

# Czasopismo Ekonomia i Zarządzanie



Dostarczamy informacje gospodarcze, polityczne,  
biznesowe, z badań naukowo-badawczych

Nr 2/2018  
ISSN 2084-963X

Economic, political, business information,  
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Journal  
ECONOMY AND MANAGEMENT



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polityczne, biznesowe,  
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# **The perspective of accountants as an occupation within the age of global changes - case of Economics Students' attitude**

## **Abstract**

Accounting as a desirable future profession has been changing across the history. Modern face of accountant presents a multiple range of tasks, requiring from potential candidate to focus on specific skills already on university times. Impact of high technology on economic world reshaped also the occupation of accountants. The aim of the paper is to itemize changes in accounting professions and the influence of technology on accounting. Final part will present the attitude and perception of accounting as a career path for economic students.

Key words: accounting, career path, technology, students' survey

## **Introduction**

Through the centuries, discipline of accounting and connected with it an occupation of accountants, has been recognized as the prestigious and respected profession. Complicated procedures and requirements of comprehensive knowledge related with the occupation of an accountant go along with the adequate salary and wide perspective of development, which make it being desired on the job market.

Factors like globalization, technological development, innovations etc. have been changing the reality of economy as well as the shape of job market, implementing reverse of human to the technique, involving also an artificial intelligence. Therefore, employers require from potential workers to adapt and improve their abilities and competences in accordance with a changeable job market and economy.

The aim of this paper includes illustration of accounting as a profession across the centuries as well as an impact of technology on a face of modern accountants. Besides, the work consists results of the survey carried out within students of Faculty of Economics of UMCS about their future career path. The summary examines the reality of the profession versus students' opinion.



## Accounting as a relevant instrument across the history

Since the very beginning, the history of economy has been associating with an accounting's impact on management and development of companies. It is believed that already in Mesopotamia, 3500 b.c., existed system of recording and subscribing transactions of selling goods. Equivalent of present accountant was the scribe, who was writing up the transactions and ensuring the agreements complied with the detailed code requirements for commercial transactions. That kind of activities was considered as a prestigious profession. Going forward, at Egyptian times, the meaning of accounting involved the trade as well as royal storehouses, bookkeepers drew up meticulous records, which were checked by an internal verification system.

According to the literature, Renaissance Italians are acknowledged to be the mothers of a modern picture of accounting. Italians became the first one who used numbers widely tracking business accounts, kept extensive business records and introduced trend towards double entry bookkeeping [Alexander 2002, p. 8].

What is intriguing, Lucas Pacioli, the monk with mathematics abilities, has been recognized as a precursor of accounting. His masterpiece *Summa de arithmetica, geometria, proportioni et proportionalità* reveals in scientific and systematized way a principle of double entry bookkeeping, an inventory preparation, rules of Profit and Loss Account, Trial Balance and Balance Sheet. In the dissemination of accounting a relevant factor constituted French Commercial Code *Ordonance de commerce*, introduced in 1673. The law imposed an obligation on merchants bookkeeping, drawing up an inventory every two years and keeping books and business documents for 10 years. Cost accounting, which appeared in XV age in manufactory's accounting, fully developed after industry revolution [Staszal 2014, p. 131].

Fundamentally, breakthrough events, presented above, influenced on perceiving an importance and the usefulness of accounting and accountants in the changeable economic world.

## **Accounting as the essential element of XXI century's company**

Market economy imposed many principles for a single enterprise, determined therefore necessity of having expanded and reliable information flow system, showing entity's financial performances. The main financial system, which includes processing nor analysing, and furthermore, a presentation of the economic results is called accounting. Terminology defines it as a language of business, which serves like a tool for providing relevant financial data on the resources of a business and the effects of their use. It is also connected with ensuring significant information for economic decisions which must be made [Hermanson, Edwards, Maher 1998, p. 15].

Besides, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) provides definition of accounting, which brings out that accounting is the art of recording, classifying and summarizing in a significant manner and in terms of money, transactions and events which are, in part at least, of a financial character and interpreting the results thereof [The Institute of Company Secretaries of India, p. 3].

Moreover, financial sphere, being used consequently as a mirror, showing all company's efforts and potentials, constitutes as an undeniable proof for all users, external or internal, who have significant influence on functioning all entity.

