

## ACCOUNTANT'S PROFILE: PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS AND PRACTITIONERS

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**Abstract:** The profession of the accountant has many aspects. Accountants shape the largest amount of information in an enterprise and play an important role in the enterprise's activity. This profession is highly regulated, very responsible and usually includes a wide range of topics: including but not limited to different spheres of accounting, formation of accounting policies, or even information system for enterprises. This suggests the need for an investigation into the accountant's profile, in order to determine the set of features which ideally should be developed for the profession. The purpose of the article is to investigate the accountant's profile from the perception of students and practitioners. For the achievement of this purpose the following methods were used: a questionnaire-based study, information systematization, comparison, and summarization. The results of the research from the study were used for the evaluation of the profile of the accountant, for the development of the necessary set of features an accountant should hold, and finally, the results may be used for the future assessment of accounting study programs of higher educational institutions.

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### Introduction

There is no enterprise, institution, or organization where accounting would not be used. Accounting is one of the first systems of gathering information for managing economic activity (Mackevičius, 2004). In any type of business, the existence of the accounting profession is required. The field of accounting is very large and includes but is not limited to: public accountants, internal accountants who work in industrial companies, finance and/or trade, accountants who worked in the government, and accountants as academics (Amilin, 2016). The information given by accounting comprises roughly 60% to 90% of all economic information, which is necessary to plan, analyze, and manage the activity of the enterprise while guaranteeing its continuance (Mackevičius, 2004). Accountants have to be the people who would help the managers of companies to with many tasks including: the introduction of new information on a company's activity and its control forms in order to increase the responsibility of the employees, and to make management system of the company more effective (Mackevičius & Subaciene, 2016). This leads to the need for an analysis of the accountant's profile, which includes determining its features, and expressing their functions and responsibilities correctly. Although the perception of the accountant's profile may be different and may vary in respect of the students and the practitioners. An analysis of the accountant's profile in this aspect will give us insights into development into the attributes of this profession.

The purpose of the article is to investigate the accountant's profile in the perception of students and practitioners. For the achievement of the purpose of this study, the following methods were used: a questionnaire-based study, information systematization, comparison and summarization.

### Overview of researches on the accountant's profile

The accountant's profile was investigated by different authors from various countries in different aspects. Some researchers analyzed emotional and intellectual features of the accountant's profession and their impact on the development of the career. Amilin (2016) investigated the role of self-confidence in moderating emotional intelligence towards career development of an accountant and made the conclusion that the higher the emotional intelligence of an accountant then the better the efforts for career development in the accounting profession are. The author also provided an opinion, based on his research results, that with good emotional intelligence an accountant is expected to establish good relations with fellow employees, superiors and subordinates so that objectives of organizations can be achieved simultaneously with the development of the careers' of the accountants. Also, he states that the research results show that confidence can strengthen the effect of emotional intelligence on the career development of accountants (Amilin, 2016). Interesting results were

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presented Chelariu & Emil (2015), who investigated the psychological profile of professional accountants. They investigated other authors' researches and stated (Chelariu & Emil 2015), "that 61% of an auditing firms' partners have the type of personalities, which usually start from abstract concepts and create a general framework for perceiving the world, they do not like detail oriented work, while only 20% of auditing firms' employees have the same type of personality". (Chelariu & Emil, 2015). Authors explained this by the necessity of the auditing firms' partners to have a broad vision and have abstract thinking because of the need to have skills to solve unstructured problems. Employees of auditing firms do not have such needs (Chelariu & Emil, 2015).

Bogdan et al. (2016) designed the profiles of professional accountants and managers in the perception of master degree students. Scientists revealed three types of account profile: the liberal and independent professional accountant, the statutory professional accountant who is responsible for the compliance with the requirements of legal accounting and financial reporting, and the advisor professional accountant who advises the managers and owners of the company in order to develop the business's activity and improve its performance. Under the results of the research the authors made the conclusions that the better that professional judgment is, the more the respondent views the accountant as statutory (following rules, regulations and principles). In addition, the authors determined a negative correlation between the professional judgment in accounting and the third profile of accountant – the advisor, signifying that the poorer the professional judgment in accounting, the more the respondent views the accountant as an advisor for the management, in addition, they concluded that none of the profiles were related to the attitude in uncertain circumstances and risk management, nor with creativity (Bogdan et al, 2016).

