

## Profiles. The way MA students perceive professional accountants and managers

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**Abstract:** Nowadays, the accountant's and business manager's image in society is an increasingly debated subject in the literature. The existing stereotypes in accounting developed in relation with the national context affect the students' attitude towards accounting (Albu *et al.*, 2012). This study aimed to design the profiles of professional accountants and managers in the perception of 106 MA students. We used the questionnaire and the projective research techniques. The exploratory factor analysis, revealed three distinct profiles of accountants: liberal and independent, statutory and advisor professional accountant, and two profiles of managers: confident and conservative. Only the profile of statutory professional accountant is explained by experience and education and there is a positive correlation between the scale of professional judgment and this profile. We found that the higher the score for statutory professional accountant the stronger the opinion that the correctness of professional judgment is reflected in a relevant information. The association done by the MA students with a book fits the greatest extent to the liberal and independent accountant and for the MA students who supported the confident manager profile, the association is largely congenial with a color.

**Keywords:** accountant, manager, MA students, association technique, judgment and decision making

**JEL codes:** M41, A14, Z13

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## **1. Introduction**

This study has as theoretical foundation the research of previous studies conducted on students or professional accountants on the professional accounting judgment or the professional accounting career and previous theoretical and empirical research that refer to projective research techniques. Although, as Albu *et al.* (2011b) highlighted there are several studies on the image of accountants conducted in different countries, using various methodologies and describing how accountants are perceived only few studies allow a full understanding of how these professionals are perceived. If studies conducted by Smith and Briggs (1999), Hunt *et al.* (2004) analysed the traditional stereotype of accountants, in which their image is the one of bean counter, others made by Jeacle (2008), Wells (2010) have emphasized the main factors that influenced changes in the image of professional accountants overtime.

Studies by Bonner (1990), Bonner and Lewis (1990), Hogarth (1991), Frederick (1991), Bonner (1999), Gibbins and Jamal (1993), Libby and Luft (1993), Xiling Dai (2010) Schiller (2013), Yufang Qi (2014), analyzed the process of logic judgments resulting in the exercise of a professional reasoning or the accounting decisions and they either expressed their opinions on the performance measurement in the exercise of judgment and decision making process, or investigated the cognitive processes conducted by accountants, analyzing the way the latter think or have proposed to delimit the components of professional accounting judgment. Bogdan *et al.* (2015a,b) tested possible correlations between the professional accounting judgment and the endogenous human variables that are represented by different personality traits: risk and loss aversion, decision-making autonomy, incentives and motivation, optimism, etc. These approaches started from the definition and delimitation of the structures of theoretical framework of the professional accounting judgment identified in ICAS (2010, 2012), KPMG (2011), CICPA (2015) and we emphasized the importance of such a theoretical framework.

Khanna and Khanna (2015) demonstrated in their study that the most important skills for a professional accountant is decision-making followed by strategic planning and information technology and the essential qualities of an accountant are acquired through experience. Taking into account all these, our intention in this experimental study was that, based on the investigation of the perception of economics master students on the professional accounting judgment and the interest pursued by managers in their accounting choices to outline a profile of the professional accountant and of the manager additionally using the projective research techniques. The projective research techniques were first known by their applicability in the field of psychological tests and studies. Gradually, they were imported by researchers in their studies conducted in various fields such as market research and market surveys, essentially aiming the interpretation of consumer

behavior. The presumption from which we started in conducting our study is that, despite the high degree of subjectivity that is assigned to these research and investigation techniques, they deserve to be applied in accounting, too due to a new perspective that can reveal the behavior and the attitude of the financial and accounting information users.

The study is based on the interpretation and grouping of information obtained and collected from the application of a questionnaire. The main objective consists in shaping the profiles mentioned according to the MA students investigated and testing the correlations between the average score of professional accounting judgment and the profiles resulted from the statistical interpretation of the responses to questions. In the last part of our research we used the technique of association among projective research techniques to understand the way in which the MA students perceive the professional accountant and the managers and we formulate findings and limitations of our study. We consider that our study adds value to the existing domestic accounting literature on the topic (Albu *et al.*, 2011a, 2011b; 2012; Bunea *et al.*, 2013; Faragalla, 2013; Cernusca & Balaciu, 2015; etc.) by bringing new perspectives and insights for the analysis of stereotypes in accounting, highlighting issues related to professional judgment.

## **2. Background of the study**

### **2.1 Previous works conducted on students in respect to accounting profession and decisions**

Analyzing similar studies conducted on students, we noticed that investigating the determinants of the Malaysian accounting students' preference to practice as professional (chartered) accountant, Nahariah *et al.* (2015) showed that environmental factors, people related factors and behaviour capability have significant effects on their preference to practice as a professional accountant but demographic factors have no effect on their preference to practice as chartered accountant.

Another perspective on accounting career related issues we found in Khanna and Khanna (2015). The mentioned authors examined in their study whether there is any significant difference in the students' perception of accounting career caused by cultural differences as differentiated by gender. Khanna and Khanna (2015) obtained results do not show any significant difference between male and female students perception in accounting career choice and revealed that self-confidence, self-motivation and qualification are the factors perceived to be very important in the chosen career.

Ghani *et al.* (2008) examining the perception of public universities students on the accounting career in Malaysia proved that more students prefer to become a public accountant rather than holding a management post. Also, Ghani *et al.* (2008) showed that students obtained their career exposure mostly from the professional accounting bodies and the factors perceived to be most important in an accounting profession are work performance and self-confidence, essential qualities of an accountant being acquired through education. Swain and Olsen (2012) carried out a longitudinal study aimed to examine both the accounting education decision and the decision to pursue and remain with an accounting career. This study provided insights into how factors like attitude, intent and performance in the introductory accounting classroom are influenced by personality traits. They have found (Swain & Olsen, 2012) that Intuitors have a less positive attitude towards accounting or intent to major in accounting as compared to Sensors and Perceivers do not perform as well as Judgers in the introductory accounting class.

