



## Management accounting information from the perspective of managers: the case of Poland and Romania Selected findings of a survey research

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### Abstract

The aim of the article is to present the manner in which several features of management accounting information (type and mode of communication) are perceived by Polish and Romanian managers, taking into consideration the development of this concept in both countries. The research method applied was an online survey, conducted among selected Polish and Romanian managers. The research problem is important as it focuses on the development of management accounting information from the point of view of decision makers from Poland and Romania. This type of research has not been done so far in Poland and Romania. The analysis of the responses show that managers use mainly financial information for short- and medium-term decision-making. In addition, Polish managers prefer new forms of communication, like reports available on mobile and online, while Romanian managers are advocates of PDFs or printed version of reports. The respondents receive information monthly or on-demand, but this is not consistent with their expectations. Furthermore, communication between managers and management accountants is limited only to meetings when the need arises.

**Keywords:** information, decisions, managers, management accounting, Poland, Romania.

### Streszczenie

#### Informacja rachunkowości zarządczej z perspektywy menedżerów: przypadek Polski i Rumunii Wybrane wyniki badania ankietowego

Celem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie wybranych aspektów dotyczących informacji rachunkowości zarządczej (typu, formy przekazu) z perspektywy polskich i rumuńskich menedżerów, z uwzględnieniem specyfiki rozwoju tej koncepcji w obu krajach. Jako metodę badawczą zastosowano studium za pomocą

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kwestionariusza ankiety *online*, przeprowadzone wśród polskich i rumuńskich menedżerów. Podjęta tematyka badawcza jest istotna dla rozwoju informacji rachunkowości zarządczej z perspektywy polskich i rumuńskich menedżerów. Wskazany kierunek badań nie był dotychczas weryfikowany w Polsce i Rumunii. Analiza danych ukazała, że menedżerowie w procesie decyzyjnym wykorzystują przede wszystkim informacje finansowe, a dane są stosowane głównie do wspierania procesów zarządzania w krótkiej perspektywie. Ponadto menedżerowie z Polski oceniają nowe formy przekazu informacji, takie jak raporty dostępne na urządzeniach mobilnych, raporty dostępne *online*, wyżej niż menedżerowie z Rumunii, którzy preferują wersje PDF raportów i drukowane raporty. Badani respondenci otrzymują informacje miesięcznie lub na żądanie, co jak wyrażają nie jest zgodne z ich oczekiwaniami, zaś komunikacja pomiędzy menedżerami a specjalistami jest ograniczona do spotkań w razie zaistniałych konieczności.

**Słowa kluczowe:** informacja, decyzje, menedżerowie, rachunkowość zarządcza, Polska, Rumunia.

## Introduction

As a significant component of a company's information system, management accounting (MA) delivers accurate information to decision-makers, in due time, widening their knowledge and supporting the efficient and effective fulfilment of the tasks.

In the context of management accounting, the „management” concept shouldn't be understood solely as referring to the top administration level of the organization, but to all levels of management (Gornjak, 2014; Sunarni, 2013). At the same time, „accounting” doesn't imply the mere recording of business operations (bookkeeping), or the preparation of financial statements, but it includes a wider range of analytical tasks. As shown by Hilton and Platt (2011, p. 4), management accounting is „the process of identifying, measuring and communicating the financial and non-financial information, allowing value judgments, and the taking of decisions by users of this information”. This definition remains just as appropriate for management accounting, as one of the two components of a company's accounting system (Sobańska, 2002, pp. 6–11), which supports management through the delivery of both financial and non-financial information.

The Institute of Management Accountants<sup>1</sup> (IMA) defines management accounting as „a profession that involves partnering in management decision making, devising planning and performance management systems, and providing expertise in financial reporting and control to assist management in the formulation and implementation of an organization's strategy”. Decision-making should be seen as the key term of this definition, given that several contributions to the literature stress the importance of management accounting as a provider of information that is directed to decision-making and employed at management level (Zare et al., 2013; Mahfar, Omar, 2004; Vaivio, 2008; Szychta, 2007; Sojak, 2003; Sobańska, 2010).

The ever-changing operating conditions of enterprises lead to the transformation of the management process and subsequently to a shift in the management's information needs. Businesses are currently run in a global environment, resulting, for instance, in

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<sup>1</sup> *Definition of Management Accounting*, [http://www.imanet.org/docs/default-source/thought\\_leadership/transforming\\_the\\_finance\\_function/definition\\_of\\_management\\_accounting.pdf?sfvrsn=2](http://www.imanet.org/docs/default-source/thought_leadership/transforming_the_finance_function/definition_of_management_accounting.pdf?sfvrsn=2) (access 18.07.2016).

the internationalization of markets and the operation of a common market (within the EU). New types of business cooperation have emerged, like capital groups, transnational companies, and supply chains. Through foreign investments, globalization supported the economic development of Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, like Poland and Romania, where multinational companies established subsidiaries. This is the context that defines the development of management accounting in business practice, i.e. the role played within the company, the type of information provided and how it is organised.

The paper aims to present the perception of Polish and Romanian managers on the information provided by management accounting, regarding its type, communication channels and frequency, considering the background and development of the management accounting concept in the two countries.

The above-mentioned research problem is important for the development of the concept of management accounting in the science and business practice of CEE countries. It aims to discover how managers from developing countries, i.e. Poland and Romania, evaluate the management accounting information system in the context of decision-making. The research takes into consideration the historical development of the management accounting concept in both countries. In Poland and Romania, issues related to the evaluation of management accounting information by managers are the subject of very few scientific publications.

The research method was an online survey. The survey was conducted on a random sample of enterprises from the available database of Tax Identification Numbers of companies in each country between May 2015 and March 2016. The collected data were used by the authors to answer the following research questions related to two aspects, i.e. the kind of MA information (questions 1 and 2) and the form of transferring the MA information (questions 3 and 4):

1. Do managers from Romania and Poland rate non-financial information higher than financial information?
2. Do managers from Poland and Romania use the information provided by management accountants for short-term or long-term tasks and decision-making?
3. Is there any difference in the evaluation of the communication channels of the information provided by management accounting by Polish and Romanian managers?
4. What is the frequency with which Polish and Romanian managers receive information from management accountants?

