
DO POLISH ACCOUNTANTS ENJOY THEIR JOB? RESULTS OF A NATIONWIDE SURVEY “ACCOUNTANTS’ SELF-PORTRAIT”

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Abstract: The aim of the paper is to examine whether their profession is a source of satisfaction for Polish accountants. The study used the results of a nationwide survey by the accountants association in Poland “2017 accountants’ portrait”. As it results from more than 2,500 responses by accountants, over three quarters of respondents assess their own job satisfaction highly. The image of an accountant satisfied with their job does not match the stereotypical perception of this profession. The respondents’ answers indicate that the level of satisfaction is related to the position held and the remuneration received. The perception of accountants as “generators of additional costs” or “business impediments” is also significant, which can lower satisfaction with working in accounting. The paper employs methods of a source analysis and a diagnostic survey. The data collected in the survey was analysed using simple statistical methods and was appropriately presented.

Keywords: accountants’ portrait, accountancy profession.

1. Introduction

Accountants now belong to the category of the most sought-after employees. According to the report “Perspectives of employment for independent accountants”, employers all over Poland have difficulties in recruiting accountants. In several regions there is a serious deficit of candidates for work in accounting. It is worth adding that also in the period of recession, accountants with appropriate competences were not unemployed. The demand for accountants still remains unsatisfied, despite the fact that graduates of first and second stage studies, postgraduate studies and participants of courses, in which the Accountants Association in Poland has specialized for many years, are entering the market.

One can formulate the hypothesis that the number of accountants in Poland is still growing. One of the reasons for this trend is the dynamic development of the BPO/SSC business services sector, which places accounting centers in Poland. However, there is a lack of accurate statistical data that could unambiguously confirm this hypothesis. The existing Central Statistical Office (CSO) data on the accounting market in Poland is vague [Kamieniecka et al. 2016]. One of the reasons for this information gap is the lack of a definition of an accountant. “Classification of professions and specializations” admittedly lists more than a dozen professions in the field of accounting, but the existence of the category “other accounting employees” indicates that the list is not closed. Moreover, especially in smaller entities, the scope of accountants’ duties is definitely wider than would result from the accounting (balance sheet) law. Without a definition of an accountant, the number of accountants in Poland cannot be determined. It is known that almost 70 thousand people received a certificate entitling them to perform bookkeeping services, and in 2017 there were over 40,000 accounting offices in Poland. According to the CSO, entities conducting legal, accounting and bookkeeping and tax advisory business activities, as on 31 December 2016, employed over 200,000 people. Currently, the Accountants Association in Poland has over 20,000 members. In Poland there are over 200 university courses (including undergraduate, Master and post-graduate), called “accounting” and/or “finance”. Therefore, according to very cautious estimates, it can be assumed that there are over 350,000 accountants in Poland. This unusually large professional group may be an interesting object of research. Such research was carried out in 2017 under the patronage of the Accountants Association in Poland as part of the project “2017 Accountants’ portrait”. Preliminary results of the study were published in June 2018 [Hońko 2018]. This paper only refers to a section of this research.

The aim of the paper is to analyse Polish accountants’ job satisfaction. Achieving this goal requires answering the following research questions:

1. What is the overall level of satisfaction from working in accounting?
2. Does the level of accountants’ satisfaction depend on their age and length of service?
3. How does the position held and received remuneration affect the level of satisfaction?
4. Are members of the professional organization of accountants more satisfied with their jobs than non-members?
5. Is there a relationship between the negative perception of accountants and their level of satisfaction?

The paper employs the method of a source analysis and a diagnostic survey. The first method was used to analyse publications and on-line resources in search of research on accountants’ job satisfaction. Due to the territorial limitation of the research to Poland, the query was limited to Polish-language positions. The second method was used to collect data on the level of accountants’ satisfaction. This data was then presented using simple statistical methods.

2. Accountants in Poland as the subject of research

Extensive research concerning the accounting profession in Poland was conducted by [Kamieniecka et al. 2016]. One of the conclusions is that in Poland there is no consistent system of collecting information about the market of accountants and auditors (A&A). As a result, the available data is fragmented and collected by separate institutions. The authors of the report propose changes to the CSO forms which would allow to obtain additional information about the described professional group. They also call for the role of an institution coordinating the collection of information on the market of accountants and auditors to be held by the Accountants Association in Poland.

