



## EDITORIAL

# Introducing the Special Issue on “Challenges, Opportunities, and Directions in Accounting”

This special issue signals the re-birth of the *Revista de Contabilidade e Gestão*, which following the appointment of a new Editor-in-Chief and of new Associate Editors in June 2021 by the Chairwoman of *Ordem dos Contabilistas Certificados* (OCC), has been renamed as the *Accounting and Management Review*.

As earlier, the *Accounting and Management Review* seeks to be a platform between academics and practitioners in public and private sectors, fostering high quality research in accounting and management fields that enhances understanding on the nature and implications of accounting and managerial practices. With the relaunch of the journal two additional concerns related to the internationalization of authors and the scope of research, as well as the contribution of articles to the promotion of the good of society and the betterment of the world have been embraced by the new Editorial Team. In so doing there is the explicit understanding that accounting is neither a neutral device nor a mere technique, but a ubiquitous practice that shapes the moral order of world and the way that the every-day life of organizations and individuals is framed; and that the journal should not confine accounting research to any specific country or region, nor to any determined methodology or theoretical lens if it is to produce global impact and to contribute to a changing world.

Although still described by some as a mere technique and neutral tool that seeks to identify, measure, and communicate information to inform judgements and decisions by users of information (cf. AAA, 1966), accounting is being increasingly recognized as “a pervasive, enabling and disabling social phenomenon” (Carnegie et al., 2021: 67). The conceptualization that accounting is a powerful and global technology that is able to create, shape and legitimize new practices and, as such, that it holds the potential to contribute to the development of a better world and fairer society is a paramount aspect that underscore the objectives and mission set for the *Accounting and Management Review*. In this respect, the definition recently proposed by Carnegie et al. (2021: 69) that “[a]ccounting is a technical, social and moral practice concerned with the sustainable utilisation of resources and proper accountability to stakeholders to enable the flourishing of organisations, people

and nature” has proved to be especially influential in establishing the journal’s scope and vision.

Drawing on the perspective that to understand accounting phenomena in their wholeness and complexity, one must consider behavioural, organizational, institutional, and social dimensions we challenge a group of distinguished leading international accounting scholars to contribute a piece of work discussing their personal views on the role played by accounting in contemporary society, and the challenges facing accounting research in the years ahead. It is therefore with great enthusiasm that I welcome you to the first Special Issue of the *Accounting and Management Review*, with the theme of **“Challenges, Opportunities, and Directions in Accounting”**.

The Special Issue comprises seven articles, each approaching a specific aspect of concern in accounting research. In the first, entitled “Pursuing Big Issues in Covid-World Accounting Research”, Lee Parker and Indrit Troshani present their reflections on critical issues of accounting research agenda in the wake of the global Covid-19 pandemic. The authors expose their concern about the attention that structured and systematic literature reviews are granting on accounting research literature these days, and the risks associated with the “research community becoming increasingly remote from today’s great challenges and concerns of local, national and global communities outside academe” if researchers persist in their focus on bibliometric analysis and research cluster identification (Parker & Troshani, 2022: 15). As a way of helping to overcome the lack of relevance of research for solving the “wicked problems” of accounting in the new world of Covid-19, Parker and Troshani (2022: 15) provide a comprehensive discussion on the growing importance of topics related to public sector and accountability, social and environmental accountability, digital accounting and reporting, and the transitioning of organizational activity from factory floor to hybrid office. By elaborating on each of the four areas of “major governmental, business, professional and community concern” (ibid: 35), the article urges the accounting research community to undertake investigation that can fruitfully contribute to society’s responses to these challenges.

Drawing on another perspective, Alan Sangster offers in the second paper (title: “Revolutionising the Accounting Curriculum in Higher Education: A Vision of the Future”), a personal viewpoint informed by observation over the last 30 years on how technology development and changes in the business environment have impacted faculty and students’ engagement in the education process. The author looks retrospectively to the beginning of the 1980s, when he started teaching in Glasgow, until the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, to conclude that despite the development of research literature on accounting education that approaches

what graduates should be able to do when entering the accounting profession, little progress had been achieved to meet these requirements. The article provides particular emphasis to the challenges that have emerged as result of the pandemic to the accounting educators and students, as well as to the importance of developing students' understanding and critical thinking as a form of leveraging the verbal communication and inter-personal skills that employers require. Additionally, Sangster discusses the relevance of "new" topics, such as big data, data analytics, and artificial intelligence in the eyes of the accounting profession, and how accounting programs need to be redesigned in order to incorporate them.

