

Staying Relevant: How Accountants Can Thrive in a Changing Environment

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Introduction

A significant and ongoing concern in the field of accounting is the need for professionals to adapt to constant change. Such adaptability is crucial to ensure that their work and the information they provide align with current environmental, regulatory, and technological developments. Accountants must remain responsive to a range of evolving factors, including legislative amendments, shifts in accounting standards and principles, technological advancements, generational transitions in the workforce, and even unforeseen events such as natural disasters. A reluctance or failure to embrace change can render accountants obsolete, diminishing their capacity to contribute meaningful value to their organizations. To maintain relevance and competitiveness in the profession, accountants must engage in continuous skill development. This commitment to lifelong learning not only enhances their professional capabilities but also positions them as knowledgeable and valuable contributors within the industry.

Accountants must consistently be prepared to deliver high-quality services, as the accounting profession is subject to frequent and ongoing changes. Legal frameworks and accounting standards are continually evolving to adapt to dynamic global environments and to mitigate risks such as fraud committed by unethical individuals. Additionally, the emergence of new generations with advanced technological skills poses a challenge to existing professionals, potentially affecting their job security. Therefore, it is imperative for accountants to actively embrace change and continuously enhance their skills, ensuring that employers recognize their value and do not feel the need to replace them with newer talent.

The rapid advancement of technology has significantly transformed the way work is conducted, making digital tools and systems an integral part of daily operations. Accountants, therefore, must not overlook the importance of technological proficiency. Rather than passively reacting

to change, they should proactively embrace change to remain effective and competitive in their roles.

To address the ongoing need for accountants to adapt to change, it is essential that they remain up to date with evolving laws, regulations, and standards, continuously upgrade their skills and knowledge, and invest in as well as leverage current technology. These measures are crucial to ensure that accountants remain relevant, competitive, and capable of providing high-quality services in a dynamic professional environment.

Keeping Up with Laws, Regulations, and Standards

Accountants must maintain a strong awareness of real-world developments, particularly changes in laws, regulations, and accounting standards. Staying informed ensures that they remain aligned with industry expectations and avoid lagging in compliance or performance compared to peers. For example, in 2024, several modifications were introduced in the Malaysian Financial Reporting Standards (MFRS), applicable to companies with financial year-ends on 31 December 2024. These changes include revisions to MFRS 101 Presentation of Financial Statements, which now offers clearer guidance on the classification of current and non-current liabilities, especially those with covenant agreements. MFRS 107 Statement of Cash Flows and MFRS 7 Financial Instruments: Disclosures now require more detailed disclosures regarding supplier finance arrangements (SFA), aimed at improving transparency for investors. Additionally, MFRS 16 Leases has been amended in relation to the accounting treatment of sale and leaseback transactions post-completion (PricewaterhouseCoopers [PwC], 2024).

One effective way for accountants to remain informed about such updates is through professional networking. Attending workshops, seminars, and continuing professional development (CPD) courses organized by regulatory bodies such as the Inland Revenue Board of Malaysia (IRBM), the Malaysian Accounting Standards Board (MASB), and international organizations such as the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) and the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) can be particularly beneficial. These organizations often disseminate updates through their official websites and social media platforms. In today's digital era, access to such information is more convenient than ever, making it imperative for accountants to utilize available resources to remain professionally current and competent. Accountants must remain vigilant and well-informed regarding all amendments to laws, regulations, and accounting standards to ensure the correct and accurate application of accounting treatments, both for their organizations and for clients. In situations where accountants lack the necessary knowledge or expertise in a particular area of change, they should proactively communicate with top management to explore initiatives that can support the enhancement of their work processes. Furthermore, clients must also be informed of relevant regulatory changes to prevent confusion or concern when deviations from previously established norms occur. A pertinent example of such a change is the introduction of the e-invoice tax law in Malaysia. This reform is a significant step towards ensuring tax compliance and preventing individuals from evading tax obligations. According to Liew Chin Tong, the Deputy Minister of Investment, Trade and Industry, only 15% of Malaysians currently earn enough to be eligible for income tax. He further targeted increasing the number of taxpayers to 60% in the future (The Edge Malaysia, 2024).

In general, most laws, regulations, and standards are mandatory for all businesses unless specific exemptions or conditions apply. Regulatory authorities closely monitor business

operations to ensure compliance. Failure by accountants to remain up to date, particularly with government-implemented changes, can disrupt the accounting process and results in non-compliance. Such lapses could result in serious consequences, including financial penalties or even suspension of the business's operating license. Therefore, a proactive approach to staying informed is critical in safeguarding both the integrity of the accounting profession and the legal standing of the business.

Ongoing Skill and Knowledge Development

The emergence of new and younger generations entering the workforce has intensified the need for existing accountants to adapt and continuously upgrade their skills and knowledge. To remain competitive and relevant in the industry, it is imperative that accountants actively pursue professional development and stay abreast of evolving industry demands. As accounting practices and required competencies evolve, skill development becomes a critical factor in ensuring that experienced accountants can compete with newer entrants, who often possess up-to-date knowledge and are well-versed in the latest tools, technologies, and methodologies. Employers today place significant emphasis on hiring individuals with current and advanced skills, making it essential for existing professionals to regularly update their competencies. According to recent studies, approximately 80% of accounting and financial managers are concerned about retaining skilled employees (Beaver, 2024). One of the most effective ways for accountants to enhance their expertise is through participation in structured training programs. Training not only helps improve practical skills but also enables professionals to acquire new knowledge that complements and reinforces their existing capabilities. In this regard, continuous learning is a key pillar of professional longevity and relevance.