Given the small size of the samples, descriptive statistics was employed to analyse the data. The article takes the form of a review article; in light of the limited extent of the study, several issues were merely outlined, so they require further detailed analysis.

As for the structure, the paper consists of four different sections. The first two are meant to lay the foundation of the study, providing a brief literature review and a detailed description of the development of management accounting in Romania and Poland. The results of the survey are analysed in the third section of the paper, followed by the concluding remarks.

## **1. Literature review – management accounting from a management perspective**

The operations of every organization rely on its information system. According to Zare and Shahsavari (2012), the databases of the business entities provide ca. 70% of the effective information, including the largest share (46–50%) of the accounting information. The information function of accounting, as a support of the decision-making process, is fulfilled by its two components, i.e. financial accounting, focusing on external receivers' expectations, and management accounting, as an internal information function. Eierle and Schultze (2013) point to the fact that the establishment of internal databases, appropriate for decision-making and cause-effect analysis, requires the implementation of appropriate models of management accounting. These should, in fact, provide detailed information on the activities and expenses associated to activities, as well as data on the cost calculation for such areas as production, service, etc. (Dobroszek, Kalinowska, 2014).

The information provided by management accountants is used at different management levels, i.e. executive and functional/department (middle) management. The highest level of management is responsible for setting the priorities of the organization, and for considering the risks and resources of each activity. The middle management is also compelled to observe the risks and bears responsibility for the proper employment of the available resources in the various functions of the company. However, regardless of the level of management, managers need to receive adequate information, provided in such a manner that the determined targets and allocated resources are effectively monitored and, if necessary, corrected (Imler, 2006). In effect, this means that decisions made at the management level depend on the amount, frequency, form and, in particular, on the quality of the provided data. According to Emery (1969, pp. 220–228), the information that will affect the efficiency of the decision-making process will represent a value-added for the manager, if:

- it reduces uncertainty;
- it facilitates individual decisions;
- it impacts the consequences of decisions.

The most extensive definition of management accounting was enunciated by IMA, showing that the concept is used to identify and interpret information for the formulation of strategies to support decision making, to enable more efficient use of resources, to protect property and to inform employees.

Considering the aspects above, it can be noted that the main focus lies in the information and decision-making at the managerial level.

The core of management accounting, as an instrument to support managers in making decisions and achieving goals, has been the subject of numerous scientific considerations (Hopper, 1980; Bruns, McKinnon, 1992a, 1993; Shields, 1995). On the other hand, Hannon (2005) states that despite progressive changes in the environment and the organization itself, the accounting information system, which is the primary source

of information, cannot adapt. Hence, the accounting management system no longer supports the credibility of management decisions.

In this context, the scientific research points to the gap between the managers' and the accountants' perception of the relevance of the provided information (Mia, Chenhall, 1994; Pierce, O'Dea, 2003; Almasan, Grosu, 2008; Walker et al., 2011; Grosu et al., 2014). This gap has mainly been generated by the fundamentally different motivations and attitudes of the information providers and users.

Researchers from the US and Western Europe analyse the relationship between the information provided by the management accounting system and the informational needs of managers. Central and Eastern European countries show a slightly different picture, based on the political and economic conditions. The development of management accounting, in both business practice and research, began here much later, i.e. after the transition to the market economy (the last decade of the 20th century) (Szychta, 2002, 2009; Dobroszek, 2011; Dobroszek, Szychta, 2009).

As indicated by Haldma and Lääts (2002), research in the field of management accounting has gained in importance in this region only recently, but to a greater extent than in Western Europe. Empirical studies aim at describing the development stage of management accounting in companies or presenting a particular implementation method. Hence, we indirectly gain information on the methods and tools of management accounting used to support the management process. Yet we know nothing about the management's assessment in this respect and this is precisely the rationale of the empirical research resulting in the present paper.

Fotache et al. (2011) stressed the role of management accounting in the decision-making process, indicating that it is designed to support planning in operational and strategic perspectives, to support the control process and the choice of alternatives, to motivate employees and managers to achieve objectives, to support the measurement of the managers' and employees' activity and to promote the competitiveness of the organization.

Most studies point to the business-relevance of management accounting; yet the expectations of the managers with respect to this concept should doubtlessly also be investigated. Simon (1978) dealt with this issue, defining three types of managerial needs with regard to management accounting. These are:

- observation (score keeping), indicating whether things are good or bad;
- attention (attention direction), indicating the problems that need attention;
- solving (problem solving), indicating which solution is the best.

There is, however, a gap between the expectations of the managers and the information provided by the management accounting system (Mia, Chenhall, 1994; Pierce, O'Dea, 2003; Almasan, Grosu, 2008; Walker et al., 2011; Grosu et al., 2014). Research shows that the gap relies on the different motivations which drive the users and the providers of information. However, the gap may also be traced back to the limited technological capacity of the organizations, the different competencies of the senders and

receivers of information, as well as to the cultural and economic conditions affecting business operations in the specific countries.

It should be emphasized here that the scope of management accounting is subject to constant change. Currently, there is a need for more advanced techniques and methods, like activity-based costing (ABC), target costing, kaizen costing, and the balanced scorecard (BSC), able to assist the management of business entities in a global, rapidly changing and highly competitive environment. Under these circumstances, both the decision-making process and the management accounting system need to consider elements like efficiency, quality, time and innovation (Drury, 2001). Non-financial information, as well as qualitative and quantitative variables, are now more important in the management process than financial data (Fisher, 1998; Bruns, McKinnon, 1992a, 1992b, 1993; Granlund, Lukka, 1998).

The progressive changes in contemporary business lead, on the one hand, to an increased complexity of the information system (more information, qualitative information, and strategic data); yet managers need at the same time convenient and clear forms of communication. This is why management accounting systems are required to change, with respect to their organization within the company.

As the foregoing considerations highlighted the importance of the relationship between management accounting and decision-making process, it is worth taking a look at the people and briefly indicate the role of management accountants in relation to management positions. During the last 30 years, according to Baldvinsdottir et al. (2009) management accountants evolved from bean counters to business partners who participate in the decision-making process. Kaplan and Atkinson (1998) show that management accountants should create added value at the level of management and be significant members of the management team.