Researchers analyzed the accountant's profile in terms of the support it gives to managers to design information on the enterprise for various spheres and policies. Grosu et al. (2014) investigated the accountants' perception – as providers of the accounting information – in the role of management accounting in Romanian organizations. The research identified the accountants and managers' perceptions regarding the management accounting information by investigating the accountants' attitude regarding decision-oriented accounting (Grosu et al., 2014). Cernuşca et al. (2015) studied the perception of professional accountants opposite to the managers regarding the approach of developing and substantiating the company's accounting policies. Len et al (2016) investigated concepts and the content of an accountant professional judgment and proposed a general definition of the professional judgment of the accountant as the application of the necessary skills, knowledge and experience in the context of management, accounting standards, taxation, management accounting, and professional ethics under decision making processes aimed at carrying out accounting tasks (Len et al, 2016).

Lithuanian researchers analyzed the accounting quality in terms of the accountant's qualification and the mandatory qualifying examination of Lithuanian accountants. Legenzova, Barbrauskaitė (2014) under the literature analysis stated, that the attitude of accounting information users to the enterprise's financial statements and the total accounting information quality depend on the personal accountants' competence. Besusparienė (2016) investigated the role of the professional accountant in the accounting service enterprise and stated that subjects of legal entities relate accounting quality with the professional accountant and give priority to such accounting service enterprises, where professional accountants provide services. In addition, a professional accountant is expected to give consultations and recommendations for the business (Besusparienė, 2016). Raziūnienė et al. (2012) investigated the conception and attributes of the accounting profession in Lithuania in the aspect of the accounting profession as an element of the accounting system.

So, an accountant's profile, competence, expected features, and functions were analyzed by foreign and Lithuanian authors. This article presents the investigation of accountant's profile in the perception of the students and the practitioners.

### **Research methodology**

For the investigation of the accountant's profile a questionnaire was built. The structure of questionnaire is presented in Table 1. The first two parts of questionnaire was prepared for the identification of respondents and enterprises, which they represent. The third and fourth parts – for the determination of tasks, functions, time structure and basic features required by the accountant. The questionnaire was presented on-line on the website: [www.apklausa.lt](http://www.apklausa.lt) from 28th of February till 7th of

March, for second, third, fourth years bachelor studies' students, first year master studies' and doctoral studies' students, as well as for practitioners of different enterprises in Lithuania.

Table 1: The structure of questionnaire				
Part of questionnaire	Indicators			
Demographics	Age	Experience	Position	Education
Type of enterprise	Activity	Category		
Time structure and functions	Functions	Distribution of time		
Features of accountant's profession	Features of professional group	Features of personal group	Features of social group	
Source: Authors				

A Likert scale of 5 points was used for evaluating the features of the accountant's profession. The features of the accountant's profession were distinguished according to the proposition of Mackevičius, Subačienė (2016). Authors presented 3 groups of features: 1) professional, 2) personal and 3) social. The professional group of features consists of such person's abilities: to record economic transactions on accounting documents and registers; to prepare financial statements; to form financial accounting policy; to form tax accounting policy; to form management accounting policy; to form an information system for the company; to plan, analyze and evaluate company's performance; to present the analysis of the results; to support internal control systems; to make decisions; be interested in innovations and changes in regulation. The personal group consists of such features as: responsibility, accuracy, sense of duty, independence, consistency, flexibility, quick thinking. Finally the social group consists of features includes such abilities: to communicate with colleagues and persons from other institutions; to cooperate with colleagues and persons from other institutions; and to work in team. Respondents in addition were asked to indicate other features, which might be important for the accountant's profile. The survey involved 66 respondents.