The lack of complete and comparable information may also be the reason for the small number of publications dedicated to accountants as a professional group. Questions addressed to accountants by researchers usually refer to the perception of specific substantive issues or proposals for amendments in regulations. Part of the publication refers to the accountants' competencies sought by employers, e.g. Zygmanski [2015] and Drumlak [2013]. Few publications aim to better understand accountants' needs and their satisfaction. It is worth paying attention to the study of employees of the accounting center [Łada, Konieczny 2015]. Respondents notice a number of advantages of working in an international environment, although job satisfaction decreases with the length of employment. Graduates of economics studies are more satisfied with their jobs than people with a different education. The conclusions of the study of the personality and satisfaction of accountants in the Alfa sp. z o.o. accounting center are interesting [Kabalski, Przygodzka 2017]. Although the research is of a pilot nature, the preliminary conclusion is that work in a professional environment consistent with the employee's personality can be a source of professional satisfaction.

3. Description of research methodology

As mentioned in the introduction, the information base for the analysis of accountants' satisfaction is the study "2017 Accountants' portrait", carried out by the Accountants Association in Poland. This research includes two questionnaires: Accountants' self-portrait and Accountants through the eyes of entrepreneurs. In the period from April to December 2017, 2,575 accountants replied to the first survey and 360 entrepreneurs to the second. The surveys were and are available as on-line forms¹ (Google Forms), and information about the initiative was widely publicized in the media, including social media. The celebration of the 110th anniversary of the accountants' organization in Poland presented the opportunity to conduct the research. The data for the study of accountants' satisfaction comes from the survey

¹ Links to these questionnaires are available in: [Hońko 2018].

“Accountants’ self-portrait”. Figures 1, 2 and 3 present the basic information about the respondents and the response time.

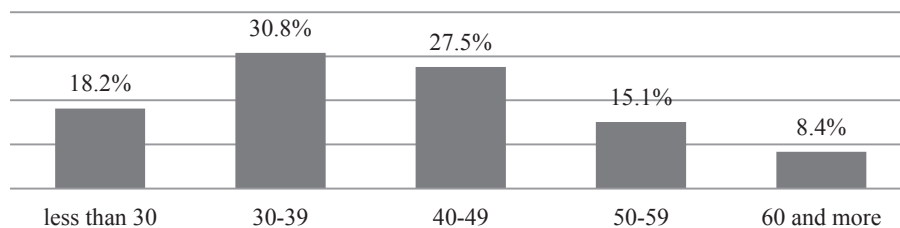


Fig. 1. Number of respondents according to age

Source: author’s own summary based on respondents’ answers in the study “2017 Accountants’ self-portrait”.

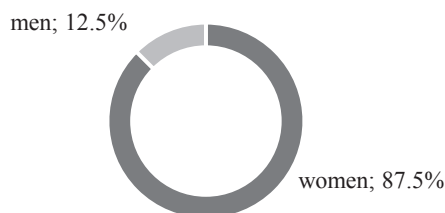


Fig. 2. Number of respondents according to sex

Source: author’s own summary based on respondents’ answers in the study “2017 Accountants’ self-portrait”.

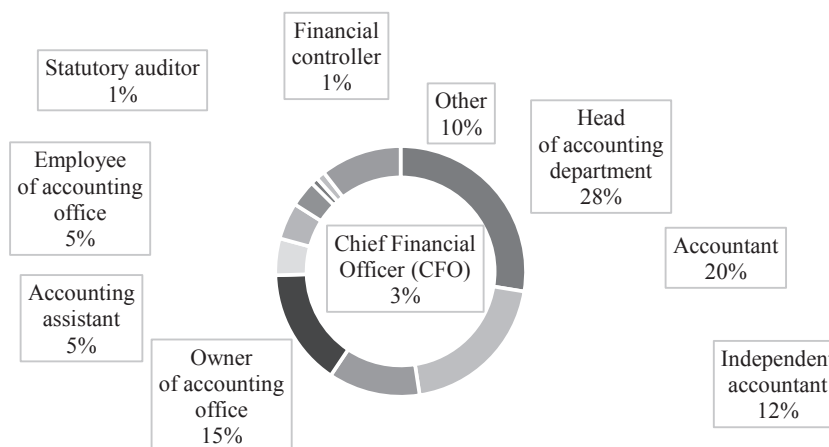


Fig. 3. Number of responses according to positions held

Source: author’s own summary based on respondents’ answers in the study “2017 Accountants’ self-portrait”.

