

Is the Accounting of the Future Online?

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Abstract

The quality of accounting services is a set of dynamic characteristics, as the demands of modern technology impose the permanent creation and realization of new modern “products” with superior traits and performance on the delivery process. The evaluation of the quality of accounting services implies the appraisal of the final result, as well as of the actual delivery of the service; practically, the quality of the service cannot be separated from the activity of providing it.

Today, the difference between an average service and a high quality one is given by the efficiency with which the people from the provider’s team work together and the systems through which they deliver the service.

The relationship between entrepreneurs and accountants is inevitable, as accounting is a mandatory activity by law, but also a useful one. Providing high quality accounting services depends on the manner in which the provider and the beneficiary interact.

Key words: the quality of accounting services, provider of accounting services, online accounting

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1. Aspects regarding the quality of accounting services

In approaching quality, the starting point is, first of all, *the use value* seen as the totality of characteristics which make products and services useful to individuals and society, differentiating them on the basis of the utility/need they satisfy. The fact that the quality characteristics of products are created in the production and delivery process, allows us to take into consideration not only the quality of a product, but also the quality of a process.

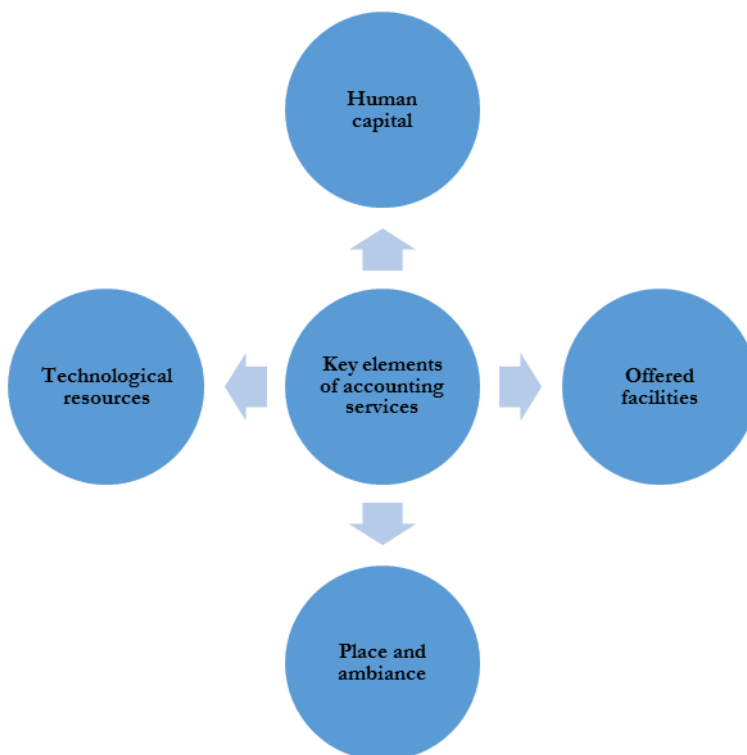
The quality of accounting services is a set of dynamic characteristics, as the demands of modern technology impose the permanent creation and realization of new modern “products” with superior traits and performance on the delivery process. The diversity of economic activities, on the one hand, and the necessity of improving the quality of the delivered services imply unitary activities, which can be grouped in a *quality spiral* as follows:

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<i>The spiral of the quality of accounting services:</i>	1. Familiarization/study of the activity of the accounting services' beneficiary
	2. Planning the provided activities
	3. Receiving the documents
	4. Verifying the documents
	5. Resolving/remediation of possible problems concerning incomplete/unclear/lack of documents etc.
	6. Actual registration in the accounting software
	7. Generating the documents
	8. Filling in and submitting the declarations
	9. Delivering the file to the beneficiary

When he or she “buys” an accounting service, the client has, apparently, too few visible elements in order to evaluate it. Upon a first glance, certain aspects seem important, such as: the place and ambiance in which the service is provided, the personnel’s behavior, the submission of the declarations in due time, the correct registration of the documents, the other benefits offered by the company. More often than not, the criteria for appraising the quality of the accounting services cannot be fully known and understood by the beneficiary, because they reside in the provider’s knowledge and the way in which the respective knowledge is made available for the beneficiary and here we refer to the legal/fiscal information that the provider puts at the beneficiary’s disposal, the manner in which the provider brings fiscal solutions for the beneficiary’s business etc. Below are presented the key elements of accounting services in a synthetic form.



The evaluation of the quality of accounting services implies the appraisal of the final result, as well as of the actual delivery of the service; practically, the quality of the service cannot be separated from the activity of providing it. The result of the service delivery represents only half of its quality, the other half being determined by the impressions accumulated by the client while the service was being provided.

The quality of accounting services is the result of the comparison between the client's expectations and the experience the client has while the services are being provided, but also of the interaction with other organisms which can appear and which have an important role regarding the set of the respective services, among which are state institutions such as the National Agency for Fiscal Administration, the Directorate General for Local Taxes etc.

Quality is defined by clients; they are the ones who ultimately appreciate the good, average or poor quality of the service. Other appraisals are irrelevant or insufficient anyway. The starting point in perceiving the quality of the service is represented by the manner in which the provider delivers the service in relation to what the consumer expects. In the case of accounting services, quality cannot be a goal in itself; it has to be based on the clients' desires and needs, but also on legal aspects.