In light of the above, we may note that the changing, dynamic and competitive global environment leads to an increased importance of management accounting. What is obvious is that, in order to provide support, management accounting should deliver significant and useful information. Yet what needs to be considered at this point is that the significance and usefulness of the delivered information can be assessed only in relation to the expectations of the managers. More, the relationship between management accounting and the managerial process can vary depending on the geographical area and the economy of the country where the company is located. More precisely, what we are pointing to are the differences between Western and Central and Eastern European countries.

In light of the above, we investigated the manner in which the information provided by management accounting is perceived by managers of companies located in Romania and Poland – as former communist and currently market economies.

Therefore, the authors decided to investigate the perception of managers from Poland and Romania regarding the information delivered by management accounting. As the current paper is meant to present selected findings of a more extensive piece of research, we shall consider the assessment of only three features of the provided information:

the type, the communication channel and the frequency of the delivery. For a better understanding of our findings, we shall start by describing the development of management accounting in the economic and political context of the two countries.

## **2. Management accounting in Poland and Romania: a historical context**

Though we talk about two countries located in Central and Eastern Europe, in matters of management accounting one can notice both similarities and dissimilarities with Western European countries.

The development of management accounting in Poland has been, to a large extent, shaped by the historical circumstances and the political system present in this country. In 1945–1989, i.e. in the period of the centrally planned economy formed by state-owned enterprises, management accounting, known then as cost accounting, played a marginal role in Poland and other countries in the region. Both the business practice and scientific publications focused only on the development of the cost accounting system and the determination of the guidelines and standards for this instrument. Cost accounting was shaped by the central planning system, the precedence of fiscal law rules over accounting rules, and the centralised style of management in enterprises (Szychta, 2001, 2002).

Despite the unique political and economic situation in Poland, the subject of management accounting first started appearing in the Polish literature in the 1950s, although under other names, as the censors refused to accept the term „management accounting” (Szychta, 2007, p. 217). Due to the existing system, scientific research focused on the methodological aspects (Biadacz, 2011a). By 1990, many valuable publications had been created concerning cost accounting and the application of accounting in enterprise management. Jarugowa (1966) had a particularly large impact on the popularisation and dissemination of knowledge and experiences of Western countries in the area of management and cost accounting in the Polish academic environment (Biadacz, 2011b). As a result, she created solid grounds for the practical application of management accounting methods in enterprises operating after 1990 in new market economy conditions (Pietrzak, Wnuk-Pel, 2014).

With the transformation of the political system, departure from the centrally managed economy and foreign investments in Poland in the 1990s, a dynamic development of this field of knowledge was observed, both in practice and in theory. Management accounting tools and techniques were first implemented in companies with foreign capital. The solutions used and proven in company headquarters and companies operating in developed countries were transferred to Poland. 1992 marked a particular milestone in the development of management accounting: in that year, the number of projects related to management accounting systems implemented in enterprises started to increase (Szychta, 2007, p. 221).

This development was due not only to branches and subsidiaries of companies with foreign capital, but a large contribution was made also by the Polish academic community,

familiar with the relevant practices and theories used in market economies despite the fact that management accounting in the centrally planned economy had been forbidden. As a result, soon after the beginning of the political transformation, the first Polish textbooks were published that presented management accounting concepts. These concepts were also included in accounting curricula. Biadacz (2011b) identified 56 textbooks dedicated to management accounting published from the beginning of the 1990s to 2010. Moreover, academics often played the roles of advisers and designers in the implementation of management accounting systems.

Summing up and comparing the available results of empirical studies on the development of accountancy in Poland, a gradual increase in the importance of information generated by management accounting for purposes related to management has been observed in Polish enterprises since the 1990s. The change has been accompanied by an increase in awareness of management boards and company owners as regards the inclusion of management accounting systems in business practice. Accountants have more and more knowledge in this area, obtained due to the introduction of courses related to management accounting to higher education curricula and various independent courses offered in this area in Poland after 1990.

Similar to Poland, the evolution of management accounting in Romania was strongly influenced by the historical and cultural context, but also by the political and economic changes experienced by the country over time. After the Second World War, the reforms that had already been initiated in the field of accounting were suddenly put on hold by the communist regime. The communist period had a significant influence on the evolution of management accounting, as the economic and political context didn't allow for the design and development of managerial accounting, meant to provide useful information for the decision-making. After 1950, the Soviet accounting system was „exported” to most of the countries included in the former communist bloc, Romania included (Feleaga, 1996). In that context, cost accounting played a leading part, as it supported the control of the economic development. The accounting system was one-cycle and focused on production while cost accounting was used to provide a basis for price setting and to compare the performance of the different companies (Feleaga, 1996).

During the communist regime, the information produced by the accounting system was mainly used for statistical purposes and for national level forecasts. It was not a management tool meant to facilitate the decision-making process, but it served exclusively to report that targets were reached (or not) (Albu et al., 2011). In the socialist economy, where the assessment and meeting of the information demands were poorly developed, the question if the accounting should be organized in one or two cycles was not as significant as after 1990.

After the fall of communism, the economic development of Romania was slower than the development of other former communist countries, like the Czech Republic, Poland or Hungary. Economically speaking, the 90s were characterized by political (and, as a consequence, legislative) instability, high inflation and a poor development of the capital market. In this context, the accounting system had a tough time, partly



due to its numerous amendments (Filip, Raffournier, 2010). In the early 90s, accounting in Romania needed to be re-shaped and connected to the European reality. This was the context in which the French accounting system was adopted (mainly for historical and cultural reasons), replacing the Soviet one-cycle system and driving a „brutal” separation between the financial and the management accounting. Jacques Richard (cited by Feleaga, 1996) showed at that moment his pessimism with the take-over of the French accounting system by former socialist countries, declaring that the accounting of the East-European countries was much closer to the (fundamentally monist) American accounting. The provisions of the Accounting law (no. 82/1991) and of its Implementing Regulation, with regard to the management accounting, led to more confusion among the practitioners, who understood that implementing management and cost accounting was optional (Almasan, 2008). Hence, it is not surprising at all that firms focused mainly on the financial accounting. Further, as noted by Jianu and Jianu (2012), accounting was perceived as a control tool, within which the state played a dual role: that of the accounting regulator (a part still played today), as well as that of the privileged user of the accounting information. Albu et al. (2010) observed that accountants perceived only two influences: (a) the role of the tax system, boosted by the power of the tax controllers; and (b) the expectations of the company owners and its managers, regarding tax decrease and cash-flow management. Under these circumstances, it is no surprise that both the research and the concerns of the practitioners in the field of management accounting were minimized. The 90s was a time of attempts and shy adaptation of the accounting system to the economic context while management accounting was suffering both conceptually, through the performed research and, most important, within organizations (Grosu et al., 2014).