Dalton *et al.* (2014) conducted two surveys to investigate the relevant factors of the audit-tax decision from the perspectives of upper-division accounting students and experienced public accounting professionals. Dalton *et al.* (2014) highlighted that accounting students who plan to pursue careers in audit believe that they will have more client interaction, better future job opportunities and greater knowledge of business processes if they work in audit, as opposed to tax, while, in contrast, accounting students who plan to pursue careers in tax, perceive that they will have a more stable daily routine, develop more specialized skills, and build more collaborative client relationships if they work in tax, as opposed to audit.

Bagley *et al.* (2012) were interested in the factors that influence accountants' decisions to seek careers with different types of firms, Big 4 versus Non Big 4, accounting firms. The authors have surveyed accounting students and found out that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral factors, control each influence firm-choice decisions and they surveyed accounting professionals from Big 4 and non-Big 4 accounting firms. Bagley *et al.* (2012) found out that, overall, students' perceptions, while more limited, are similar to those of accounting professionals.

In terms of Romanian research in the field we observed that some research studies conducted by Albu *et al.* (2012), Diaconu (2008), Muşiu and Tiron (2009), Fărcaş and Tiron (2012) have focused on the possibilities for improvement of accounting education in the national universities while other studies have oriented towards the analyze of the perception of the image of the accountants or the accounting profession (Bunea *et al.*, 2013; Faragalla, 2015; Cernuşca & Balaciu, 2015; Chelariu, 2015; Albu *et al.*, 2011b).

## 2.2 Previous works that involve projective research techniques

According to Porr *et al.* (2011), projective techniques are strategies used to access presumably hidden content and emotions using visual stimuli and imagery. The authors (Porr *et al.*, 2011) emphasize that these techniques facilitate expression of internal content that is often subconscious or difficult to articulate by circumventing cognition, rational thought, and normative responses. Boddy, Bond and Ramsey (2011) believe that “projection”, basically relates to how unconscious and often suppressed beliefs can be transferred/projected on to external objects. After, Boddy *et al.* (2011) projection can be seen as a cornerstone of much current management theory.

A similar view is that of Branthwaite (2002), who believes that projective techniques are predicated on the assumption that a person will cast his or her unfiltered (perhaps socially unacceptable) perceptions, feelings, and desires onto neutral or ambiguous images. Regarding the usefulness of projective techniques in education research, Catterall and Ibbotson (2000) consider that they are unusual and often intriguing for respondents to complete, permitting them to express thoughts and feelings which can be difficult to access by direct and structured questioning. In their view, projective techniques can be fun and engaging for respondents, especially when they become involved in their analysis and interpretation. A more skeptical approach on these techniques we find at Lilienfeld *et al.* (2000). They dispute the scientific status of projective techniques used in psychology noting that controversy has been no stranger to the field of personality assessment and no issue in this field has been more controversial than the scientific status of projective techniques. As respects the evidence of usefulness, reliability and validity of projective techniques in market research, Boddy (2005) highlighted that projective techniques are often used in market research to help uncover findings in areas where those researched are thought to be reluctant or unable to expose their thoughts and feelings via more straightforward questioning techniques.

Analyzing the use of projective techniques in market research we found out that a commonly used completion technique in qualitative market research is “bubble drawing” (Gordon & Langmaid, 1990; Will *et al.*, 1996). According to Tucker-Ladd (2001), “bubble drawing” is a technique based on a test in which clinical psychologists use a series of standard pictures and ask subjects to make up stories about them and believes that what people see in the pictures says something about themselves and thus reveals their personality. For instance, a bubble drawing was used by researcher, as Boddy (2004) noted, to uncover students’ underlying attitudes towards the delivery of a lecture on marketing research rather than to uncover any deeper aspects of their own personalities. As respects the reliability issues of projective techniques in market research, Hussey and Duncombe (1999)

identified that each researcher brings his or her own subjective style to the interpretation of projective findings and recognized this as a fallibility of the method while Catterall and Ibbotson (2000) find considerable consistency in the responses obtained from using projective techniques but less consistency in the interpretation of such responses. According to Boddy (2005), validity is taken to refer to how well a piece of research actually measures what it sets out to measure or how well it reflects the reality it claims to represent. Lilienfeld *et al.* (2000) pointed out that as in psychology there are criticisms of the reliability of projective techniques it is pertinent to ask ourselves about the status of these techniques in market research.

Studies conducted by Cooper and Tower (1992), Sykes (1990), showed that projective techniques encourage consumers to express their private and unconscious beliefs and feelings by talking about other people rather than themselves and also encourage emotional reactions as well as rational ones. As regard the analysis of the results of projective techniques at an aggregate level, applied in market research, Boddy (2005; 2004) and Gordon and Langmaid (1990), highlighted that the data are reportedly analyzed as a combination of qualitative or quantitative content analysis (Zober 1955; Levy 1994; Hussey & Duncombe 1999), grounded theory-type approach (Glaser 2001; 2003) and reflection, conceptualization, linking and reassessment of the data take place (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 1991).

From our point of view an interesting study is that of Vlahovic and Dressayre (2015) which expose a new method of data collection based on a game of cards. The method enables conducting the research on the perceptions of the employees concerning the competencies framework and helps the researcher to identify the decision making and priorities of the employees. The method is not usually used in HR management research but provides new insights and perspectives in understanding the mental interpretations of people.