Nowadays, the profession of accountants can ensure variety of faces in an enterprise. From the administrative roles, accountants have transformed their position dependably to concrete situations and conditions. In a smaller enterprise, the accountants' role may consist of primarily data collection, entry and report generation. Middle to larger sized business may utilize accountants as the advisers and financial interpreters, who present the company's financial data to people within and outside of the business. Generally, the accountants can also deal with third parties, such as vendors, customers and financial institutions. Examples of practical dimensions of accountants have been listed below [Davis]:

- financial data management- can include sophisticated duties like implementing, developing and maintaining financial data bases, as well as monitoring and establishing control procedures;
- financial report preparation, analysis and advice- the preparation of financial reports is connected with the accurate quarterly and year-end closing documents. The role of analysing and advising can be used as an assistance in making economic decisions;
- regulatory and reporting compliance- monitoring and supporting taxation, coordinating the audit process by assisting with financial data preparation;

- external business affiliations- accountants may provide data to public accountants, who act as consultants, auditors and tax service professionals.

In the age of global changes, a professional accountant in enterprise is an invaluable asset to the company. With the counterparts in taxation and auditing, accountants in business constitute important roles that contribute to the overall stability and progress of the society. Thus, without public understanding of all those diverging faces and responsibilities of different specialists working in business, public perceptions of their value may be misinformed [Jui, Wong].

## **Accountant as the prestige profession according to the reports**

Across the centuries, the profession of accountants has been recognized as the prestigious position, so far the adjective still describe the perception of this occupation. The report, issued by Federation of European Accountants (FEE), published on September 2016, indicates why young people choose career in accountancy. The study was conducted among young accountancy professionals in Europe. Survey shows that main reasons of envisioning this profession for their career has been: interest in the subject matter, possibility of good career progression, the opportunity of good first work experience and the profession may open many doors. The least-chosen factor is an international environment. For the question if they are happy with the choice so far, only 7% said no, 46% answered definitely yes, while 47% respondents indicated that they are partly happy [Federation of European Accountants 2016, p. 2-3].

A polish counterpart of the report mentioned above, can be treated the survey of SKwP published on June of 2017. The respondents were participants of courses and trainings within the association SKwP and members, connected with accounting. The main conclusions from the study are [Stowarzyszenie Księgowych w Polsce 2017, p. 2,3,5,10]:

- the accounting profession is prestigious;
- accountants find a job easily;
- the most satisfied people are the ones, who work at the position of chief accountant.

Furthermore, among the answers, respondents indicate that in their opinion, features that accountants ought to have, which are necessary in work are: meticulousness, analytical mind, honesty, patience and diligence. Besides, 77% of respondents admitted high or very high satisfaction of their profession.

Issues, introduced above, shows that since the very beginning, a profession of accountants has been recognized as a prestigious and respected job, what has also a reflection in modern opinion of the accountants. Changes, which have been made through the centuries, led the shape of profession to be related with diversified and comprehensive abilities. According to the reports, career in accounting ensures many possibilities and progress. What is more, only 7% of respondents are unhappy with their job and almost 80% feel satisfaction of being accountant.

## The impact of technology on the profession of accountants

Profession of accountants can be treated as a key pillar in business, which helps to create sustain value and growth. Therefore, developing economy, changeable conditions of the job market or innovations have significant influence on required and necessary competences and abilities of accountants. Towards the ending of the twentieth century, the accounting profession has begun to take on a whole new look. Computers and accounting software has changed the profession completely. With programs such as Microsoft Excel, an accountant can make statistical analyses, financial forecasts and calculations with great efficiency. Technology has allowed the accountant to move from the desk, covered with papers making documentations that took hours to be completed, to more dynamic ways of performing and it has allowed the accountant to find new challenges and much more to offer than in the past [Pepe 2011].

Although it is hard to predict the future with the big degree of certainty, trends of evolve innovations and the technology give an opportunity to estimate possible directions, which a profession of accountants go towards. Ten trends of the technology are [ACCA 2013, p. 3-14]:

- mobility;
- cloud;
- social collaboration;
- digital service delivery;
- big data;
- payment systems;
- cyber security;
- robotics;
- augmented and virtual reality;
- artificial intelligence.

It seems that those ten factors together can create new standards. Thus, it may requires accountants to re-skill to retain their emerging role as the gatekeeper of corporate data, also the profession will have to develop new ways to measure and value technology costs and benefits for the world of cloud computing and social networking. Moreover, possibly the CFO will need to know as much about technology as they do about financial management. Accountants must exploit emerging technologies to attract talent and to develop and manage existing talent [ACCA 2013, p. 3-14].

Predictions about future accountants include that it will be necessary to increase understanding of the new accounting software programs and other business and finance

applications, also accountants shall develop the understanding of the practical skills required to use technology as a leverage [Thompson, Attolini 2014].