After the year 2000, along with the adoption of the Anglo-Saxon accounting model, through the implementation of the International Accounting Standards, management accounting started to be included in more and more papers with a modern approach, which showed the interest of the academia for this topic. At the beginning, the published studies described „modern” management accounting techniques (Albu, 2003; Volkan, 2007, 2008; Albu, 2008; Almasan, Grosu, 2009), keeping up with the international trends; however, these papers were completely apart from what the practice flagged. If the academia had succeeded to a certain extent to stay in line with the international trends of development, the business environment would have continued to feel the drastic split between the financial and the management accounting from the early 90s. Several studies (Glavan et al., 2007; Jinga et al., 2010) showed that, in the decision-making process, managers use mainly the information provided by the financial accounting. Volkan (2010) reached a more radical conclusion, namely that Romanian entities do not have a management accounting system at all.

Unlike Poland, where academia’s concern for cost and management accounting has increased ever since the 80s, the changes in Romanian accounting from the early 90s slowed down the development of this field. But thanks to the investments performed by multinational companies that implemented their own management accounting system

in their Romanian subsidiaries, recent years have shown significant progress in the matter, especially after Romania's accession to the EU in 2007. The endeavour of academia to become aware of management accounting problems, together with the need of the managers for more and more complex information, have built the groundwork for the inception of a new stage in the evolution of management accounting in Romania.

Although the evolution of management accounting in Romania is similar to that in Poland in more than one regard, there are also several differences that we can point to and, thus, increase the attractiveness of our research. More specifically, while Poland was strongly influenced by the German accounting system, Romania „adopted” for a period the French accounting system, i.e. a system that was already on the decline, doubted at that time even by renowned French academics. However, the effects of the communist period on economic development and, most important, on the mentality within organizations, raise specific difficulties in the field of management accounting encountered by most companies in both countries.

### **3. The presentation of selected findings of the empirical research**

#### ***3.1. Research methodology***

The paper presents selected findings of research performed by the authors in the period May 2015 – March 2016. The survey was conducted on a random sample of enterprises from the available database of Tax Identification Numbers of companies in each country. The companies included in the research represent various sectors and different origins of capital. The questionnaire-based survey was sent online to the randomly selected Polish and Romanian managers. The questionnaire consisted of 26 half-open and closed questions (single- and multiple-choice questions or questions in the form of matrix), structured in four different sections: two of them referred to the characteristics of the company and the respondents, the third section was related to the management accounting system of the companies, while the fourth section regarded the managers' perception of the suitability of the information delivered by management accounting (MA) systems.

The authors sent 500 surveys online via Google Survey software to randomly selected companies from Poland and Romania. One question about having an MA department in the company was the „filtering question”. The respondents who answered this question negatively did not take part in the next part of the study<sup>2</sup>. In the end, the authors received 154 correctly completed questionnaires, out of which 116 originated from Poland and 38 from Romania. Taking into consideration the small size of the sample, the results cannot be generalized to the overall population. The fact that the

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<sup>2</sup> The questionnaire may be found at <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdfbaeUPmv9EU-hAMpC6KmGOaX9CjQf9ouewNK74WuSD2gJqcw/viewform>

survey had three times more respondents in Poland than in Romania is a consequence of the different approach of management accounting in the two countries in the last decade of the 20th century described in the second part of the paper.

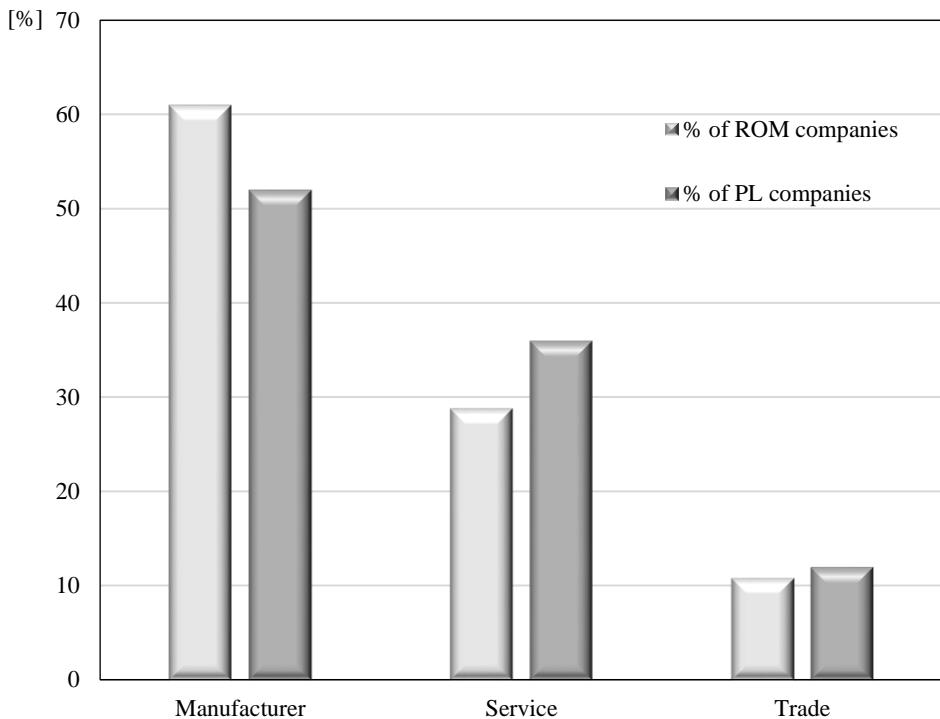
The collected data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics.

