



BOOK REVIEW

Handbook of Accounting, Accountability and Governance

Edited by Garry D. Carnegie & Christopher J. Napier

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This *Handbook of Accounting, Accountability and Governance*, published in 2023, and edited by the distinguished professors Garry Carnegie and Christopher Napier, has already been the subject of at least three book reviews¹, and is fundamentally a very relevant compilation of knowledge for an international, diverse audience. Ranging from researchers, educators, practitioners, to legislators and regulators, this audience includes everyone interested in learning more about the triad accounting, accountability and governance, and its multifaceted nature.

The fundamental premise established from the very beginning by the editors is that “accounting, accountability and governance inter-relate as the three sides of a triangle. Fundamentally, *accounting performs accountability, accountability nurtures governance, governance presumes accounting*” (Carnegie & Napier, 2023, p. 1, emphasis in the original).

The *Handbook* starts with an introduction that outlines the rationale and structure of the subsequent chapters, their contents, the careful process of selection of authors conducted by the editors, and suggestions on how it can be used in teaching and research. It is a very useful starting point, which carefully sets the scene for the remaining chapters.

The *Handbook* is structured into five distinctive parts, namely:

- I. Past and present perspectives on accounting, accountability and governance;
- II. Mechanisms for accounting, accountability and governance;
- III. Accounting, accountability and governance in diverse contexts and sectors;
- IV. New perspectives on accounting, accountability and governance;
- V. What lies ahead for accounting, accountability and governance?

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Although distinctive, these five parts are interconnected and have a logical sequence. They comprise a total of 21 chapters, authored by 45 contributors, who were carefully selected, to ensure not only the quality, diversity and logical sequence of the topics, but also “a combination of gender diversity and geographical diversity, as well as, where possible, combining author teams of established and emerging scholars” (Carnegie & Napier, 2023, p. 8). As such, the *Handbook* gathers contributions from 45 authors, based in a total of 15 countries, while others derive from countries other than where they reside and work, thus reflecting “a greater cultural and language diversity than these numbers suggest on the surface” (Carnegie & Napier, 2023, p. 9).

The general aim of the *Handbook* is “to provide a comprehensive guide to the ways in which accounting, accountability and governance are interconnected” (Carnegie & Napier, 2023, p. 9), focusing “on the nature, roles, uses and impacts of accounting in its organizational and social contexts where accountability should be discharged and where the governance of an organization is expected to be effective” (Carnegie & Napier, 2023, p. 9). As such, the *Handbook* “could supplement the more technical aspects of an accounting module, and it could be used as a resource on more specialist modules focusing on governance and accountability” (Carnegie & Napier, 2023, p. 9). The reference list provided in each of the chapters is by itself a valuable tool for anyone wishing to know more of a particular topic, or to gain an understanding for new avenues of research.

On page 3 of the introduction, the editors indicate the date when it was written, by stating that “the future or what lies ahead, therefore, is cast by reference to the present (on writing in late 2021 to early September 2022)”. If necessary, this would be the confirmation of a noteworthy feature of the *Handbook* and the editors behind it – the undeniable fact that the *Handbook* cannot be dissociated, rather, it is firmly grounded on the abundant previous work its editors and authors have done, namely the more recent contributions made by Professor Carnegie and his several co-authors, accompanied by discussions on Academiaⁱⁱ. In that discussion, and the several publications commented upon by participants, the fundamental idea is that accounting must aspire to meet “its full potential in shaping a better world”, fulfilling its mission of serving the public interest (Carnegie et al., 2024). Indeed, accounting must be regarded as a multidimensional technical, social and moral practice (Carnegie et al., 2024, p. 1543).

If I had to choose the main message of the *Handbook*, I would highlight the two very important calls for readers made by the editors. First, that readers must

“understand and inculcate the perspective that accounting, accountability and governance are all necessary essentials for contributing to the effective and proper conduct of the affairs of organizations of all kinds and for taking care of, and supporting, all humans and

non-humans alike in the world, including the natural environment which sustains all of us, as well as the planet on which we are born, live and pass on” to future generations (Carnegie & Napier, 2023, p. 10).

Second, the need to align

“accounting with the fundamentally moral nature of accountability and ensure that accounting’s place in processes of accountability and systems of governance transcends a passive role of recording and measurement of allegedly objective phenomena to become an instrument that helps humanity to work actively towards shaping a better world” (Carnegie & Napier, 2023, p. 10).

These are strong reminders of the power and responsibility we all hold when teaching or using accounting in our daily lives, in an increasingly complex and challenging world.

I would like to end this review with a personal note: I first became acquainted with both editors’ research in early 2007, and I still remember that the very first academic paper I read was Carnegie & Napier (1996). Since then, I have witnessed many instances whereby professors Carnegie and Napier actively encouraged both established and emerging scholars to give their best to the projects they were involved in. This encouragement has been provided with feedback and discussions in conferences, seminars and colloquia around the globe, while at the same time leading the way into new fields of research (suggested, for example, in their more recent Carnegie & Napier, 2012). The way the *Handbook* is structured, the selection process of authors described in the introduction, the breadth of scope and logical flow that emerges from its five distinctive key parts (the sequence past-present-future), denounces a long journey in terms of thinking what accounting, accountability and governance were, are, and could or should be.

Only after a lifetime studying these matters, and reflecting on them, is someone able to structure, edit and write like this, and this is the main reason why this *Handbook* is certainly going to remain a landmark for many years to come in the vast field of accounting, accountability and governance.

Endnotes

ⁱ Listed in the references as Gibson (2024), Rombi (2024) and Szycha (2024).

ⁱⁱ The most recent of which concerning the paper “How accounting can shape a better world: framework, analysis and research agenda” (Carnegie et al., 2024) was concluded on 8 October 2024 and involved 140 participants, with views deriving from a total of 45 countries/regions. Although concluded, this discussion can still be accessed at <https://www.academia.edu/s/159592d8ff>.

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