Unfortunately, despite the large sample size it is not sure that the study described can be considered as representative for all accountants in Poland. This is mainly due to the difficulties, described in the introduction, with the precise determination of the total number of accountants². It should be assumed that every accountant in Poland has access to the Internet. Information about the surveys was provided by nationwide media, so every accountant had the chance to complete them. The extensive coverage of the survey can be proved by the fact that it was filled in by accountants from all voivodships.

4. Investigating accountants' satisfaction in Poland

Accountants are seldom an object of media interest. They usually gain publicity after a scandal has been revealed, to which is often incorrectly attributed the adjective "accounting". The profession of an accountant is also not a dream career for students. This is due to the stereotypical perception of an accountant as a person performing boring and repetitive activities in which there is no room for one's own inventiveness and creativity [Jeacle 2008]. Perhaps this is why creativity combined with accounting has an incorrectly pejorative reception.

It is worth mentioning that research on accountants and their professional satisfaction were conducted, for example, by [Patten 1995]. An interesting review of the literature is given in [Chatzoglou et al. 2011].

Job satisfaction can be defined as the "pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" [Locke 1976]. Can work in accounting be a source of satisfaction? The first research question addressed this issue. The question about the level of satisfaction was answered by 2,550 respondents, indicating answers on a scale of 1-5, where 1 meant no satisfaction, and 5 – a high level of satisfaction with working in the profession. The answers to this question are presented in Figure 4.

Accountants rate highly their job satisfaction. Over three quarters of the respondents marked their answers at 4 or 5, and every third respondent chose the highest possible rating. There are not many people extremely dissatisfied with the fact that they are accountants. The lowest mark was given by one in sixty respondents. The average level of satisfaction is 4.06 and the dominant is 4. The standard deviation of 0.89 indicates the small variation in responses.

The high level of accountants' satisfaction is difficult to reconcile with the stereotypical perception of the profession. This does not mean that accountants see only the positive aspects of this profession. The most frequently mentioned nuisances include the ambiguity and instability of the laws and the case law, as well

² In the sample selection calculator available at <http://www.naukowiec.org/dobor.html>, with a fraction size of 0.5, a maximum error of 2%, a confidence level of 95%, the sample size for a population of 1 million people would be 2,359 people.

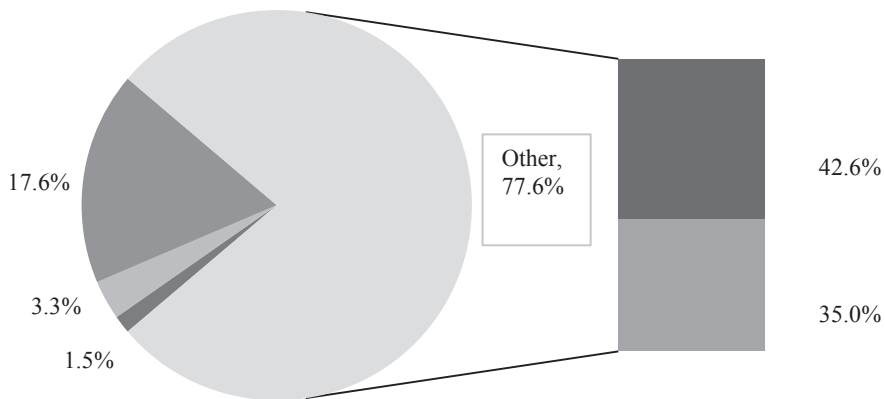


Fig. 4. A summary of answers to the question “To what extent does the job in accounting give you satisfaction? (scale 1–5)”

Source: author’s own summary based on respondents’ answers in the study “2017 Accountants’ self-portrait”.

as the necessity to know many regulations from outside of accounting. Despite these inconveniences, accountants like their jobs. Is the level of satisfaction dependent on age? This matter is illustrated in Figure 5.

