
Call for Papers: Accounting and accountability in small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

Call for papers

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Objectives and scope of the special issue

Small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of our economy. They are widely acknowledged to be key drivers of both employment and innovation (cf. [McKinsey.com, 2022](#)). For example, in OECD countries, SMEs account for about 99% of firms and 70% of all jobs ([OECD, 2017](#)). Therefore, ensuring their continued profitability and successful corporate governance can be key to our future prosperity. However, recent events worldwide, including the COVID pandemic, war in Ukraine and rise of inflation, have had a significant and detrimental effect on the expected longevity of these small firms, with many falling by the wayside as these events have had their impact across the globe. Now is the time to strengthen research on SMEs, with the hope of rebirth and prosperity for future generations. Accounting and accountability together have a role to play in nurturing these organisations. This special issue therefore wishes to address the key issues of how SMEs use accounting and accountability to measure, manage and answer for their actions, whilst serving the needs of multiple stakeholders, all with different claims.

The editors welcome submissions to this special issue, in the areas of accounting and/or accountability, broadly conceived, as applied to SMEs. These might include, but are not restricted to, the following areas:

- (1) Fieldwork-based evidence of the use of management accounting in managing and measuring performance,
- (2) Financial accounting being used as a tool for discharging accountability,
- (3) Explorations of stakeholder identification and needs and the ways in which these are addressed,
- (4) Challenges faced by SMEs in the post-COVID era, and how they are using accounting to help them overcome difficulties,
- (5) The use of new technologies to assist internal governance and control or to create new strategic outreach or internationalisation opportunities and
- (6) Commitments to sustainable business practices and accountability thereof.

We are open to new ideas that are based on different research methodologies, including

- (1) Qualitative or quantitative evidence,

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- (2) Illustrative case studies or inductive reasoning, based on grounded empirical evidence and
- (3) Theoretical conceptions of new pathways for SMEs.

Submissions may be from anywhere in the world, but must clearly make the case for inclusion on the specific topic of accounting or accountability in SMEs. Ideally, papers should show a broader applicability across differing nations or organisational forms.

Overview

SMEs cover nearly every sector of the economy, and research into their practices is diverse. For example, [Li et al. \(2021\)](#) explored corporate governance and accountability in managing performance in an ambitious entrepreneurial firm in China, focusing on principal-agent relationships and hierarchical accountability to examine how Western ideas can influence behaviour in a developing country. [Kusumaningtias et al. \(2021\)](#) explored a similar theme of accountability in SME Islamic entrepreneurship during the COVID-19 pandemic, showing how the elements of responsiveness, responsibility, appropriateness and effectiveness can encourage both horizontal and vertical accountability in SMEs.

Some of the key challenges faced by SMEs today give rise to new opportunities, which entrepreneurial ventures are well-placed to exploit. For example, it is almost without question that firms need to keep pace with digitalisation if they are to survive. SMEs are better able than most to move quickly; witness the proliferation of online food deliveries (often from tiny micro-firms) during the pandemic. This increasing need for online service delivery requires accounting systems to be in place to handle job orders, costings, customer details and so on. Having strong internal control mechanisms can help SMEs to avoid accusations of fraud ([Siti et al., 2021](#)). In addition, integrating corporate social responsibility (CSR) into the management control systems (MCSs) of SMEs has been found to play a role in the relationship between CSR initiatives and organisational performance ([Cheffi et al., 2021](#)). Realistically, very often management accounting practice in SMEs is naïve, at best ([Jaradat et al., 2021](#); [Dlamini and Schutte, 2021](#); [Eugine and Mapuranga, 2017](#)), and seeking remedies of this is both a theoretical and practical agenda.

Another key opportunity for SMEs is the strategic goal of internationalisation. This has potential advantages of both diversification and of the exploitation of economy of scale. Clearly, this could help their growth as they expand beyond their home and local markets. However, in order to upscale on this level, they require resources from sponsors, lenders, investors and government, as well as new orders from overseas customers. These multiple stakeholders require accountability reports on activity and performance, which the SME must address if they are to receive such support (cf. [Ma et al., 2022](#)). From a financial accounting standpoint, [Wijekoon et al. \(2021\)](#) report on the institutional pressures that drove the adoption of the IFRS for SMEs in Sri Lanka. Their findings reveal that the decision was in response to institutional pressures, rather than to any alleged benefits from internationally comparable financial information (cf. [Güngörmüş's, 2020](#)). Further, the standardisation of non-financial reporting for SMEs is expected to increase in importance when this becomes obligatory for smaller entities (cf. [Krawczyk, 2021](#); [Gholami et al., 2022](#)).

Nevertheless, whilst trying to enhance their business opportunities through international growth, SMEs must also be aware of other issues faced by business today, including government commitments to decarbonisation, by reducing greenhouse gasses, for example, and making promises to become more sustainable. Most SMEs will have little resources to divert towards sustainability (cf. [Johnstone, 2021](#)), when they are focusing on restarting their business after a period of dormancy, as in the COVID-19 era.

Cavicchi *et al.* (2022) examine the extent to which sustainability is integrated into conventional accounting practices. Their paper investigates how MCSs and sustainability-specific control systems (SCSs) are mobilised, and how they interact to support the environmental sustainability strategy of an SME. The role of multidisciplinary teams, formed by accountants and environmental scientists to support sustainability management control at the SME, enabled interaction and provided steps for integrated thinking. So what more evidence can one find to suggest that SMEs have a conscience and are willing and able to be held accountable for their actions?

**Workshop on ‘Accounting and Accountability
in Small Firms: insights from research,
teaching and practice’**



The guest editors are running a workshop on the above theme from 18–19 May 2023 at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, sponsored by the European Council for Small Business and Entrepreneurship. Full academic papers presented at this event may subsequently be considered for the special issue, if the authors wish, by submission in the usual manner. Presentation and attendance at the event is not a necessary prerequisite for acceptance in the special issue nor does acceptance for the workshop confirm acceptance for inclusion in the journal. The website link for those interested in participating in the conference is given below.

Website: <https://ewds3.strath.ac.uk/aasbworkshop/>

Submission to the journal and logistics

The instructions for submission and guidance for authors are at the Journal’s webpage at <https://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/journal/ejms>.

Submissions to *EJMS*’s special issue should be made using ScholarOne Manuscripts, the online submission and peer review system.

The deadline for the initial submission is 31 December 2023.

The word count for each paper should not exceed 7,000 words (everything included). The word count provided should attribute 280 words per table, figure, illustration or photograph and should include the abstract, references and appendices.

When submitting online, authors should designate their manuscript for this Special Issue (select “Special Issue” as the manuscript type when submitting and then connect the paper to this special issue.) Submissions should be accompanied by an assurance of originality and exclusivity and should adhere to the manuscript guidelines for authors that can be found on the journal’s website.

If you have any questions or suggestions regarding manuscripts, please direct them to the lead guest editor, Dr Julia A Smith, at julia.smith@strath.ac.uk.

All submissions will be subject to a rigorous double-blind peer review process, with one or more of the guest editors acting as action editor.

The accepted papers will be published open access in the Journal’s web page, free of charge to authors.

Julia A. Smith
University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK

Gavin C. Reid
University of St Andrews, St Andrews, UK, and

Tiago Cardao-Pito
ISEG, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal

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Further reading

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