### **3. Methodology of the study**

Our study was conducted with the help of MA economic students of University of Oradea. In Libby and Rennekamp (2012), Libby *et al.* (2002) we found out that students can be used as participants when their knowledge is sufficient for the task. Thus, we selected for our study only MA students who have accumulated sufficient theoretical and practical knowledge in the field of accounting in order to rule on professional accounting judgment. Moreover, the subjects investigated are largely interested in pursuing a professional career in accounting and / or financial audit. We used a questionnaire to investigate the perceptions of MA students on human

endogenous variables that influence the professional accounting judgment and accounting decisions. The questionnaire contains:

- 7 general questions aimed at gathering information on the educational and professional status of MA students, their age, gender, satisfaction with the salary, for those who have a job;
- 12 questions relating to the professional accounting judgment - factors influencing its exercise, the existence of a theoretical framework regarding the exercise of an appropriate, professional and quality reasoning, the traits of professional judgment, and accounting policies;
- 8 questions investigating individual personality traits;
- 2 questions that are based on projective research techniques, in this case the technique of association was used.

The subjects investigated have been selected based on their academic curriculum namely, the existence and covering of accounting disciplines forming professional and transversal skills on the subject of professional accounting judgment and the choice of accounting policies. A number of 106 students attended of which: 82 AABM (Accounting, Audit and Business Management) students and 24 FBI (Finance, Banks and Insurance) students.

The questionnaire contains mostly closed questions and a few open questions. For most questions the Likert scale was used with 5 response categories. For the questions targeting the association technique it was asked the association of the portrait of a professional accountant, and then of the company manager with a picture. 10 images were mentioned, the same, for the association of the portrait of the professional accountant and of the manager, and it was asked to select only one response. Thus, a respondent had to check a single image for the accountant and one image for the manager considering the appropriate options.

We used in the study the association technique. We found this research technique the most appropriate taking into account that Linzey (1959) identified and developed five different categories of projective techniques based on the type of responses they elicit. We describe in the table below these types of projective techniques in a short presentation:

**Table 1. The major types of projective techniques**

Type of projective technique	A brief description	Representative authors
1. Associative techniques	An assortment of stimuli are presented to draw out an individual's immediate thought, so respondents are asked to respond to a stimulus with the first thing that comes to mind. Word association is the most frequently used associative	Porr <i>et al.</i> (2011), Gordon and Langmaid (1988), Burns and Lennon (1993), Green (1984), Catterall and Ibbotson (2000)

Type of projective technique	A brief description	Representative authors
2. Construction techniques	<p>technique and is especially useful for identifying respondents' vocabulary. This can be useful in discovering a brand image or product attributes. With the pictures and words technique, the subjects are given a number of words and pictures and are asked to choose those they associate with a brand or product and to explain their choice. This allows the researcher to discover the more emotional responses to brands and imagery.</p> <p>Individuals are asked to compose a story, to mould a sculpture or to paint a picture. Are loosely based on the clinical Thematic Apperception Test. They encourage the expression of imagination and creativity. For instance, respondents can be asked to draw their own picture. The construction procedure require more complex and controlled intellectual activity on the part of the subject. In some cases one or more persons can be depicted in ambiguous situations and the subjects are asked to describe or assume the role of one of these people and they have to tell what this person is thinking, saying and doing.</p>	<p>Burns and Lennon (1993), Churchill (1991), Porr <i>et al.</i> (2011), Gordon and Langmaid (1988), Catterall and Ibbotson (2000), Mick <i>et al.</i> (1992), Sherry <i>et al.</i> (1993), Matthews (1996)</p>
3. Completion techniques	<p>Individuals are expected to complete a sentence or finish a drawing. These techniques generate less complex and elaborate data than construction techniques, but they demand less from respondents as the stimulus material has more structure. Sentence completion is useful when time is limited but depth of feeling still has to be tapped. For instance, brand mapping is a completion technique for which a variety of competing brands are displayed and subjects are asked to group these brands according to some stipulated characteristics. Brand mapping may be used in new product development and as a way to gain an understanding of how subjects view a product market.</p>	<p>Gordon and Langmaid (1988), Burns and Lennon (1993), Green (1984), Porr <i>et al.</i> (2011), Catterall and Ibbotson (2000)</p>
4. Choice or ordering techniques	<p>Individuals are asked to rank group of pictures or sentences. Respondents select one from a list of alternatives or arrange pictures or</p>	<p>Mostyn (1978), Burns and Lennon (1993), Gordon and Langmaid</p>



<b>Type of projective technique</b>	<b>A brief description</b>	<b>Representative authors</b>
	statements, into some order, or group them into categories according to their similarities and dissimilarities. This technique is frequently used in quantitative research. In market research a variety of different brands within a product category are presented to consumers and asked them to place the items into groups. Often consumers will place certain brands product together in ways that were not envisaged by their brand development and management teams.	(1988), Porr <i>et al.</i> (2011), Catterall and Ibbotson (2000)
5. Expressive techniques	Individuals are directed to respond to a given stimulus through self-expression such as role playing, drama, dance, playing games, etc. Respondents might be asked to prepare and act out a mini play where the characters are, for example, the computer, the software and a new user. It is good to know that role plays are best undertaken when respondents know and are comfortable with each other and the researcher. Expressive techniques focus on the manner in which the subject constructs something, rather than on what it represents.	Burns and Lennon (1993), Gordon and Langmaid (1988), Porr <i>et al.</i> (2011), Catterall and Ibbotson (2000), Lannon and Cooper (1983) Vlahovic and Dressayre (2015)

As Catterall and Ibbotson (2000) observed projective techniques are sufficiently versatile to be employed within a wide range of research strategies and applications. For example, word association, sentence completion and bubble cartoons can be incorporated into interviewer administered or self-completion questionnaires (Oppenheim, 1992) while other techniques such as story telling or personification techniques are more appropriately employed in class discussions or focus group. Donoghue (2000) highlighted that validity refers to the degree in which the technique measures what it is supposed to measure and the purpose of projective techniques is to get below the surface of the underlying need value system of the individual (Kassarjan, 1974). On the other hand, Webb (1992) believes that these techniques are useful in the exploratory stage of a research project, when ideas and hypotheses are required. Also, Kassarjan (1974) questions the external validity of projective techniques when the marketing or consumer researcher has to generalize from a small and perhaps unrepresentative sample to a population of potential users or buyers. Combining projective techniques with informal interviewing will enhance their value (Donoghue, 2000).