### 3.2. Description of the research sample

The business organisations included in the study, located in Romania and Poland, were classified, in the first instance, according to their activity, origin of capital, number of employees<sup>3</sup> and annual turnover in € mln.

As shown by the results, the respondents were mainly active in manufacturing companies (see Figure 1). The best represented sectors in Poland were consumer goods (22%), building and construction (14%) or IT & new technologies sectors (12%), respectively, and automotive (24%), food & beverages (13%), IT & new technologies and the telecom sectors (13%) in Romania.

**Figure 1.** Company profile: type of activity



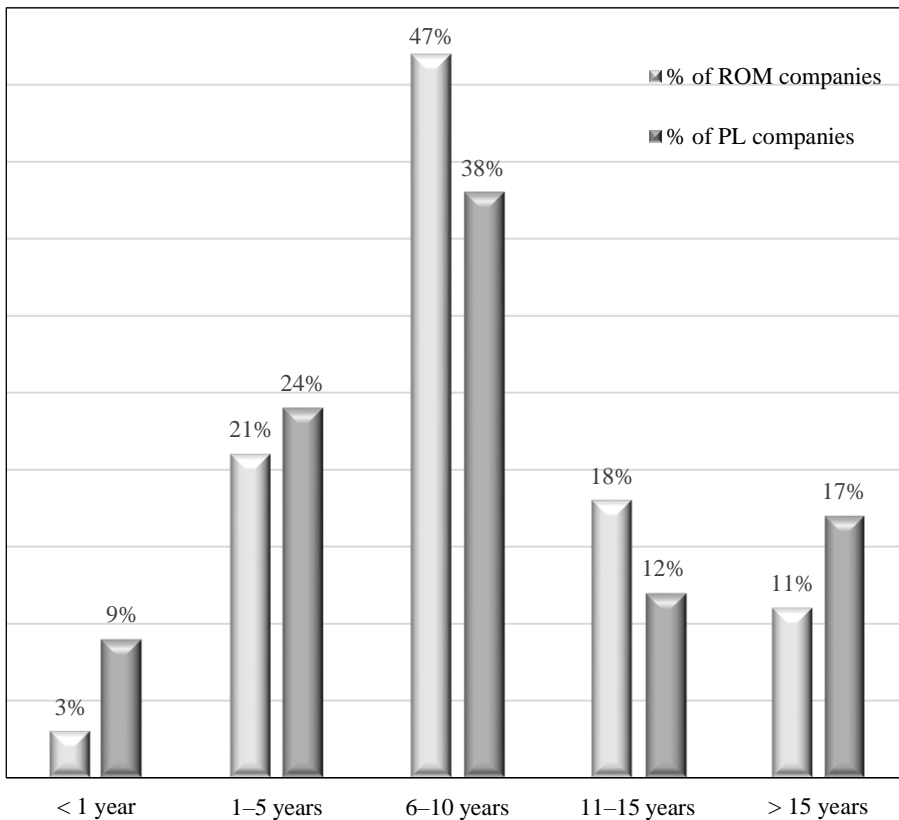
Source: authors' own elaboration.

<sup>3</sup> The size of companies in Poland and Romania were mainly selected in the study according to the number of employees: up to 50 employees – small enterprise, up to 250 employees – middle enterprise, over 250 employees – large enterprise.

Most companies included in the sample (42% in Romania and 57% in Poland) have foreign capital – this state may have a potential impact on the interpretation of the findings – while all of them are large organisations, with over 250 employees. Half of the Polish companies disclose a turnover of over € 200m, while the turnover of the best represented size-class among the Romanian companies lies between € 11m and € 50m (18% of Romanian companies).

Within the above described companies, the questionnaires were completed by managers of different departments, mainly male (58% in Romania and 64% in Poland). The best represented intervals of work experience were 6–10 years, i.e. 47% of Romanian managers and 38% of Polish managers and 1–5 years (21% of Romanian managers; 24% of Polish managers).

**Figure 2.** Experience of the surveyed managers (in years)

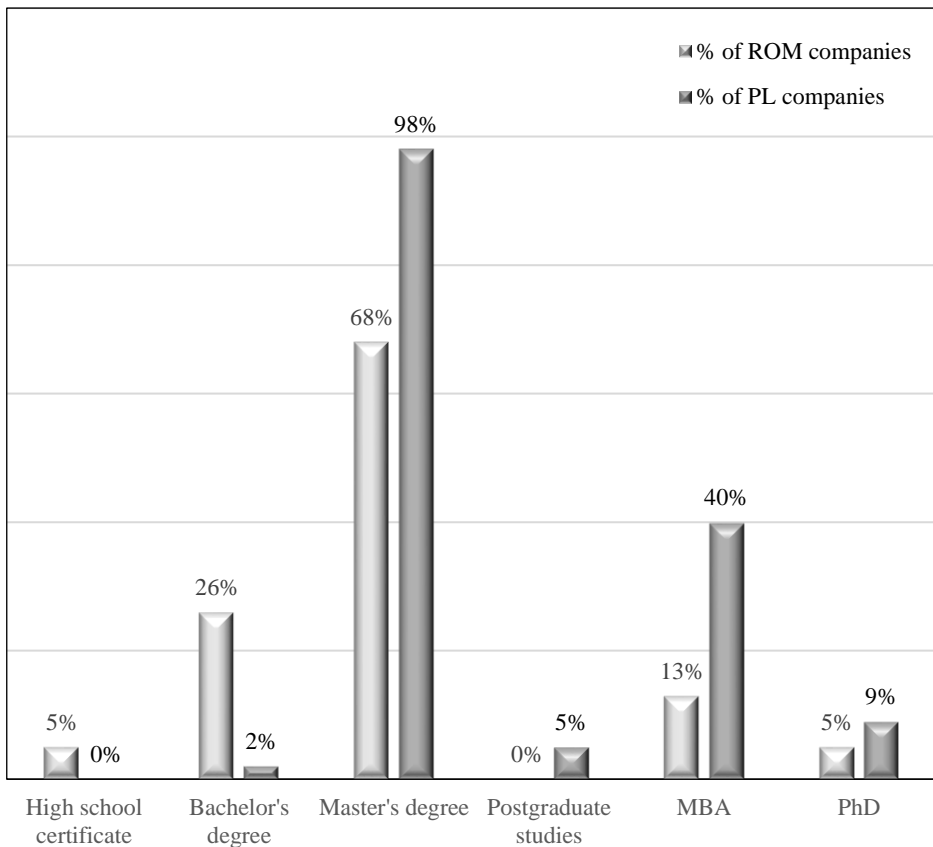


Source: authors' own elaboration.