Each employee of a service company contributes in one way or another, more or less visible, to the positive or negative perception of quality. A small number of persons may be involved while the service is being provided, but their activity also depends on the rest of the employees who do not have a direct contact with the public and who are also responsible for the delivered quality. The company's entire personnel contribute to the creation of quality and if one employee does not carry out his or her duties appropriately, then the service will be affected.

Today, the difference between an average service and a high quality one is given by the efficiency with which the people from the provider's team work together and the systems through which they deliver the service. The system through which a provider delivers the service is not always something visible, easy to recognize by the client and this is the reason why as long as the providers continue to find, for the time being, the resources to compensate the use of systems which are not well developed, then the clients will not focus their attention on this aspect. However, problems may occur when one of the irreplaceable resources, namely time, is wasted constantly by the provider in solving certain issues without the beneficiary having a significant added value.

2. The provider of accounting services

A good accountant is one that has the time to offer solutions to his or her beneficiary. The difference between a good accountant and a mediocre one is given by one thing, in most cases: the larger amount of time dedicated to the beneficiary's business instead of his or her own company data. Qualified accountants from the majority of providers of accounting services are real experts, good quality professionals, but they are too busy with processing the client's data and they have little time left to do anything else, thus creating a substantial deficit right in the area where their expertise and experience can solve many problems that entrepreneurs have to deal with. 10 extra minutes in order to respond to a question asked by the entrepreneur even during the month-end closing makes all the difference.

A good provider of accounting services is one who makes sure that the qualified accountant has the time to offer information to the client any time the entrepreneur needs it, not after the accountant has finished processing data and closed the financial month end. In this sense, it is preferable to have a provider of accounting services who permanently develops not only employees, but also internal systems in detail so that the data can be used easily.

For entrepreneurs, communication means much more than being in contact with their accountant via e-mail, phone or Whatsapp. Communication in accounting means first of all the entrepreneur's access to recent financial information which is based on accounting information.

3. Traditional accounting services vs. modern accounting services

In the paradigm of the traditional accounting services, the idea is that, best case scenario, for one month, almost two months, the entrepreneur has access to this information after the accountant closed the month end. This is the moment when an entrepreneur can send an e-mail or phone the accountant and ask for details regarding certain unpaid invoices, expenses or anything else he or she would like to know.



These are some of the problems involved by the traditional providing/delivery of accounting services. Therefore, the respective clients, the ones who outsource accounting services, have to deal with them in the absence of technology in the present accounting services: outdated information (from the previous closed month) and the impossibility to make quick decisions based on certain data which should be available, even on the mobile phone.

Thus, the following question emerges: can it be done differently? Can accounting be adapted to the needs from the business area?

The answer is affirmative only in the context of implementing modern technologies and finding solutions for the delivery of accounting services in real-time. Of course, financial accounting, the VAT registry, the monthly trial balance, the mandatory accounting records, the balance sheet, tax declarations, the submission of the remuneration documents at the Labour Inspectorate and REVISAL remain unchanged, but the processes through which they are obtained and the sets of documents they are based on can be processed and made available for the entrepreneurs in another way.

Accounting benefited from technology, accounting record programs actually making the activity of accountants easier. For example, in the USA, accountants understood many years ago (since the 1980s) that software automation can free much of their time, thus avoiding the waste of countless hours in introducing numbers in columns and giving them the opportunity to focus on services which add value to the client, such as specialized advice. However, in Europe and especially in Eastern Europe, there were certain reservations in adopting the software, as accountants were under the impression that automation was going to replace them. The truth is that in regards to online digital accounting, accountants are not replaced, but "improved"/helped with digital instruments in order for them to be able to work with many more companies. Accounting changes through digitalization and only in this way the entrepreneurs' desire to receive accounting services with added value becomes concrete reality.

Due to the manner in which accounting documents are processed, the accountant will not be able to see the present, he or she will only look back, 30 days ago at least; this is the reality of traditional accounting services. This shortcoming of traditional accounting can be surpassed by using mobile and cloud technologies and artificial intelligence that online accounting companies include in their regular accounting services.

A system which uploads fiscal documents when they are issued can generate for the entrepreneur (the services' beneficiary) different reports which reflect the financial situation in real-time: income for the current month, expenses for the current month, profit, advances/reimbursements, frozen assets, available funds, monthly balance sheet, cash flow. Such information is available for the entrepreneurs on the mobile phone or laptop and through a message system they can ask qualified accountants certain questions.

4. Conclusions

The relationship between entrepreneurs and accountants is inevitable, as accounting is a mandatory activity by law, but also a useful one. Providing high quality accounting services depends on the manner in which the provider and the beneficiary interact; building a long lasting relationship should be based on the following aspects:



- Handing over the documents in due time, according to the calendar agreed by both parties (preferably in writing);
- The documents should be complete and written correctly, but also ordered properly;
- Fast communication – on both sides;
- Respecting the accountant's instructions;
- Respecting the accountant's work schedule, but also understanding the pressure that the entrepreneur has to deal with;
- No hurry in filling in the declarations;
- Respecting the accountant's duties;
- More financial education;
- Going from compliance and traditional services to services with added value;
- Standardisation of services;
- The help of technology.

Online accounting offers a series of advantages to the beneficiary:

- ✚ Making records in real-time, not in a delayed manner;
- ✚ Offers information immediately to the beneficiary;
- ✚ The work is done in stages and the work load is not concentrated in a short period of time anymore;
- ✚ The possibility to offer certain solutions/answers to the beneficiary when the financial-accounting event takes place;
- ✚ Making decisions based on immediate and real information.

The future of accounting is online!

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