However, the new technologies are not the only challenges for the accountants, there are other points that are relevant when profession is facing changes of the future and that should be proficiency in the English language and developing an attitude of an entrepreneur. English continues to be the language for the business. Thus, it is quite urgent and necessary to achieve technical command of that language. Assuming the attitude of an entrepreneur is also pretty relevant. It is not like accountants must resign from their current job in order to immediately take on new challenges, but rather that they should assume new profession with the approach of an entrepreneur, making of the job and professional development an entrepreneurial experience and handling a development as an entrepreneur would [Murphy 2010].

## **Accounting as a future career path for students from Faculty of Economics UMCS**

The labour world changes faces of employers' expectations fast which makes young people be required to manage their business future during their university's times already. Nowadays, young people are obligated to concentrate on labour market, and to be more precise, they need to focus on areas of occupations ensuring international career, satisfactory salary, possibility to develop one's skills or other advantages, dependable on individual feelings. Changeability of a technology world and moreover developing economies underscore a necessity of young people to organize and acquire specific abilities, qualifications or competences to achieve a dream job.

The survey, based on answers of economic students, was conducted for 5 months. In the work took part 118 students. The methodology of collecting data was the Internet Questionnaire. The research included questions about future career path and issues connected with accounting. Main part of respondents was students from the course Finance and Accounting, but in the survey took part also students from courses as: Economics, Management, Economic Analysis and Logistics.

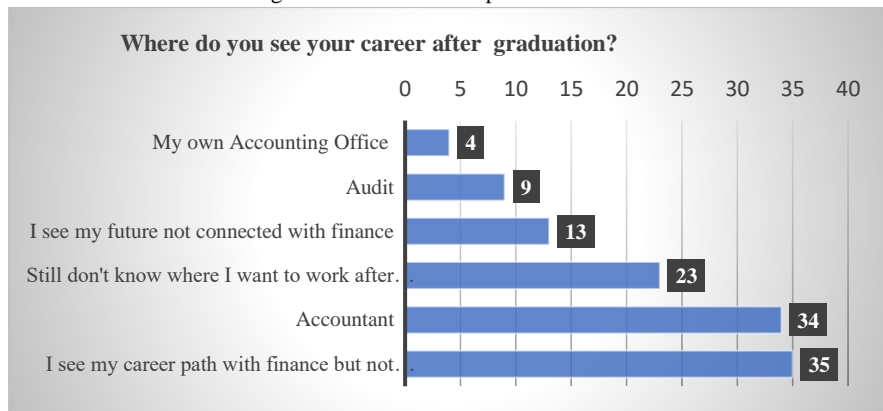
The number of students of any year has been listed below:

- 1<sup>st</sup> year- 54;
- 2<sup>nd</sup> year- 17;
- 3<sup>rd</sup> year- 20;
- 4<sup>th</sup> year- 18;
- 5<sup>th</sup> year- 9.

What should be indicated, the biggest number of respondents has constituted students of the first year.

The first question in the pooling form was the career path, which students want to choose after graduating their University. Results has been showed in the chart number 1.

Figure 1. Chosen career path of students.



As it is visible, almost the same number of answers has been the career in finance but not accounting and directly profession of accountant. It highlights the fact that economic students want to choose their career as the position of accountant. Still, nearly 20% of respondents don't know what exactly will be their working path. Among those answers the biggest part has constituted students of the first year what is understandable. Positions, correlated with accounting, like audit and own accounting office haven't been popular among students.

Moreover, the questionnaire has included a question about the traits, which in students' opinion are the most relevant for a person working in accounting. The most popular choices were (multiple choice):

- diligence (87 answers),
- systematism (85 answers),
- responsibility (83 answers),
- reliability (81 answers),
- honesty (77 answers).

Among the points, the least-chosen answers were:

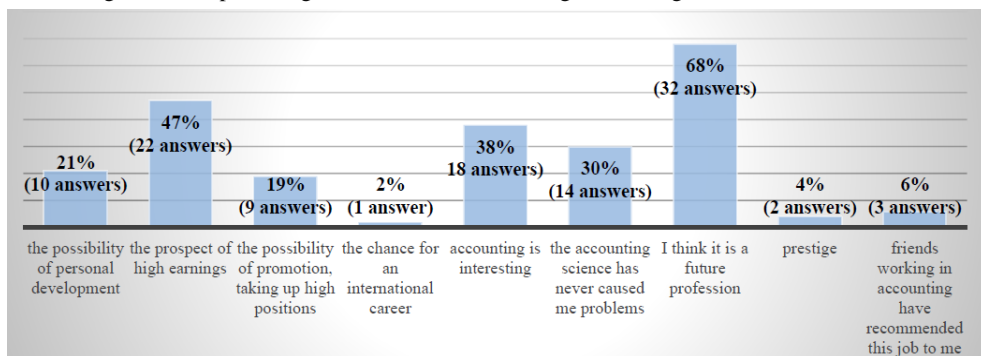
- impulsiveness (0 answers),
- leadership (6 answers),
- stubbornness (9 answers),
- innovativeness (10 answers),
- creativity (11 answers).



