP PENGAMBILAN KEPUTUSAN ETIS KONSULTAN PAJAK DIMODERASI LOCUS OF CONTROL. *Primanomics : Jurnal Ekonomi & Bisnis*, *23*(2), 225–235. https://doi.org/10.31253/pe.v23i2.3567

Rinaldi Bursan, Aida Sari, Tazkiyah Sakinah, Tiara Prisca Sabilla, & M. Ramadhani Sanjaya. (2025). Peningkatan Literasi Keuangan bagi UMKM di Kabupaten Pesawaran untuk Mewujudkan Kemandirian Ekonomi. *Jurnal Pelayanan Masyarakat*, *2*(3), 48–64. https://doi.org/10.62951/jpm.v2i3.2156

Rotter, J. B. (1966). Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement. *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied*, *80*(1), 1–28. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0092976

Volume 02, No. 02, October 2026
ISSN 3123-6499

Shafer, W. E., & Simmons, R. S. (2008). Social responsibility, Machiavellianism and tax avoidance. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, *21*(5), 695–720. https://doi.org/10.1108/09513570810872978

Shafer, W. E., & Wang, Z. (2018). Machiavellianism, social norms, and taxpayer compliance. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, *27*(1), 42–55. https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.12166

Svanberg, J., & Öhman, P. (2019). Auditors' issue contingency of reduced audit quality acts: perceptions of managers and partners. *International Journal of Accounting, Auditing and Performance Evaluation*, *15*(1), 57. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJAAPE.2019.096740

Windesi, E. M. (2016). Pengaruh Faktor Individu: Persepsi Pentingnya Etika dan Tanggung Jawab Sosial, Machiavellianism, dan Locus of Control terhadap Pengambilan Keputusan Etis Akuntan Pajak Dalam Perencanaan Pajak (Tax Planning). *Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa FEB*, *5*(1), 1–19.

Yovita, D., Safira, C., & Rahmawaty, R. (2016). Pengaruh Gender, Ethical Sensitivity, Locus Of Control, dan Pemahaman Kode Etik Profesi Akuntan terhadap Perilaku Etis Mahasiswa Akuntansi Universitas Syiah Kuala . *Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Ekonomi Akuntansi Unsyiah*, *1*(2), 252–263.

Zakki Nur, A., & Halim, A. (2023). Locus of Control as Moderator Machiavellian Nature and Risk Preferences toward Ethical Decision Making of Tax Consultants in Malang. *JOURNAL OF ECONOMICS, FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT STUDIES*, *06*(01). https://doi.org/10.47191/jefms/v6-i1-34