Thus, we believe it is justified the controversial perspective of the use of projective techniques in market research, or in research in general, nevertheless we think that this trait do not diminish their intrinsic value.

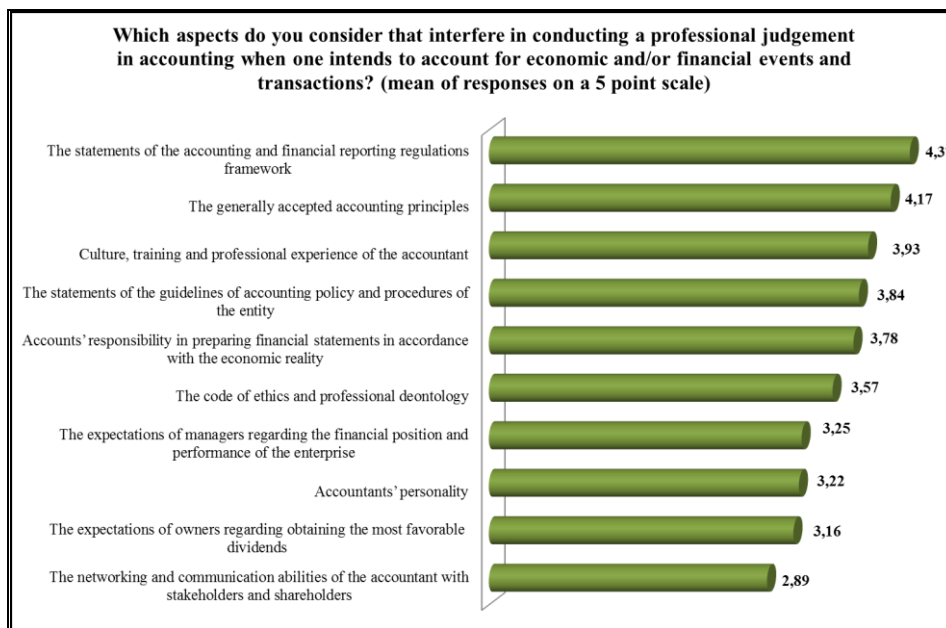
The objectives of the present study are:

- to portray the profile of the professional accountant according to the perception of MA students investigated;
- to portray the profile of the manager from the behavior perspective in the selection and implementation of accounting policies;
- to compare the profiles and test the existence of correlations;
- to test the correlations between the theoretical framework of the professional accounting judgment and the profiles mentioned;
- to interpret the results obtained using the association technique

## 4. Profiles

Regarding the profiles of managers and accountants several aspects were investigated based on various questions available.

### 4.1. Accountant profile based on statistical analysis of the answers to the investigation conducted on MA students



**Figure 1. Mean responses of students regarding the aspects considered in making an accounting judgment**

As we can observe in Figure 1, students have a correct view of the factors intervening in making accounting, as all listed aspects received an average above 2.5 - the mean of the scale. More, the most important aspects are related to the regulations and principles in accounting, and the least important are the relations with share and stakeholders.

Based on these responses we have conducted an exploratory factor analysis in order to identify the dimensionality of these responses, as the items could not be grouped as on a scale. Consequently we identify groups of answers and profiles of opinions of students based on these perceptions of the factors interfering in making a professional judgement in accounting. As it can be seen in table no 2, our analysis revealed the existence of three distinct profiles or views on types of accountants: *the liberal and independent professional accountant*, the *statutory professional accountant* who aims with maximum responsibility at the compliance with the legal accounting and financial reporting framework, the *advisor professional accountant* to the managers and owners of the company in order to develop the business' activity and improve its performance.

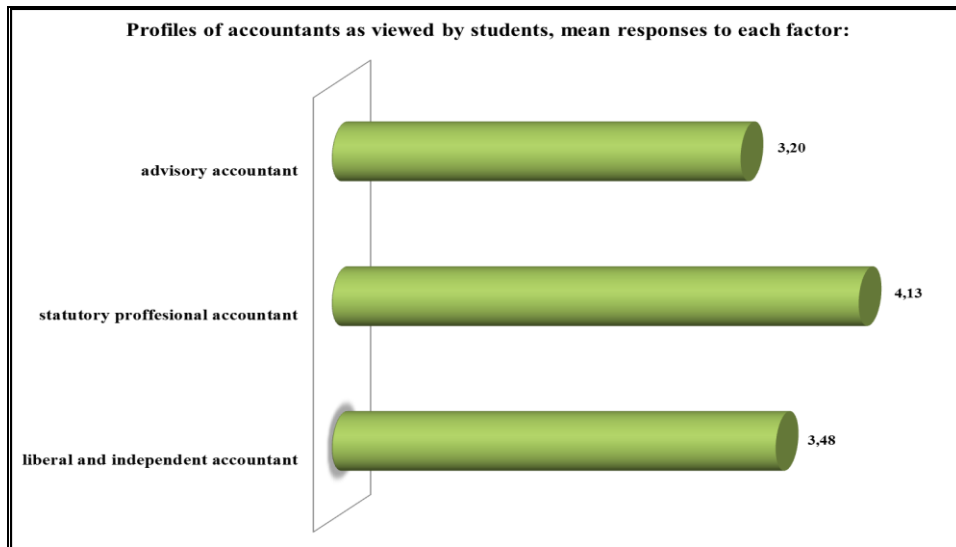
**Table 2. Factor analysis results, rotated component Matrix**