### Research results

59.7 % of respondents were students. More than half (53.7 %) was students of bachelor studies, 4.5% - students of master studies, 1.5 % - doctoral studies' students. 40.3 % respondents were practitioners. This number comprises of 3 % of certified accountants, 9 % of chief accountants and 28.3 % different positions of accountants. Regarding the demographic indicators, 55.2 % of respondents were younger than 25 years old, 22.4 % was in range of 26-35 years old, 9 % - in range of age groups of 36-45 and 46-55 years, the rest were older than 56 years. Accordingly, to the age of respondents correlated to work experience with the analysis results showing, that 64.2 % of respondents has less than 5 years' work experience, 14.2 % - from 6 to 10 years, and 7.5 % from 11 to 20 years. The analysis of respondents' education shows, that 31.8 % had a bachelor diploma, 29.5 % - a secondary or special education certificate, 14.8 % - a master diploma, 3.4 % - a doctoral diploma and what is interesting 5.7 % of respondents had national and international trainee center's certificates. The rest of the respondents had college diplomas.

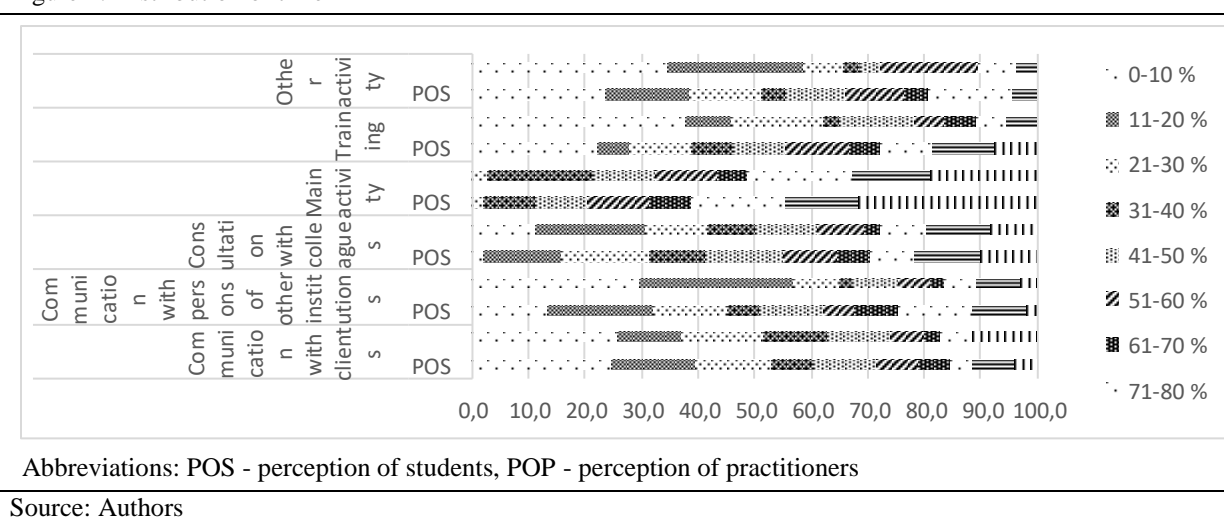
The structure of the enterprise's category was quite consistent 35.8 % respondents were form small enterprises, quarter were from micro and the same part from large enterprises, rest were form medium enterprises. Enterprises perform in all activity types (according to classification of economic activities), the most popular was financial and insurance activity which made up 20.6 %, the other types of activity varied from 1 % to 7.8 %.

For analysis of types of areas, the accountant should perform all the accountant's functions which were divided into financial accounting (by spheres), management accounting (by spheres) and other spheres. The results of research show that students and practitioners consider that the profession of accountant as related with financial accounting (mostly with cash accounting, accounting of labor expenses and other financial account spheres), less than with management accounting (cost accounting, budgeting and planning were distinguished). Respondents emphasized financial analysis and internal control system spheres of other activity's type.