In the next article (titled: "Global University Rankings: The Macro-Micro Contradiction in Public University Management") Garry Carnegie discusses the extent to which concerns with performance measurement in the context of New Public Management (NPM) ideology have been dominating the management of Australian public universities. Acknowledging the prevalence of multiple and global rankings (designated as "global university rankings – GURs") in the management of public universities over the last two decades, Carnegie analyses the explicit mission and vision statements of each of the 37 public universities in Australia in the 2021-2022 period. While arguing that there are societal expectations regarding the macro-contribution of public universities to serve and support society, helping to solve "wicked or super-wicked problems" (Carnegie, 2022: 79), the author claims that there has been a concentration during the past 20 years "on management by numbers", that is, on the "micro-measurement, metrics-driven approach to university management" (ibid: 79). This dichotomy is termed by the author as the "macro-micro contradiction in public university management" (ibid: 98), and attributes it in part to "a lack of appreciation and understanding generally of accounting as an influential, multi-dimensional technical, social and moral practice" (ibid: 100).

In another vein, in his paper (titled: "From Stakeholder to Rightsholder Perspectives: The UNGPs, SDGs and New Paradigms for Corporate Accountability") Ken McPhail explores how from the endorsement of the UN Guiding principles on Business & Human Rights (UNGPs) in 2011 and the subsequent publication of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a new framework based on the universal nature of human rights has emerged, and how this impacts the literature on stakeholder theory and the development of accounting research in the future. Accordingly, the move of Business and Human Rights (BHR) from periphery to centre stage in international law has triggered a fundamental question about "whether the prevailing 'Chicago School' understanding of what it means for a firm to behave efficiently and to create wealth remains the best way to theorize accounting practice" (McPhail, 2022: 114). Furthermore, the author provides a comparison between the three strands of stakeholder research, and debates how

stakeholder theory through the conceptualization of corporate responsibility beyond the rights of shareholders, extends, relates, or differs from the business and human rights perspective. In so doing he offers an outline of opportunities for new directions in accounting research.

The fifth article is written by Christopher Napier (title: “How Theorising Can Enhance Historical Accounting Research”), who examines the importance of theory and theorization in historical accounting research. Based on three frameworks for theorizing developed in the organizational literature (Langley’s (1999) “Seven Strategies for Sensemaking”; Llewellyn’s (2003) “Five Levels of Theorising”; and Mclean et al.’s (2016) “Four Conceptions of History in Organisation Studies”), this researcher offers an interesting discussion about the relevance of each of the frameworks to inform historical studies in accounting and to provide effective explanations and understandings of historical processes. While acknowledging that there are different ways of theorizing in historical accounting research, through the adoption of theory either as the input, output, or as both the input and output of the investigation process, Napier points out the benefits for the accounting historian of thinking explicitly about the role of theory in their work.

The next article is written by Zahirul Hoque under the title of “Outcome Budgets in Government Entities: Rhetoric or a Reality!”. Building upon two of his recent edited books (Hoque, 2021a, 2021b), the author presents a critical overview on NPM reforms and how deficiencies of budgetary practices in the public sector are pressuring governments to expand traditional budgeting from pure output measures to outcome measures. To this end he examines the way that outcome budgeting and the performance management framework operate in the public sectors of selected countries in both developed and developing economies. The article concludes with the examination of issues related to the difficulty in the adaptation and operation of the new outcome budgeting approach and suggestions for further studies to investigate “whether this ‘new’ paradigm shift has accrued benefits to the public sector” (Hoque, 2022: 167).

The Special Issue ends with the presentation of Niamh Brennan and Doris Merkl-Davies’ study on “Discretionary Accounting Narratives in Contemporary Corporate Reporting: Review and Framework”. The researchers adopt a preparer perspective combined with an analytical framework based on Wiedman’s (2000) three components (which they re-label as “antecedents/environment”, “characteristics/attributes”, and “consequences/impact”) to review earlier research on the discretionary accounting narrative. Recognizing that there are different streams of disclosure research (North American-style versus European-style narrative research), with each of them holding specific assumptions about the purpose of

accounting information and under distinct intellectual traditions, the authors draw on five theoretical perspectives (the economic, the psychological, the sociological, the critical, and the rhetorical and linguistic perspective) to inform their review and set an agenda for future research.

By bringing together in this Special Issue the insightful views of this group of distinguished accounting researchers, it is expected that the *Accounting and Management Review* can provide a useful overview on some of the contemporary practices of accounting and a discussion on the new directions and challenges posed to research in the area. In doing so it is aimed to contribute to the ongoing debate about the role of accounting in society and the world.

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