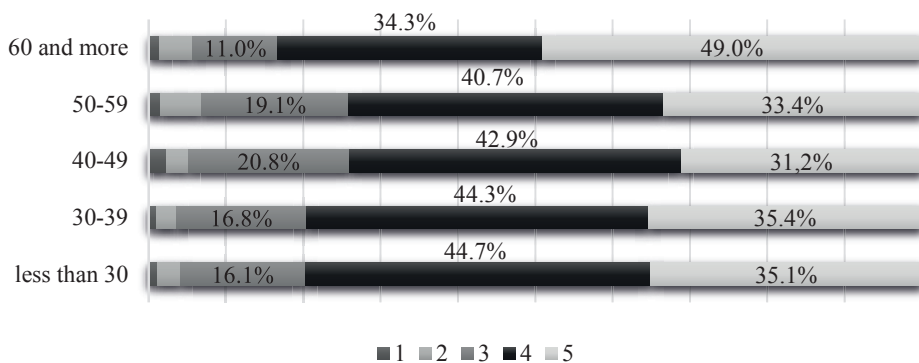


Fig. 5. Accountants’ satisfaction by age (scale 1–5)

Source: author’s own summary based on respondents’ answers in the study “2017 Accountants’ self-portrait”.

The largest share of negative responses (1 and 2) was in the 50-59 age group and amounted to 6.8%. The lowest number of answers at 1 and 2 were given by persons aged between 30 and 39. (3.6%). The structure of responses is similar in all groups except those over 60 years of age. In this age group, satisfaction was rated the highest, as evidenced by 83.3% of answers at 4 or 5. In second place is the group of the youngest accountants, whose sum of answers at 4 and 5 was 79.8%. The

most average rates (3) were marked by people aged 40-49. What results from this is the fact that the level of satisfaction is not unequivocally dependent on the age of the respondents. The highest percentage of positive responses in the youngest and oldest age groups provokes reflection. Perhaps the youngest persons just gaining experience are not yet overloaded with duties. As for the oldest persons, it seems that they can already benefit from their experience, and the amount of work they need to put in does not have to be as large as in people aged 30-59.

The second research question also refers to the relationship of accountants' satisfaction and their length of service in the profession. The starting point is to examine the relationship between the accountants' age and their length of service. Not always is a short length of service in accounting synonymous with the young age of respondents. Not only people freshly out from college, but also those changing professions at different ages, find their place in accounting. Assuming that a person having just finished second-stage studies is 24 years old and immediately finds employment in accounting, the standard length of service will be respectively: up to 5 years (age up to 29 years), 5-15 years (the 30-39 group), 16-25 years (the 40-49 group), 26-34 years (the 50-59 group) and over 35 years in the group of people older than 60 years. Most people for whom accounting is a successive occupation are in the 30-39 years of age group (18.4% of people with less than 5 years of work experience). In the 40-49 group, the length of service in accounting shorter than 10 years is declared by 13.6%, and in the 50-59 group the length of service shorter than 20 years is confirmed by 21.7% of respondents. The relationship between the length of service and satisfaction with working in the accounting profession is shown in Figure 6.

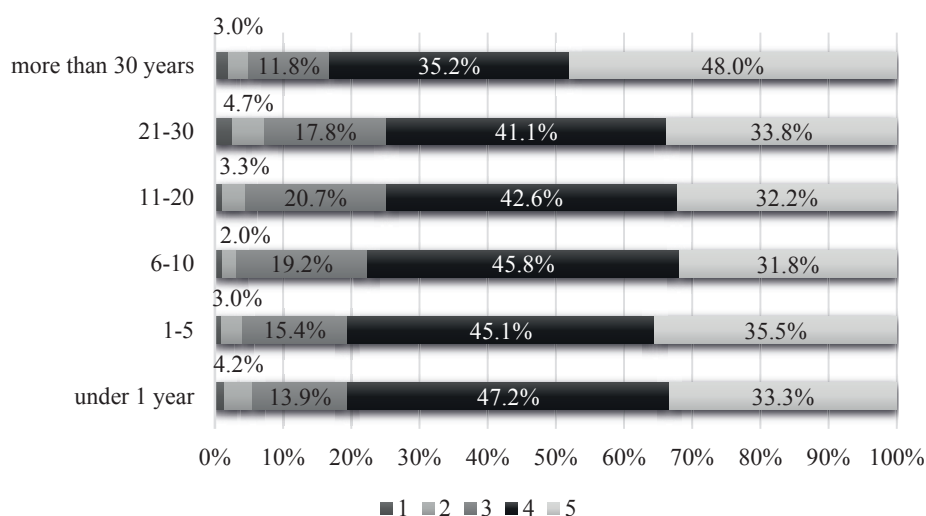


Fig. 6. Accountants' satisfaction by length of service in years (scale 1-5)

Source: author's own summary based on respondents' answers in the study "2017 Accountants' self-portrait".