Analysis of distribution of time shows, that 25 % of students presume that communication with clients takes less than 10 % of the whole time structure, 15 % of students think, that it take around 15 %, 13

% - around 25 % and 11 % - from 41% to 50 % (Figure 1). Rather similarly, the perception of practitioners on the distribution of time for communication with clients – approximately the same part of respondents consider, that communication with clients is at almost the same proportion of time, but generally they consider that for this activity accountants spent more time. Regarding the opinion of students, the communication with persons of other institutions (tax agencies) and enterprises takes from less than 10 % (13 % of students) to 30 % (32 % of students), but 59.7 % practitioners think, that this activity takes less than 20 % of the total time. The tendency of this presumption of consultation/discussion with colleagues is rather similar, except a slight difference in consideration of practitioners, that it takes more time (11 % of practitioners defined for this activity less than 10 % of time, and 2 % of students, but one third of both groups think, that communication/discussion with colleagues takes less than 30 %). Regarding the main activity (accounting procedures), the general tendency shows, that students assign more time for it and more time for training (attendance to seminars, courses and similar): 22 % of students define less than 10 % for training activity and as almost 38 % of practitioners consider, that till 10 % of time should be distributed for training. Other activity was defined by practitioners as “financial analysis, internal audit / control procedures”, “new ideas implementation, development”, by students - “to think how to improve the financial position of an entity”, “developing the knowledge of accounting by himself”, “reading the articles, increasing qualification”, “investigative interest related to bettering one's technical know how on the accounting profession” or “knowledge and skills”. So, students were more oriented to increase the qualification of the accountant profession, but 51 % of students and 66 % of practitioners consider, that other activities takes less than 30 %.

Figure 1: Distribution of time



Grosu et al. (2014) also evaluated the time distribution of the accountant's profession and their research results showed, that accountants' time for different activities were distributed in such way: for data processing – 25,44 %, cost analysis and control – 16,67 %, preparation of financial reports – 15,09 %, preparation of fiscal reports – 11,75 %, ensuring the relationship with banks – 6,31 %, legislation study – 15,09 %, other activities – 9,65 %. Authors stated that preparing the information for external users represents the main objective of the accountants within organizations (Grosu et al., 2014). It is not possible to compare both study's results, as the information is prepared in different ways.

Table 2 shows that practitioners evaluate accuracy, responsibility as the most important features of the personal group. Students consider these features in a rather similar way, but there were also respondents, who think, that these features may be unimportant. Students define a sense of duty, quick thinking, flexibility and consistency as important features for the accountant's profession, but practitioners give more attention for these features.

Table 3 shows the results of analysis of features of professional group. It is interesting, that according to students' opinions all listed features may be evaluated as most unimportant, especially the ability to plan, analyze and evaluate a company's performance, ability to support an internal control system, the ability to make decisions, be interested in innovations and changes in regulation. Accordingly, about

40 % of practitioners mentioned features as most important. Practitioners also assess as more valuable almost all the features than students assessed, except for the formation of different accounting policy types and the preparation of financial statements.

Table 2: Features of personal group

Likert scale	Perception of students					Perception of practitioners				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Accuracy	2,6	0,0	7,7	15,4	74,4	0,0	0,0	0,0	7,4	92,6
Responsibility	2,6	0,0	0,0	12,8	84,6	0,0	0,0	3,7	14,8	81,5
Flexibility	23,1	25,6	17,9	15,4	17,9	3,7	7,4	29,6	25,9	33,3
Sense of duty	7,7	10,3	30,8	33,3	17,9	3,7	11,1	14,8	22,2	48,1
Quick thinking	2,6	23,1	43,6	17,9	12,8	0,0	11,1	22,2	18,5	48,1
Independence	10,3	12,8	20,5	33,3	23,1	7,4	3,7	7,4	37,0	44,4
Consistency	2,6	7,7	28,2	35,9	25,6	0,0	3,7	14,8	29,6	51,9

