

ACCOUNTING TECHNICIANS: Roundtable 2: Imagining the Future

Accounting Technicians
Webinar Series
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Confederation of Asian and Pacific Accountants (CAPA)

Overall Outcomes and Next Steps for Consideration

The Outcomes:

- ATs do not have a 'brand' - stakeholders do not understand ATs
- Articulate and demonstrate to many stakeholders
 - ✓ what an AT is and
 - ✓ that there is a future for ATs
- Basic book-keeping is still required in many instances and/or jurisdictions
- Technology is pushing ATs to 'own' technical areas of accountancy such as data gathering and reporting, software applications and cloud computing - is this a unique identifier for ATs?
- If ATs had the 'right' to do certain tasks, it would assist with recognition
- ATs are an important pipeline in the supply of PAs (*evidenced from UK)
- 'Trust' is paramount - this creates the case for professionalising the AT cohort, in the public interest

Next Steps for consideration:

- Understand why ATs are recognised in some jurisdictions (possible success factors)
- Understand current perceptions that suggest ATs do not have a future and/or role for separate recognition in the accountancy profession
- Delineation of roles between PAs and ATs: Understand if other professions (medical, legal) provide insights into how professional 'levels' successfully co-exist for mutual benefit
- What, if anything, can be learnt from those PAOs that already provide AT and PA programs - how do they view and manage the co-existence

Imagining the Future – key responses and comments

- Role of AT (like the PA) will evolve over time reflecting the current environment and market needs
- Critical skills will also evolve to reflect the changing demand and expectations of the AT
- Can a set of core competencies be created, whilst allowing for specialisation to meet any specific jurisdictional needs?

Slides 4 - 6 :

Key responses to the specific questions, and challenges/ thoughts arising from these

Slides 7 - 9 :

Original slides presented at Roundtable 2

Imagining the future.....

.....Will there be a market need/demand for this type of accountant?

Comments before RDT2:

- Yes, but role will be different

Comments during RDT2:

- **There is an existing market across profession / world**
- In some jurisdictions, there is a demonstrated demand for ATs to:
 - ✓ Support organisations to become digital ready
 - ✓ Fulfil statutory roles for ATs
- AT level brings opportunities for non-graduates to enter the accountancy profession

Challenges & thoughts arising:

- Need to understand any contrary views in relation to ATs
- **Need to help the market to understand the role of ATs**
- Consider if there is a role for ATs in the evolving area of sustainability reporting and assurance
- Any statutory roles will require regulated training to be completed.

Imagining the future.....

.....What roles (and critical skills) are envisaged?

Comments before RDT2:

Critical skills for accountants are expected to be:

- Technology related:
 - ✓ Big Data/Data analysis
 - ✓ Blockchain, Cloud-based
- Communication skills
- Ethics and governance
- Focus on advisory

(CAPA note: the relative emphasis placed on these for PAs and ATs may be the key question)

Comments during RDT2:

- Possible roles for ATs:
 - ✓ Compliance roles
 - ✓ Fundamental accounting and financial management
 - ✓ Sustainability and non-financial reporting
 - ✓ Data gathering, structuring, analysing
 - ✓ Internal controls around data management/analysing
- **ATs perform a range of roles at different levels**, for example:
 - ✓ Some ATs may only gather and organise data for others to use
 - ✓ Some may interpret and provide an analysis of the data
 - ✓ Others may perform a broader role and carry out more complex activities

Challenges & thoughts arising:

- **Roles of ATs in certain jurisdictions, and level that they operate at, means that critical skills may vary** – making standardisation difficult
- Identifying the critical skills unique to the different levels that ATs operate at is key to:
 - ✓ Matching roles to skills (or vice versa)
 - ✓ **Enabling AT roles to evolve in line with the future demands and expectations on ATs**

(Take some of this discussion forward to future roundtables e.g. Defining an AT)

Imagining the future.....

What, if anything, needs to change in how this type of accountant is perceived?

Comments before RDT2:

- Establish a common base and understanding of ATs
- Will need to change perceptions:
 - ✓ Locally, regionally, globally
 - ✓ With all stakeholders

The challenge will be 'how?'

Comments during RDT2:

- ATs could be defined in terms of the level that they operate at (mid-tier, senior level)
- Stakeholder expectations of ATs may differ depending on demand
- Are ATs genuinely accepted as part of the accounting profession?
- Emphasise the link between growth of AT segment of the profession and the overall opportunity to improve PAO sustainability.

Challenges & thoughts arising:

We need a better understanding of:

- **the current perception of ATs**
- the growing and changing demands (and constraints) on ATs
- whether the AT sector can respond to stakeholder demands and expectations
- **Whether a core set of competences/skills can be created, whilst allowing for specialisation to meet jurisdictional needs**

Imagining the future.....

.....Will there be a market need/demand for this type of accountant?

Directly relevant responses:

- Yes, but role will be different

What we have heard to date:

- Yes – for developing jurisdictions
- Yes – for the public sector which has too few accountants in many countries
- Yes – where the provision of cost-effective services is demanded. Can be in-practice or in business, especially SMEs
- Uncertainty over impact of technological change and AI:
 - ✓ No – advances will reduce the demand
 - ✓ Yes – roles will evolve

What might this mean?

This cohort of individuals already exists, especially in developed markets – just not easily identified for various reasons.

Undoubtedly, given the general nature of their work, it is the impact of technology and AI that is the main uncertainty – a threat or opportunity?

The opportunity for PAOs and the profession would seem to be to embrace existing and new cohorts (growth) and ensure appropriately skilled (professionalise and meet market needs, e.g. new client services)

Imagining the future.....

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(CAPA note: the relative emphasis placed on these for PAs and ATs may be the key question)

What we have heard to date:

- In developing economies (in early stages of accounting reforms and professionalisation), current roles/skills are needed, e.g. basic bookkeeping
- Technology and digitalisation skills – ability to manage and interpret data (true for all accountants?)
- Critical thinking:
 - ✓ Analyse and interpret data,
 - ✓ Problem solve
 - ✓ Make appropriate judgements and decisions
- Softer skills – communicate the information
- Privacy, ethics and accountability

What might this mean?

The skills journey will continue to evolve for all accountants – PAs or ATs. The continued improvement in critical thinking, softer skills, ethics, etc, appears to be a demand for “increased professionalism” which ought to be a natural result for ATs if part of PAO membership, CPD, etc.

Imagining the future.....

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Directly relevant responses:

- Establish a common base and understanding of ATs
- Will need to change perceptions:
 - ✓ locally, regionally, globally
 - ✓ with all stakeholders

The challenge will be 'how?'

What we have heard to date:

- Global recognition required and acceptance that there is a role for the AT equivalent
- Need to include ATs in the wider vision and strategy for the profession (i.e. how ATs fit into long-term growth and sustainability of the global accountancy profession)
- A better understanding is needed of
 - ✓ Who the future AT is;
 - ✓ What the future AT can contribute

What might this mean?

The words 'Accounting Technician' may mean different things to different people – so a common definition will assist. However, perhaps moving the conversation towards "the mid-tier of the accounting sector" may assist others to understand the position of this cohort and how they can complement "the senior tier" (the CAs, CPAs):

- Eliminate 'competitor threat'
- Focus on efficiencies and opportunities