As shown in Figure 6, accountants with the longest service are the most satisfied with their jobs. As many as 83.2% of people with the length of service in accounting of more than 30 years are satisfied with their choice of profession. In second place, ex aequo persons with the length of service of up to 1 year and from 1 to 5 years (80.6%). The majority of negative ratings (1 and 2) are given by people with 20 or 30 years of experience (7.3%).

The next research question refers to the relationship between accountants' satisfaction and their remuneration and the position held. Respondents answered the question: "Do you consider your total remuneration (from all sources) as adequate to your competences and responsibilities? Therefore, it is possible to formulate a working hypothesis that higher remuneration affects the level of satisfaction. This is confirmed by the summary in Figure 7.

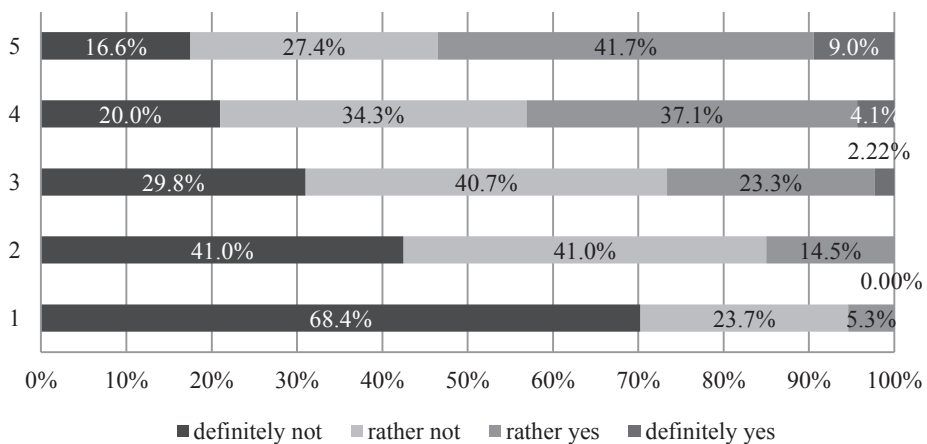


Fig. 7. Satisfaction with working in accounting (scale 1-5) and the assessment of the adequacy of remuneration to competences and responsibilities

Source: author's own summary based on respondents' answers in the study "2017 Accountants' self-portrait".

Based on Figure 7, one can conclude that lower job satisfaction goes hand in hand with dissatisfaction with remuneration. This relationship is positive and moderately weak (Pearson's correlation coefficient = 0.25). The reason for the low level of the correlation index may be a significant variation in the responses regarding the adequacy of remuneration, which is confirmed by the standard deviation of 1.3.

The next step is to examine the relationship between accountants' satisfaction and the position held. Due to the fact that, apart from the posts specified in the survey, it was possible to fill them in by the respondents themselves, it was necessary to properly filter the positions. This resulted in a decrease in the number of responses to 1,924. Figure 8 presents a summary of negative (1 and 2) and positive (3 and 4) responses according to the most frequently selected positions.

The conducted research does not indicate that the position held significantly affects the level of accountants' satisfaction. The first two places according to the highest answers (4 and 5) are occupied by persons in high positions. Accounting assistants, i.e. people on the lowest positions in accounting, derive slightly lower job satisfaction. The most of low rates were given by the owners of accounting offices and statutory auditors.