Source: Authors

Table 3: Features of professional group

Likert scale	Perception of students					Perception of practitioners				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to record economic transaction to accounting documents and registers	2,6	0,0	10,3	17,9	69,2	0,0	0,0	7,4	7,4	85,2
Ability to prepare financial statements	2,6	5,1	10,3	12,8	69,2	0,0	0,0	7,4	25,9	66,7
Ability to form financial accounting policy	2,6	0,0	17,9	30,8	48,7	0,0	7,4	29,6	22,2	40,7
Ability to form tax accounting policy	2,6	0,0	7,7	41,0	48,7	0,0	11,1	22,2	29,6	37,0
Ability to form management accounting policy	2,6	0,0	35,9	30,8	30,8	3,7	3,7	51,9	14,8	25,9
Ability to form information system of the company	5,1	15,4	23,1	28,2	28,2	3,7	3,7	37,0	18,5	37,0
Ability to plan, analyse and evaluate company's performance	7,7	7,7	38,5	10,3	35,9	0,0	7,4	25,9	25,9	40,7
Ability to present analysis results	2,6	7,7	28,2	23,1	38,5	0,0	3,7	29,6	25,9	40,7
Ability to support internal control system	7,7	2,6	15,4	51,3	23,1	0,0	7,4	22,2	29,6	40,7
Ability to make decisions	10,3	15,4	30,8	23,1	20,5	0,0	7,4	25,9	22,2	44,4
Be interested in innovations and changes in regulation	7,7	2,6	30,8	28,2	30,8	0,0	0,0	25,9	33,3	40,7

Source: Authors

Regarding to the analysis of features of the social group results, presented in Table 4, it may be stated that all types of features practitioners assessed as more important than students. Students consider this features' group as less valuable and important to the accountant' profession.

Table 4: Features of social group

Likert scale	Perception of students					Perception of practitioners				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to communicate with colleagues and persons from other institutions	2,6	7,7	25,6	33,3	30,8	0,0	0,0	18,5	48,1	33,3
Ability to cooperate with colleagues and persons from other institutions	2,6	0,0	23,1	48,7	25,6	0,0	0,0	7,4	48,1	44,4
Ability to work in team	2,6	2,6	41,0	25,6	28,2	0,0	0,0	7,4	33,3	59,3

Source: Authors

General tendency shows that practitioners assess all groups of features as more important and consider that accountants spend more time for communication with clients, while as students are more oriented in increase of qualification. Our research results coincide with the results of the Rumanian researchers, who stated that a more correct judgment is given by respondents who already work in this field and also by the ones that consider that the accountant should be a professional guided by rules, regulations and the main principles of his or her occupation (Bogdan et al., 2016). Bogdan et al. (2016) found out

that there is a significant correlation between the scale of professional judgment in accounting and the opinion of students regarding the fact that high quality professional judgment is reflected in the preparation of relevant financial information.

Wen et al. (2015) examined “the factors influencing the decisions of accounting students in China concerning the certified public accountant (CPA) designation” (Wen et al. 2015). Authors made the conclusion (Wen et al. (2015)), that “students need to realize that accountants are more than number crunchers. Today’s CPAs are engaged in many managerial functions besides bookkeeping: they are actively involved in business development, estate planning, management consulting, retirement and college planning, and investment counseling. It is urgent to educate students and the public about the industry’s changing profile. Finally, universities might partner with accounting firms to provide more internship opportunities” (Wen et al., 2015).

## Conclusion

The accountant’s profile was investigated by different authors in aspects of this profession’s competences, psychological characteristics, and the functions they have to perform. The perception of students and practitioners on profile of accountant is presented in this article.

The analysis of the questionnaire based study results showed that both groups of respondents assessed financial accounting as the main sphere for performance of an accountant’s functions. Cash accounting and accounting of labor expenses were mentioned as the most important areas of financial accounting. Management accounting was not distinguished as a significant type of accounting for the performance of the accountant’s functions, but cost accounting and budgeting planning spheres were indicated as the most important areas of management accounting. Accounting of intellectual capital was defined as the least significant area of other activities of accounting. The results of analysis of distribution of time show, that practitioners indicate more proportion of time for communication with clients, persons of other institutions, tax agencies, and colleagues, while students suggest that more time may be spent for other activities especially for the development of qualification. Although both groups agree that, the biggest part of time goes to the main activity. The analysis of the features of the accountant’s profession let us state, that practitioners indicate all features of personal and social groups more significant to this profession than students.

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