<b>Which aspects do you consider that interfere in conducting a professional judgment in accounting when choosing an accounting treatment for economic and/or financial events and transactions?</b>	Component		
	1	2	3
Accountants' personality	<b>0.608</b>	0.096	0.357
Culture, training and professional experience of the accountant	<b>0.601</b>	-0.118	-0.041
Code of ethics and professional deontology	<b>0.652</b>	0.327	-0.024
Networking and communication abilities of the accountant with stakeholders and shareholders	<b>0.750</b>	0.054	0.094
Accountants' responsibility in preparing financial statements in accordance with the economic reality	<b>0.621</b>	-0.403	-0.076
The statements of the accounting and financial reporting regulations framework	0.126	<b>0.807</b>	-0.227
Generally accepted accounting principles	-0.137	<b>0.636</b>	-0.123
The statements of the guidelines of accounting policy and procedures of the entity	0.060	<b>0.686</b>	0.057
Owners expectations regarding the most favorable obtained dividends	-0.157	-0.100	<b>0.823</b>
Managers expectations regarding the financial position and performance of the enterprise	0.287	-0.135	<b>0.760</b>

*Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.*

*Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.*

In order to better understand these profiles we have saved and used the factor scores for further analysis (DiStefano *et al.*, 2009). We have computed new variables based on the factor loading of these items, based on average scores at individual items. Consequently the three resulted items reflect each of the views on accountants, the higher score from one response to one of these three factor scores indicates that the respondent agrees with that particular profile. As presented in Figure 2, the average score of the second factor is the highest, indicating that students support the view of the professional accountant, which bases his or her decisions on rules, regulations and principles. The support for the liberal and independent professional accountant is moderate, while the least support is given to the advisory professional accountant.



**Figure 2. Mean responses of students regarding the profiles of accountants based on the factor analysis of the aspects considered in making an accounting judgment**

In order to understand these responses we investigated the covariates of each of the three profiles, assuming that the view on the professional accountant is influenced by work experience, educational field and environmental variables.

Solely the profile of the statutory professional accountant is explained by experience and education. There was a significant difference as students who worked in accounting ( $M=4.20$ ,  $SD=0.487$ ) had a significantly higher agreement for the statutory professional accountant than those who did not ( $M=4.01$ ,  $SD=0.454$ );  $t(104)=-2.023$ ,  $p=0.04$ . Surprisingly, students in finance ( $M=4.28$ ,  $SD=0.32$ ) also had a significantly higher support for the statutory professional accountant than students in accounting ( $M=4.08$ ,  $SD=0.50$ );  $t(55.702)=2.396$ ,  $p=0.02$ . The profile of the liberal and independent accountant is supported by women, as there mean score for women ( $M=3.52$ ,  $SD= 0.55$ ) is significantly higher than the one for men ( $M=3.24$ ,  $SD=0.54$ );  $t(104)=-2.057$ ,  $p=0.042$ .

Regarding the relation between these profiles and the other attitudinal variables in our analysis we could highlight a significant relationship between the second and third profiles and the scale of professional judgment in accounting (a computed variable based on four statements regarding the factors to be considered in making an adequate professional accounting judgment). The professional accounting judgment framework score was computed as the mean responses to the four items scale. The measurement was performed based on the analysis of distribution of the answers regarding the information collection and interpretation, the conceptual framework of the professional judgment, the proper assessment of economic and transaction events and the documentation of these.

There is a positive correlation between the scale of professional judgment in accounting and the second profile of accountant ( $p=0.359$ ,  $sig.=.000$ ), meaning that the better the professional judgment, the more the respondent views the accountant as statutory (following rules, regulations and principles). More, there is a negative correlation between the professional judgment in accounting and the third profile of accountant – the advisor ( $p=-0.197$ ,  $sig.=.046$ ), signifying that the poorer the professional judgment in accounting, the more the respondent views the accountant as an advisor for the management. None of the profiles are related with the attitude in uncertain circumstances and risk management, nor with creativity.

#### 4.2 Manager profile based on statistical analysis of the answers to the investigation conducted on MA students

The questions for managers referred to their attitude regarding the purpose of choosing and implementing accounting policies.

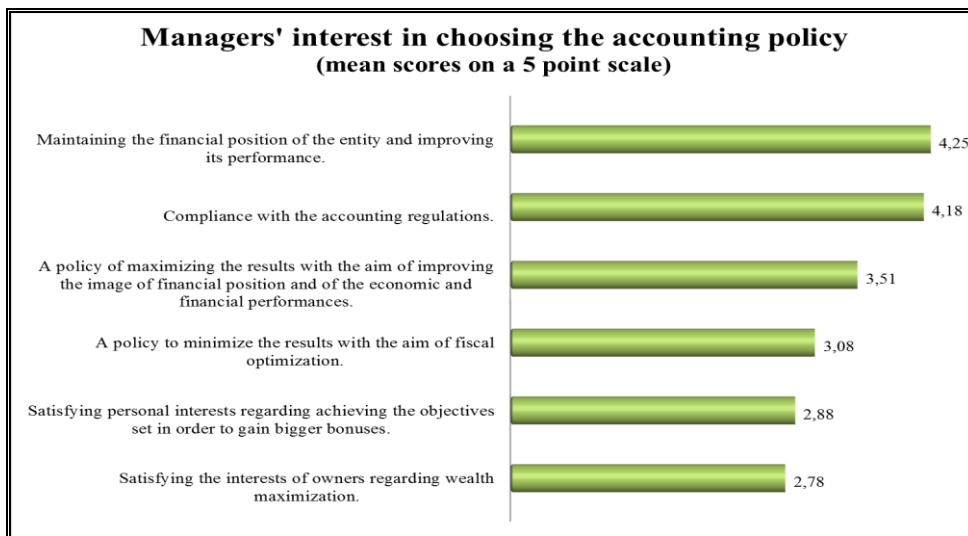


Figure 3. Mean responses of students regarding their opinion of manager’s interests regarding the accounting policies

**Profiles. The way MA students perceive professional accountants and managers**

As shown in the figure above, the perception of MA economic students investigated is one that reflects the reality in the current Romanian accounting practice. Thus, the majority of company managers are primarily interested in choosing and implementing accounting policies, maintaining the entity's financial position, improving its performance and compliance with the accounting regulatory framework. Moreover, from the result of factor analysis, presented below the following manager profiles according to the perception of the investigated subjects can be drawn:

- the confident manager (independent, optimistic and flexible), and
- the conservative manager (which aims the strict framing within accounting and tax rules, pessimistic and rigid).