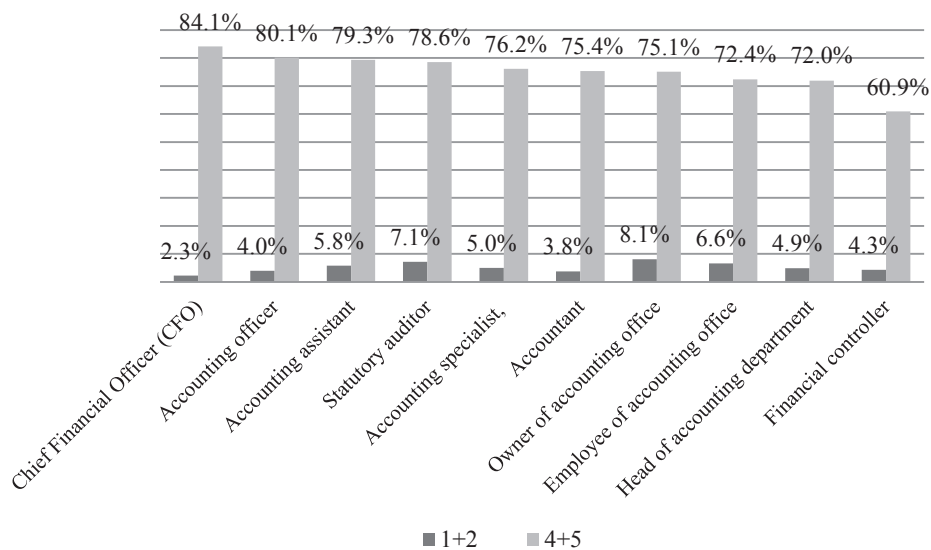


Fig. 8. Satisfaction with working in accounting (scale 1–5) and the position held

Source: author's own summary based on respondents' answers in the study "2017 Accountants' self-portrait".

The fourth research question refers to the impact of membership of the Accountants Association in Poland on the level of accountants' satisfaction. SKwP (Accountants Association in Poland) members are more satisfied with their jobs than non-members (Figure 9).

It is understandable that members of the professional organization are well integrated, and they know the environment better, which could be a source of additional satisfaction. It is not without significance that older people more often declare themselves to be associated with SKwP. 80% of respondents over the age of 60 are members of SKwP, while those surveyed who are younger than 30 account for only 39%.

The last research question refers to investigating the relationship between the perception of accountants and the declared level of job satisfaction. In the survey respondents choose an expression that they thought best reflected the perception of accountants by employers. The most-chosen were: a trusted adviser, a finance

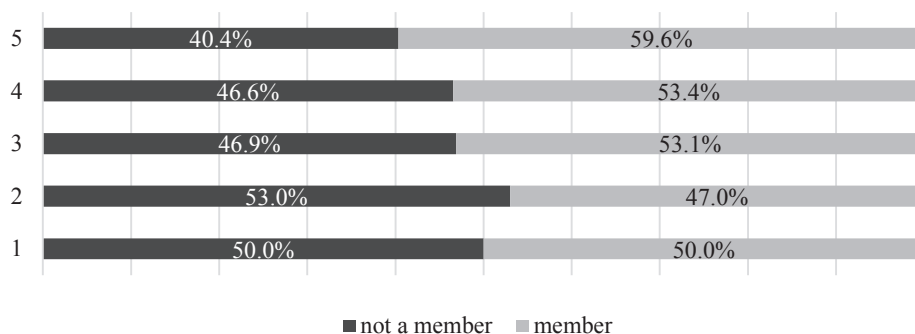


Fig. 9. Satisfaction with working in accounting and membership in the Accountants Association in Poland

Source: author's own summary based on respondents' answers in the study "2017 Accountants' self-portrait".

guard, a high-class specialist, a generator of additional costs, a person of public trust and a business impediment. Two of these terms have a negative meaning. It may be interesting to examine the relationship between the declared level of satisfaction and the choice of one of these terms.