The educational profile of the surveyed managers in the two countries is interesting and should be highlighted (see Figure 3).

In both countries, most respondents hold a Master's degree, confirming a high level of education, which means they should be able to provide excellent management and decision-making skills. There are, however, subtle differences between the two countries with respect to the educational profile of the respondents, which is to say that more Polish than Romanian responding managers are graduates with higher-level university degrees, i.e. Master's, MBA or PhD. What should be specified, however, is that in Poland it is almost impossible to get a management position in a company without holding a Master's degree.

**Figure 3.** Respondent profile: education



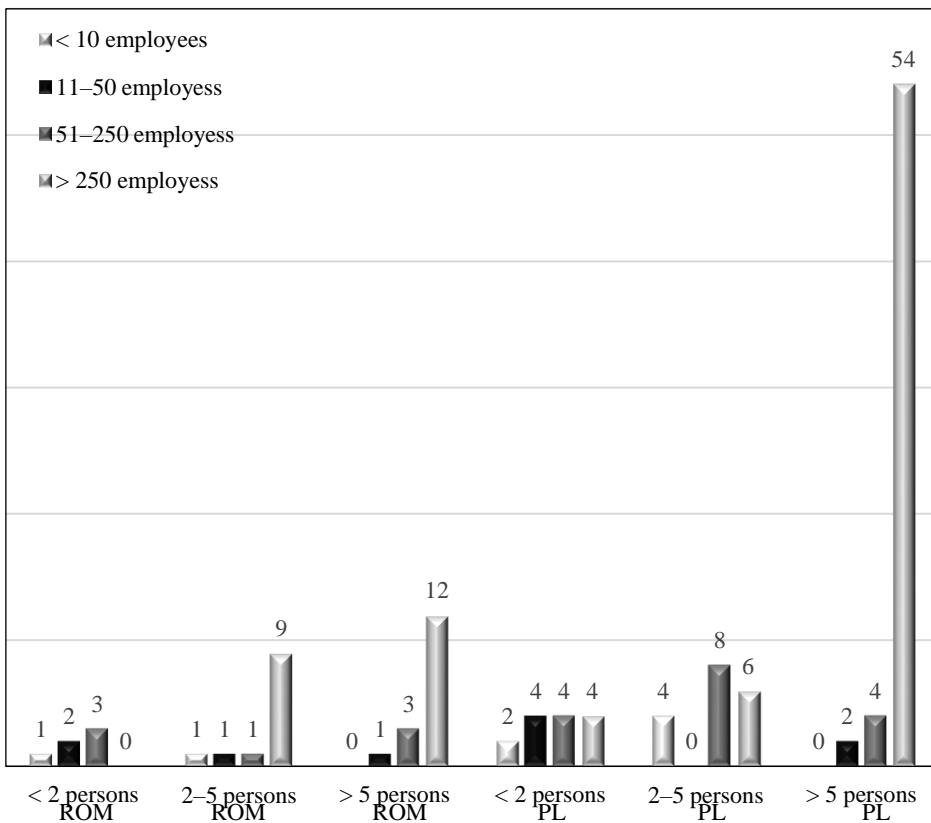
Source: authors' own elaboration.

Turning to the place of management accounting inside the company, a significant question of the survey regarded the existence of a distinct management accounting (MA) department. The responses showed that 21% of the surveyed Polish companies and 11% of the surveyed Romanian companies had no MA department and were, as a consequence, excluded from the study. Among the remaining organisations, MA

tasks were mostly performed within a distinct department (55% of Romanian companies, 62% of Polish companies); yet the companies often prefer to integrate management accountants with employees from different departments (34% in Romania, 16% in Poland). Only two of the Polish companies outsourced management accounting.

47% of Romanian companies and 65% of Polish companies have more than 5 people involved in management accounting, while 35% of Romanian companies and 20% of Polish employ 2-5 people in these departments. This is due to the dominance of large companies in the sample, i.e. companies employing over 250 people, as such enterprises have the largest management accounting departments (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4.** Employment in management accounting departments in the surveyed companies

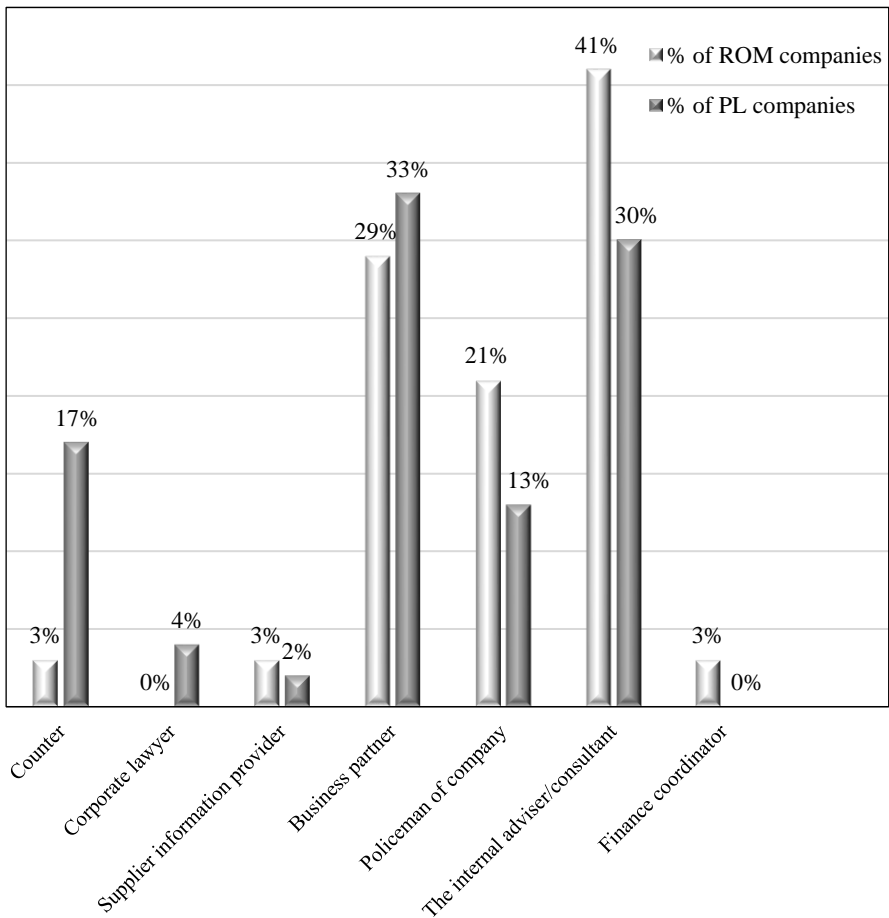


Source: authors' own elaboration.