**Table 3. Factor analysis results, rotated component Matrix**

<b>Managers' interest in choosing the accounting policy</b>	Component	
	1	2
A policy of maximizing the results with the aim of improving the image of financial position and of the economic and financial performances	<b>0.357</b>	0.147
Satisfying personal interests regarding achieving the objectives set in order to gain bigger bonuses	<b>0.834</b>	-0.113
Satisfying the interests of owners regarding wealth maximization	<b>0.858</b>	0.078
A policy to minimize the results with the aim of fiscal optimization	0.090	<b>-0.795</b>
Maintaining the financial position of the entity and improving its performance	0.340	<b>0.509</b>
Compliance with the accounting regulations	-0.243	<b>0.524</b>

*Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.  
a. 2 components extracted.*

We intend to further compare the profiles resulting from the analyses conducted. Thus, the three accountant profiles have been put face to face with the two manager profiles and possible correlations have been tested.

**Table 4. Contoured profiles after collecting the answers and their interpretation**

<b>Profiles</b>	
Professional accountant	Manager
Liberal and independent accountant	Confident manager (independent, optimistic and flexible)
Statutory professional accountant	Conservative manager (conformist, pessimistic and rigid)
Advisory accountant	

The obtained results show that students' viewing the accountant as liberal and independent, also view the manager as confident (independent, optimistic and flexible;  $p=0.220$ ,  $sig = .0240$ ). No other statistically significant relations could be established between the profiles of managers and accountants. There are no significant relations between the professional judgment in accounting and the profiles of managers as viewed by students in accounting and finance from University of Oradea. In order to assess the impact of these profiles on the professional accounting judgment we have constructed a **Linear Regression Analysis**, presented in table no. 5. The model is significant ( $F(11, 94)=3.141$ ,  $p=0.001$ ) with a  $R^2$  of 0.269. The significant variables that explain a correct professional judgment in accounting (in bold in the table) are presented in the following paragraph. We must mention that while this model explains 26% of the variation of the independent variable, the explanatory level decreases if we eliminate some or all the nonsignificant variables, consequently we chose to keep them in the final model.

**Table 5. Correlations between professional accounting judgment score | and the profiles**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
(Constant)	3.229	0.718		0.000
Gender (1=male)	0.079	0.134	0.059	0.557
Age	0.549	0.285	0.177	0.057
Specialization (1=accounting)	-0.118	0.124	-0.095	0.342
Employed	-0.231	0.148	-0.157	0.122
<b>Job in accounting</b>	<b>0.288</b>	<b>0.119</b>	<b>0.280</b>	<b>0.018</b>
Satisfaction with income	-0.026	0.122	-0.023	0.830
The liberal and independent professional accountant	0.077	0.090	0.083	0.397
<b>Statutory professional accountant</b>	<b>0.221</b>	<b>0.107</b>	<b>0.206</b>	<b>0.041</b>
Advisor professional accountant	-0.152	0.080	-0.181	0.060
Confident manager	0.034	0.050	0.067	0.495
Conservative manager	-0.046	0.048	-0.089	0.339

The only significant predictors of the professional judgment score are the existence of a job in accounting, the profile of statutory professional accountant. This is to say that a more correct judgment is given by students which 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 this occupation.

In view of the things described and presented above, in the end we decided to test the possible correlations between the profiles outlined for the professional accountant and for the manager respectively, the average score obtained for the theoretical framework of professional accounting judgment and the quality of this judgment.

We found out that there is a significant correlation ( $p=0.298$ ,  $\text{sig.}<0.01$ ) between the scale of professional judgment in accounting and the opinion of students regarding the fact that a high quality professional judgment is reflected in the preparation of relevant financial information. The higher the score for the *statutory professional accountant* the stronger the opinion that the correctness is reflected in a relevant financial information ( $p=0.399$ ,  $\text{sig.}=0.000$ ). Also, the higher the score for the *advisor accountant* the stronger the opinion that the high quality professional judgment is reflected in the preparation of relevant financial information ( $p=0.242$ ,  $\text{sig.}<0.01$ ).

There is no significant relationship between the opinion regarding the way a high quality professional judgment is reflected in the preparation of relevant financial information and the profiles of managers.

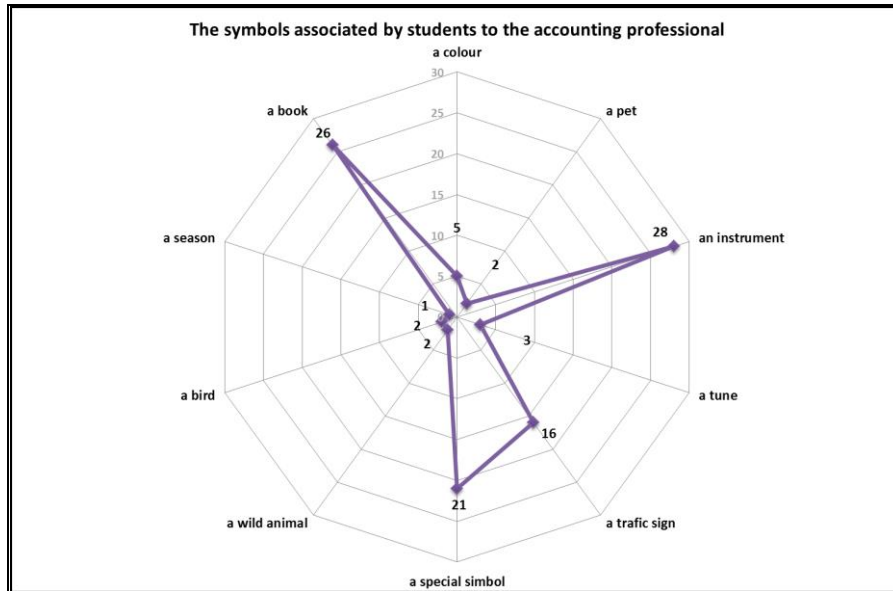
## **5. Discussion of results based on association technique**

