

Abstract

Higher accounting education is under pressure to change due to ongoing changes in audit profession and practices. Much of traditional accounting practices rely on numbers and the accuracy of numbers correspondence towards law. Auditors' roles are changing from being scorekeepers in a context of debits and credits they now act as business consultants coping with challenges of risk and control. As much as practice stresses auditors to uphold control, accuracy, relevance and identify risks they also slowly deviate towards communicating accurately. Recent failures where large limited companies were drawn into liquidation (i.e., bankruptcy) revealed significant issues and loopholes in audit reporting standards and relevance. While many numbers met the accounting standards, stakeholders such as owners were because of indirect ownership left behind. Today there is a strong awareness about changes in auditing practices and a debate calling for reconsidering and adjusting audit education to the changing needs of the audit profession. We ask in line with this; what are the implications from changes in the audit profession on accounting education? This paper seeks to help explore and generate a debate on accounting education from a perspective of needs by the audit profession and adjustment of accounting education in accordance to these needs.

As a proxy for the need by the audit profession this paper assumes the criteria for recruiting auditing candidates differ today. In an attempt to explore these new needs this paper asked 2036 external auditors and received 200 (response rate 9.8%) responses representing both small bureaus and large bureaus (big four). The study has a satisfying representation across gender and age. The survey instrument was based on established concepts and measures from previous studies and also further tested and developed through a pilot study on external auditors.

Our initial results show that that there are significant differences between male and female auditors in expected task performance. Expected task performance also differs between small and large bureaus. Further, Big four bureaus have more emphasis on expected social skills than small bureaus. Our results, using multivariate statistics, show that expected task performance and education have a positive effect on job performance and job commitment.

Our results are important to stimulate changes in accounting education. Universities educating external auditors need to anticipate critical aspects and deal with issues on knowledge management in terms of comprehension of professional needs for adjustment of the audit processes to continuous changes in the environment. We notice that the accounting students, need to develop their competences and capabilities to ascertain future recruitment as audit professionals. We also suggest based on the findings that development of accounting education together with practitioners may enable designing and recognizing new methodologies for efficient and effective improvement of accounting education adjusted to professionals needs.