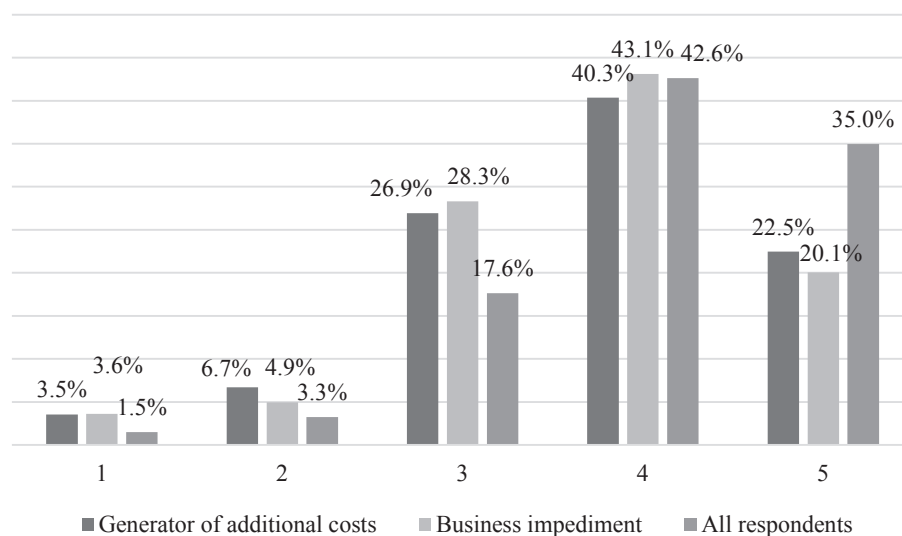


Fig. 10. Satisfaction of accountants (scale 1–5) and their negative perception

Source: author's own summary based on respondents' answers in the study "2017 Accountants' self-portrait".

Figure 10 appears to show that people who marked one of the negative terms, assessed their level of satisfaction less well. This is evidenced by the higher number of 1, 2 and 3 scores compared to all respondents' answers. This correlation is also confirmed by the smaller number of the highest satisfaction ratings. Based on the answers, it can be concluded that the perception of accountants affects their job satisfaction. Accountants are part of an organization, which is why the assessment of the environment is not indifferent to them. It can also be proof of the need to convince entrepreneurs that the work of accountants is an added value to the organization, and does not only generate additional costs or impede the initiatives of the management.

5. Conclusion

The study shows that the overall level of job satisfaction in accounting is high. Accountants like their jobs and are not discouraged by constantly having to improve their qualifications. The following conclusions result from the analysis:

- there is a lack of comprehensive studies devoted to Polish accountants as a professional group,
- the most satisfied with their jobs are accountants from the Opole and Greater Poland voivodships, and the least satisfied are those from the Silesian and Masovian voivodships,
- the level of satisfaction of accountants is not unequivocally dependent on the age or work experience of respondents, the highest satisfaction with work is declared by the youngest and the oldest,
- there is a correlation between the assessment of the adequacy of remuneration and the declared satisfaction, the relationship is positive but weak,
- the most satisfied were persons holding the highest positions (accounting officer, chief financial officer) and lower ones (accounting assistant),
- SKwP members are more satisfied with their jobs in accounting than non-members,
- respondents who consider the profession of an accountant to be perceived negatively by entrepreneurs assess their own job satisfaction lower.

The purpose of the paper was to study the satisfaction of Polish accountants. It can be considered that this goal has been achieved. The next stage of research may be the analysis of the reasons determining job satisfaction or lack thereof. However, it should be borne in mind that such research requires conducting a further survey.

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CZY POLSCY KSIĘGOWI LUBIĄ SWOJĄ PRACĘ? WYNIKI OGÓLNOPOLSKIEGO BADANIA „AUTOPORTRET KSIĘGOWYCH”

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu jest zbadanie, czy praca jest źródłem satysfakcji polskich specjalistów ds. rachunkowości. W badaniu posłużono się wynikami ogólnopolskiej ankiety Stowarzyszenia Księgowych w Polsce „Portrety księgowych 2017”. Jak wynika z ponad 2500 odpowiedzi księgowych, ponad ¾ respondentów wysoko ocenia własną satysfakcję z pracy zawodowej. Obraz zadowolonego z pracy księgowego nie pasuje do stereotypowego postrzegania tego zawodu. Odpowiedzi wskazują, że poziom zadowolenia ma związek z zajmowanym stanowiskiem oraz otrzymywanym wynagrodzeniem. Istotne jest również postrzeganie księgowych jako „generatorów dodatkowych kosztów” czy „hamulcowych biznesu”, które może zmniejszać zadowolenie z wykonywania pracy w rachunkowości. W artykule zastosowano metody analizy źródeł oraz sondażu diagnostycznego. Dane zebrane w ankiecie zostały podane analizie z zastosowaniem prostych metod statystycznych i odpowiednio zaprezentowane.

Słowa kluczowe: portret księgowych, zawód księgowego.