When it comes to the role played by management accountants within the company, the analysis showed that they are, to a large extent, seen as partners of the management,

as specialists with particular knowledge about business, and able to support the decision-making process. In this context, 41% of the Romanian managers and 30% of the Polish managers consider management accountants as internal advisers/consultants and, nearly to the same extent, as business partners. The responses confirm the current trends in both business practice (most often in the US) and academic research. As such, management accountants should not operate in isolation, but as members of a team. They become management advisors in both financial and non-financial matters, with the task of interpreting financial ratios and supporting the improvement of the qualitative process, strategic planning, process design and advice in decision-making. They play the role of an expert who takes part in the strategic decision-making from the point of view of the company (Szychta, 2007, p. 155; Wolf et al., 2010; Järvenpää, 2007).

**Figure 5.** The perception of management accountants by managers



Source: authors' own elaboration.

### 3.3. MA information and how it is communicated – analysing the research questions

#### A. The perceived suitability of the information provided by management accounting

The following first question was set in order to analyze managers' perception on the information provided by management accounting:

1. Do managers from Romania and Poland rate non-financial information higher than financial information?

The authors had previously thought that if companies with foreign capital dominated in the study then they would implement a more western-type managerial accounting approach, i.e. more tools and methods for strategic decision making.

For the purpose of the analysis, the financial information was divided into typical financial data originating from the financial accounting or the costing system (i.e. cost, revenue, profit/loss), the budget (i.e. variance analysis), as well as from the ratio-based financial statements analysis, referring both to planned and current data. Non-financial data was considered only based on indicators. The respondents rated the usefulness of the selected information provided by the MA on a 1–5 scale (1 – completely useless, 2 – unsuitable, 3 – neutral, 4 – important, 5 – very important).

The analysis of the results (see Table 1) showed that managers rated financial data higher than non-financial information for the decision-making process.

**Table 1.** Suitability of the information provided by the MA in the decision-making processes

Type of information	ROM		POL	
	Average	Rank	Average	Rank
Costs	4.529	1	4.283	1
Financial results	4.294	2	3.978	2
Financial indicators	4.206	3	3.826	4
Variance analysis	4.118	4	3.304	6
Actual financial data	4.059	5	3.978	2
Revenues	4.029	6	3.761	5
Planned financial data	4.029	7	3.913	3
Non-financial indicators	3.618	8	2.935	7

Source: authors' own elaboration.



Within the financial information, both Polish and Romanian managers perceived information on costs and financial performance as most suitable in the context of decision-making. These were followed, in the Romanian view, by financial indicators. Polish managers ranked current and planned financial data second and third, respectively. In both countries, the ratings shows a strong orientation towards financial aspects, i.e. financial reporting. It means that the managers prefer financial (hard data) over non-financial information (soft data). Probably non-financial information is less understood by the surveyed managers or it's inappropriate for their current decisions.

Starting with the type of information preferred, we further aimed at identifying the type of tasks and decisions for which the information provided by management accounting is employed. The following research question was formulated in this context:

2. Do managers from Poland and Romania use the information provided by management accountants for short-term or long-term tasks and decision-making?

The average ratings were calculated in order to find the answer to the above research question (see Table 2). The respondents were asked to use a 1–5 scale: (1 – no usage, 2 – usage in small extent, 3 – medium extent of usage, 4 – large extent of usage, 5 – very large extent of usage).

**Table 2.** The extent to which surveyed managers use information provided by the management accounting department in management activities

Types of decisions	ROM – average	POL – average
Ad-hoc decisions	2.7353	2.9130
Operational decisions	3.5294	3.5217
Tactical decisions	3.5000	3.5435
Strategic decisions	3.7059	3.6957

Source: authors' own elaboration.

In the research, the short-term tasks and decisions of management translate into ad-hoc, operational and tactical perspectives, while long-term tasks and decisions of management are related to the strategic perspective, respectively.

The responses of the Romanian and the Polish managers in the matter of interest were quite similar. The Polish and Romanian managers used the information provided by management accounting for strategic management, but also for tactical and operational activities, to a medium extent, while its usage for ad-hoc decisions was rated lower.

In view of the second research question, it may be stated that managers from Poland and Romania use the information provided by management accounting more for short-term (operational and tactical) than for long-term tasks and decision-making.

### **B. The communication form and the frequency of information delivery**

Apart from the type of information and the qualitative elements of reporting, the authors examined the manner in which the information provided by management accounting is forwarded to managers. Both traditional (PDF files, printed version reports, excel data transfer) and modern (online, mobile reporting) channels of communication were investigated. In this context, the authors formulated the following research question:

3. Is there any difference in the evaluation of the communication channels of the information provided by management accounting by Polish and Romanian managers?

In order to answer this question, descriptive statistics were used (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Assessment of the communication mode of the information provided by management accounting

<b>Communication channels</b>	<b>ROM</b>	<b>POL</b>
PDF files	<b>3.941</b>	2.739
Printed version reports	3.471	2.543
Excel data transfer	<b>4.412</b>	<b>4.152</b>
Online	2.971	<b>3.674</b>
Mobile reporting	2.735	3.022

Source: authors' own elaboration.