In a previous study, Balaciu *et al.* (2014), having as subjects of investigation managers with the help of projective research techniques interpreted their perceptions of auditors and accountants using colors and symbols attached and outlined their psychological profile using the interpretation of various colors and symbols attached. We imported this projective technique and in the present study, questioning the MA students on the association that they see between the portrait of a professional accountant and an image represented by a symbol and the association that they make between the portrait of a manager and a picture.

The images suggested by us to be chosen by respondents were: a color, a domestic animal, an instrument, a song, a traffic sign, a special symbol, a wild animal, a bird, a season and a reading book. The charts presented below show that when associating the image with a professional accountant the MA students oscillate between an instrument and a reading book. From the perspective of interpreting the responses, using the projective technique, the answers are consistent and in direct correlation with their attitude to the professional judgment in accounting and accounting policies. Thus, the association with a book means the link it creates in their perception with the substantiation of the accounting reasoning and accounting decisions that must be in compliance with the accounting regulations / standards and with the accounting policies and procedures manual of the company. The



association with an instrument of the professional accountant can be interpreted in two ways: in the mind of MA students, the accountant is a handy instrument for the company management to achieve the performance indicators or in the services provided by the management, the professional accountant uses various instruments specific to accounting or not in preparing the financial reports.



**Figure 4. Polar diagram for symbols associated to the professional accountant**

However, in the case of associating the image for the managers, the answers are more diversified. However, of the total answer options there are two images that detach themselves: a special symbol and a color. Considering the interpretation of the results of the previous study in Balaciu *et al.* (2014), we consider that the symbol and the color chosen by the students indicate that image of the manager generally, in their perception, is a figure that requires authority and outlines guidelines regarding the company's future. These associations indicate that the perception of the MA students on managers is that they are powerful and strong figures who lead.

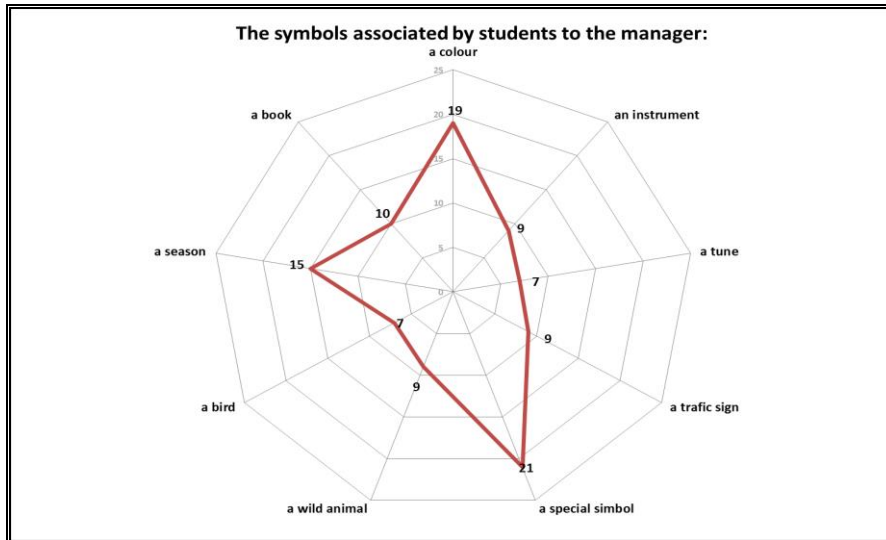


Figure 5. Polar diagram for symbols associated to the manager

The distribution of the responses on the association of an image (symbol) to the professional accountant, as shown in the diagram below, shows that the association done by the MA students with a book fits the greatest extent to the liberal and independent accountant.

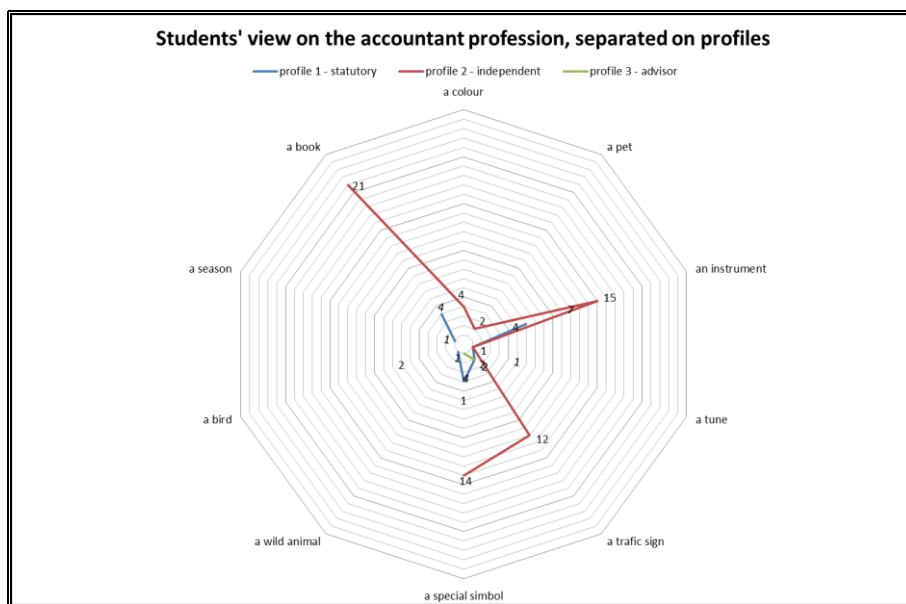


Figure 6. Polar diagram for symbols associated to accountant profiles

The diversity of responses is verified for managers too, with the particularity that for the MA students who supported the confident manager profile, the association is largely congenial with a colour while for the conservative manager profile the association is mostly congenial with an instrument.