Students assessed that the picture of accountants should be correlated with personality features represented by phlegmatic, and so on far from the characteristic traits for sanguine. What is intriguing, the students' opinion concentrates on stereotypical perceiving of the profession, like being systematic, diligent and responsible, so unnecessary turned out the features like leadership or innovativeness.

The questionnaire has itemized also the reasons why students want to choose career in accounting. The question was a multiple choice, the answers included only people choosing career connected with accounting. The chart number 2 presents the answers.

Figure 2. The percentage and numbers of choosing accounting as the future work.



The graph has shown that the most-chosen reason to work as an accountant has been conviction that it is a future profession. The second most-chosen point has been the claim of the prospect of high earnings. However, puzzling are the least-chosen factors, which have been the possibility for an international career and prestige related with the profession.

For the question about the factors influencing the success in this business, students chose 3 the most important issues (multiple choice):

- proficiency in legal regulations, knowledge in the field of tax, insurance, corporate finance etc. (84 answers, 71%),
- knowledge in accounting (88 answers, 75%),
- adequate competences (70 answers, 60%).

Within the answers, the 3 least-chosen issues were:

- openness to international career (13 answers, 11%),

- luck (29 answers, 25%),
- fluency in foreign languages (46 answers, 39%).

Summing up the answers, although a tendency of showing the accountancy as the job for educated, competent people, students don't see the necessity of proficiency in languages or being open for the international career in the profession of accountant.

For the question of the activities connected with accounting (multiple choice) only 56 students chose statements and operations performed by information technology. Nearly 80% of respondents (92 votes) answered that accounting is correlated with records of economic events.

The results of the study showed that an occupation of accountant is known as a future profession. A career path many of students concerned within accounting and being accountant. Even though respondents considered that profession as destined for competent and qualified people, still abilities connected with technology, innovativeness or languages fluency in students' opinion don't playing relevant role and are not urgent in facing reality of modern economy.

## Conclusion

The relevance of accounting system in an enterprise is reflected upon the areas and matters concerned by financial information. Despite the fact that accountant is a prestigious profession and provides satisfaction and future career, the occupation has obligated potential candidates to acquire comprehensive abilities and keep up with faces and challenges of modern wind of changes.

Continuously implemented tools of technology has touched and reshaped also the position of accountant. Thus, aspects as mobility, cloud, big data or robotics make accountants to be forced to adjust their skills to more horizontal and innovative outlook of the work. As the review of reports presented, accountants ought to brace themselves for changing and reskilling their qualifications to tail for modern challenges. According to results, important role will play technological abilities, accountants shall obtain knowledge of programs and systems basing on modern technology. Beside, future dictates terms for success in accounting career, including proficiency in English or other foreign language and entrepreneur's attitude.

Findings of the survey examined the willingness of students to connect their career with accounting. Although respondents indicated that they perceive accounting as a future profession, still their picture of accountant remains without a spirit of time. Students don't underscore necessity of fluency in languages, being innovative and enterprising. Furthermore, in their opinion technology doesn't have a big influence on accounting. That way of thinking ought to be changed if students want to be succeed in the position of accountant. Students should gain new abilities of technology or languages in universities times already to suit for modern requirements of economy.

## **Abstrakt**

Rachunkowość jako zawód przyszłości, zmienia swoje oblicze na przestrzeni wieków. Współczesny kształt księgowego prezentuje wiele różnych zadań, które wymagają od potencjalnego kandydata skupienia się już podczas studiów na konkretnych umiejętnościach. Wpływ wysokiej technologii na świat gospodarczy zmienił również zawód księgowych. Celem artykułu jest wyszczególnienie zmian w zawodzie księgowych oraz wpływu technologii na rachunkowość. W części końcowej przedstawione zostanie podejście i postrzeganie rachunkowości jako ścieżki kariery przez studentów ekonomii.

Słowa klucze: rachunkowość, ścieżka kariery, technologia, badanie studentów

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