Excel spreadsheets are the only communication channel which, to a large extent, satisfies both Polish and Romanian managers; however, the similarities end here. Polish managers rank the online transfer via front end and mobile reporting in second and third place, while printed documents are found least satisfactory. By contrast, Romanian managers favour the traditional approach, with PDF and printed reports in top three of their preferences. Using Excel spreadsheets to transfer or present the information of MA is not surprising, because this is the basic tool of management accountants.

Further aspects under assessment were the frequency in the delivery of information and the possibility of face-to-face communication between the beneficiaries and the providers of MA information within meetings. In this context, managers surveyed by Pierce and O'Dea (2003) pointed precisely to the frequency of the information received as the element which required significant improvement in their relations with the management accounting departments. In this matter the following research question was put forward:

4. What is the frequency with which Polish and Romanian managers receive information from management accountants?

As presented in Table 4, 43% of the Polish and 41% of the Romanian managers declared that information was delivered on a monthly basis, though a higher frequency would be recommendable. 41% of the Romanian and 33% of the Polish respondents also stated reports were also received on demand, while a daily or weekly delivery of information is rather rare.

**Table 4.** Frequency of information delivery

Frequency	ROM		POL	
	No. of responses	%	No. of responses	%
Monthly	14	41	40	43
On demand	14	41	30	33
Daily	2	6	12	13
Weekly	4	12	10	11

Source: authors' own elaboration.

The frequency with which Polish and Romanian managers receive information from management accountants is hence similar. Thus, it means that there is no difference in this matter. The analysis of the communication channels and frequency of communication also included studying the frequency of face-to-face meetings between managers and management accountants (see Table 5).

**Table 5.** Frequency of meetings with management accountants

Frequency of meetings	ROM		POL	
	No. of responses	%	No. of responses	%
No	7	21	16	17
Yes:				
monthly	8	24	24	26
on demand	14	41	40	43
daily	4	12	4	4
weekly	1	3	8	9

Source: authors' own elaboration.

The results were quite interesting: 41% of the Romanian and 43% of the Polish managers meet management accountants on demand, 21% of the Romanian and 17% of the Polish managers do not participate in common meetings with management

accountants, and only 12% of the Romanian and 4% of the Polish managers hold daily meetings.

It is worth underlining that the low frequency of direct meetings could justify the poor utilisation of management accounting in the management process in the two countries included in the study. The opportunity to meet representatives of the management accounting departments improves the relationship between this professional group and the managers and also contributes to better support of the decision-making processes. Bruns and McKinnon (1993) noted that interpersonal communication, as well as the meetings with management accountants, are the main sources of information, while written reports are just a formal confirmation of what was communicated at the meetings.

## **Conclusions**

Decision-making is essential in managing an organization. Proper decision-making relies on relevant information, delivered to a great extent by the accounting information system. The expectations of managers, with regard to the information they are supplied with, can be met or not. Information should be adjusted to the needs of its addressees, it should be of the right quality, properly detailed, and delivered in a suitable and convenient manner. Yet there is most often a gap between the information provided by management accountants and the needs of the managers.

In this context, the current paper aimed at investigating and performing a comparative analysis of the perception of managers regarding the information provided by management accountants with respect to several specific issues: the type of information, the types of tasks and decisions the information is employed in, the channels of communication, as well as the frequency of written and direct communication.

Four research questions were put forward and analysed using descriptive statistics. Taking into account the analysed data and formulated questions it may be stated that both Polish and Romanian managers prefer financial over non-financial information, and employing data supplied by management accountants in operational, tactical and strategic management. There is no clear orientation of the information provided by management accountants to long-term decision-making, which leads us to the conclusion that the statement that management accountants are business partners is rather a declarative one.

The same is suggested by the rather low frequency of direct communication between managers and management accountants, in the context of face-to-face meetings, while written reports are most often delivered on a monthly basis or on demand. The main difference between the preferences of Romanian and Polish managers was to be found in the communication channels of the information. Though Excel spreadsheets are well accepted by all respondents irrespective of their location, Polish managers favour online communication while Romanians would rather have printed reports.

In summary, despite the important role of management accounting in business, as a support of the management process, a gap between the informational needs of managers and the information supply of management accountants can still be observed, also in the case of companies operating in Poland and Romania. The results of the research indicate that the surveyed management accountants in Poland and Romania are „bean counters” providing financial information in order to support managers in operational decisions.

As the statements of the managers in this matter are quite general, their perception of the role played by the management accountant in the organization requires further investigation, both in the geographical area currently under analysis and in Western European countries.

Moreover, most companies included in the survey are subsidiaries of foreign multinational organisations, where both the managers and management accountants are guided by the headquarters. This aspect may be seen as an important part of the development nature of MA in Central and Eastern European countries. It can be assumed that the responding managers would strive to obtain more internal analyses, of a better quality, e.g. non-financial data, or strategic analyses, which would support their current activity or contribute to a more active role of the management accountants as business partners, if their area of operations were wider and they did not need to follow decisions taken at the central headquarters.

In the above mention respect, the authors perceive in a positive way the enterprises with foreign capital (mainly multinational organisations), which dominated in the empirical research in both countries, in relation to business entities with national capital. The surveyed companies with foreign capital usually share their knowledge of MA systems, i.e. its tools and methods, thus contributing to the development of this concept in Poland and Romania. Moreover, they often have more capital to implement new MA tools and new technologies supporting MA systems. The surveyed domestic companies in Poland and Romania that implemented the MA systems most frequently have the basic tools of MA (e.g. full cost accounting, simplified budgets) and use simplified technology, e.g. Excel spreadsheets.

According to the authors, for developing countries (e.g. Poland, Romania), companies with foreign capital may mean more opportunities for the development of the MA concept and expanding the knowledge in this field. On the other hand, the analysis of the data also showed that companies with foreign capital (often as branches in Poland and Romania), as well as enterprises with domestic capital, are largely based on financial data within the MA systems. Therefore the aspect of the impact of capital origin on the scale of MA systems in enterprises require separate, in-depth empirical research.

The limitations of the study consist mainly in the small number of respondents from Romania, as well as in the restrictive character of the online survey. As a consequence, more reliable results will be gathered in the next stage of the research, consisting in direct interviews with the responding managers. We expect that the direct communication will be helpful for a better understanding of the reasoning on which the provided responses are based.

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