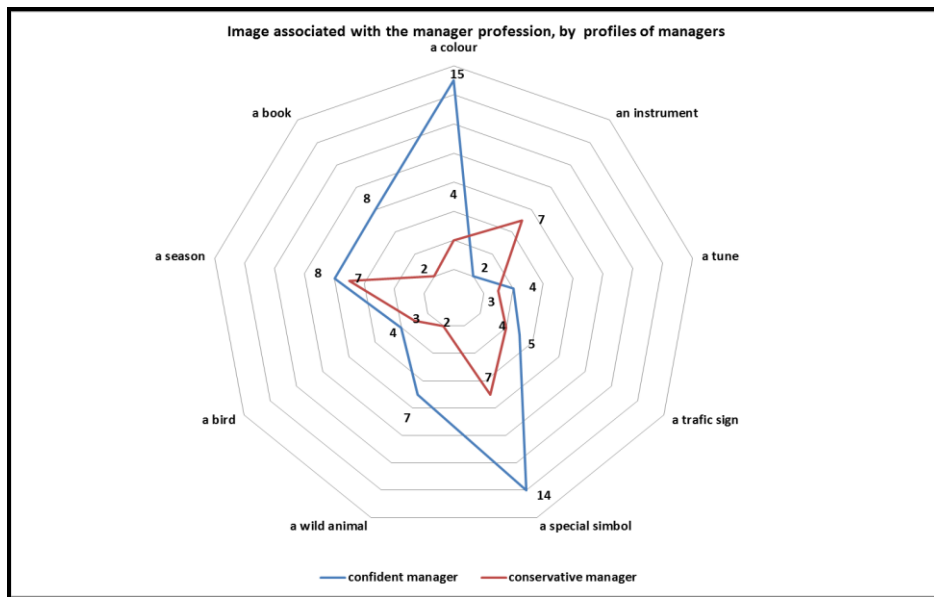


Figure 7. Polar diagram for symbols associated to manager profiles

## 6. Conclusions, limits and further research

The aim of our study was to analyze the perception of the MA students on the profile of the professional accountant and that of the manager. In this view, from the questionnaire applied, we have carried out analyzes based on the replies to questions researching the factors that influence the exercise of professional accounting judgment, the interest pursued general by the managers in the choice of accounting policies, including those concerning demographic and personality traits and finally the questions based on the association technique. The results of analyzes performed on the answers received have led to the delineation of three profiles for the professional accountant and two for the manager. The statutory accountant profile and the conservative manager profile cumulate most of the answers.

After delimitation of the profiles, we aimed to test the correlations between these outlined profiles and the average score of professional accounting judgment,

between the quality of professional judgment from the perspective of securing the relevant information and profiles.

From the statistical analysis of results we found that the higher the support for the statutory professional accountant the more adequate the professional judgment in accounting is ( $p=0.0359$ ;  $sig.=0.000$ ). Surprisingly or not, a negative relationship was revealed between the scale of rational judgment in accounting and the advisory accountant: the higher the score for the advisory consultant the less adequate the judgment in accounting is ( $p=-0.194$ ;  $sig.=0.049$ ). Also, the results showed that students' viewing the accountant as liberal and independent, also view the manager as confident (independent, optimistic and flexible;  $p=0.220$ ,  $sig =.0240$ ). The linear regression analysis revealed that the significant predictors of the professional judgment score are the existence of a job in accounting and the profile of statutory professional accountant. Regarding the relationship between students' opinions about the way the high quality professional judgment is reflected in the preparation of relevant financial information with the profiles of accountant, we have revealed a positive correlation between the second and the third profile.

Using the association technique, in the end we noticed after processing the responses that emerges a picture / symbol attached to the professional accountant, that of a book and the image represented by a color for the managers. Analyzing the associations of the images on the outlined profiles it follows that the book picture is mainly attached to the liberal independent professional accountant and the image representing a color is associated to the confident manager.

We believe that our study brings novelty in the literature from the perspective of investigating the future economists' perception on the accounting profession and that of the manager. In contrast to other similar studies concerning professional accountant stereotypes (Carnegie & Napier, 2010; Albu *et al.*, 2011b; Faragalla, 2015; Chelariu, 2015, etc.) our research work has as results the delimitation of the accountants and managers stereotypes analyzing the perception of the investigated students on the accounting professional judgment and accounting policies. Our findings are consistent with those expressed by Albu *et al.* (2012) regarding the continuous process of change and improvement in the accounting stereotypes which provides opportunities for both academia and professional bodies and with those observed by Crenuşca and Balaciu (2015) that Romanian surveyed students are concerned with the accounting profession and the image of the accountant in the society. We consider that the analyses of responses offer solutions for improving the university curricula and the methodology of teaching accounting disciplines so that the future graduates realize the importance of an adequate and qualitative professional accounting judgment in the context of existent accounting stereotypes in emerging countries.

The main limit of our study lies in the formulation of questions in the questionnaire, the selection and formation of the sample of students investigated and in the degree of subjectivity that can be attributed to the association technique. Future research proposes similar analyzes carried out on graduates and professional accountants in order to follow the professional path and professional career development and the use of new methods of investigation and measurement of the quality of professional accounting judgment.

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