According to the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) 2024 industry insight, there are four core areas in which accountants should focus their development: technical knowledge, business acumen, behavioural proficiency, and ethical and professional standards.

1. Technical knowledge involves delivering high-quality financial disclosures, which enhances transparency, improves client satisfaction, and builds investor confidence.
2. Business acumen requires accountants to engage in strategic thinking by assessing risks, identifying opportunities, understanding business challenges, and considering the long-term impact of decisions on organizational performance.
3. Behavioural proficiency includes strong communication, collaboration, and analytical skills, essential for maintaining effective internal relationships and engaging productively with external stakeholders.
4. Ethical and professional standards refer to the ability to uphold ethical values while delivering quality work, identifying potential ethical threats, and prioritizing public interest.

By actively developing in these areas, experienced accountants can establish themselves as valuable assets within their organizations. This proactive approach reduces the threat posed by younger competitors and demonstrates their continued relevance and commitment to excellence. In turn, employers are more likely to retain such individuals, recognizing their expertise, adaptability, and professional integrity. While upgrading their current skills and expertise, accountants must concurrently uphold the five fundamental principles of ethics as

outlined in the Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants. These principles integrity, objectivity, professional competence and due care, confidentiality, and professional behaviour serve as essential guidelines in the execution of professional responsibilities. Adherence to these ethical standards is critical in maintaining trust, avoiding conflicts of interest, and preventing unethical conduct such as fraud and corruption. It is imperative that accountants do not misuse their enhanced knowledge, skills, or expertise for personal gain or unethical purposes. Instead, they should apply their competencies responsibly and in a manner that aligns with the public interest, supports organizational integrity, and reinforces the credibility of the accounting profession.

Investing in and Embracing Technology

In the rapidly evolving landscape of accounting, it is essential for accountants to remain vigilant and responsive to technological advancements. By staying informed about emerging technologies and engaging in continuous dialogue with upper management, accountants can advocate for strategic investments in tools that enhance operational efficiency and decision-making processes. To effectively influence organizational decision-makers, accountants must present well-researched proposals, supported by relevant data and cost-benefit analyses.

Modern technologies such as Big Data analytics, Blockchain, and Database Management Systems (DBMS) offer significant advantages for the accounting profession. For example, the implementation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) allows for the automation of repetitive and time-consuming tasks, which not only saves time but also enhances accuracy. This enables accountants to allocate more time to value-added activities, such as client engagement and strategic advisory roles. Investing in contemporary technology also contributes to cost reduction and data security. Advanced systems are designed with robust security features to protect confidential information, thereby strengthening client trust and organizational reputation. Furthermore, technology enhances data presentation, facilitates comprehensive analysis, and streamlines record-keeping processes (Innovation, 2024). These improvements result in more informed decision-making and greater satisfaction among clients, increasing the perceived value of accountants within the organization. The integration of new software solutions can also facilitate the accurate handling of complex tax matters, ensuring ease of access to records and greater overall efficiency (Beaver, 2024). Real-time reporting is another crucial benefit of adopting new technologies. The ability to produce up-to-date financial and non-financial data allows clients to make more accurate and timely decisions. Conversely, reliance on outdated reporting tools may hinder strategic planning and lead to poor financial outcomes.

From a competitive standpoint, organizations that embrace technological advancements are more likely to distinguish themselves in the marketplace. The use of cutting-edge technology not only improves internal processes but also attracts potential clients who prioritize data security, accuracy, and efficiency. Accountants must be proactive in learning how to use these technologies through online resources, formal training programs, or collaboration with Information Technology (IT) experts. Such collaboration ensures a smoother transition and greater integration of technological tools into daily accounting functions.

Finally, it is important to dispel the misconception that technology will render accountants obsolete. Rather, the purpose of these advancements is to enhance the role of accountants by minimizing human error, improving data handling, and enabling higher-level analytical work (Innovation, 2024). Demonstrating openness to change, confidence in adopting new systems,

and a willingness to continuously improve can position accountants as indispensable assets to their organizations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, accountants must be fully equipped, both mentally and professionally, to adapt to the continuous changes occurring in the fields of laws, regulations, standards, technologies, and knowledge. Remaining up to date is essential for delivering high-quality, accurate, and timely financial information to clients. These changes are not arbitrary but are implemented to enhance the quality of accounting work, reduce instances of fraud, increase data accuracy, alleviate the burden on accounting professionals, and improve overall client satisfaction. The necessity for accountants to embrace change is also crucial for maintaining their relevance in a highly competitive and evolving industry. Acquiring and updating knowledge and skills is not solely for job retention, but also for upholding the professional standards of the field and contributing meaningfully to organizational success. Failure to remain current, particularly with regulatory requirements, may result in legal penalties and reputational damage for businesses.

Technology plays a critical role in modern accounting by saving time, increasing operational efficiency, and ensuring that organizations provide real-time and reliable information to clients. Access to the most up-to-date data is vital for stakeholders to make informed and strategic decisions. In this regard, accountants should embrace change and view it as an opportunity for personal and professional growth. Support from top management is also critical in fostering a positive environment for continuous learning and improvement. Ultimately, change should be perceived not as a challenge, but as a strategic advantage, one that drives both individual development and business innovation. Embracing change today ensures future readiness and resilience.

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