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ACCOUNTING OUTSOURCING IN MICRO AND SMALL ENTITIES – OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

OUTSOURCING RACHUNKOWOŚCI W MIKRO- I MAŁYCH PODMIOTACH – SZANSE I ZAGROŻENIA

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Summary: In the era of social and economic transformations, strong competition, as well as changing legal regulations, it is possible to stay on the market and for micro and small entities to operate effectively by outsourcing the provision of accounting services to highly specialised entities. *Aim of the article:* to present the role of accounting outsourcing in terms of information needs of users of small and micro entities operating on the global market, as well as to point out their opportunities and threats in the light of the results of the conducted research. *Research methods:* studies of the subject literature, review of legal acts, survey method, inference. *Research results:* benefits (opportunities): focus on the implementation of key tasks, identification and reduction of the risk of threat to financial liquidity, reduction of labour costs, better effectiveness without investing; threats: confidentiality of company information, changes in legal regulations, increase in service prices.

Keywords: outsourcing, accounting, economical information.

Streszczenie: W dobie przemian społeczno-gospodarczych, silnej konkurencji, a także zmieniających się przepisów prawnych utrzymanie się na rynku i efektywne funkcjonowanie mikro- i małych podmiotów możliwe jest dzięki delegowaniu świadczenia usług w dziedzinie rachunkowości na zewnątrz wysoko wyspecjalizowanym jednostkom. Celem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie roli outsourcingu rachunkowości w aspekcie potrzeb informacyjnych użytkowników podmiotów małych i mikro funkcjonujących na globalnym rynku, jak również wskazanie na ich szanse i zagrożenia w świetle wyników przeprowadzonych badań. Jako metodami badawczymi posłużono się studiami literatury przedmiotu, przeglądem aktów prawnych, metodą ankietową oraz wnioskowaniem. Wyniki badań wskazały zarówno na korzyści (szanse), takie jak: koncentracja na realizacji kluczowych zadań, identyfikacja i obniżanie ryzyka zagrożenia płynności finansowej, obniżka kosztów pracy, lepsza efektywność bez

inwestowania, jak i zagrożenia, takie jak: poufność informacji o firmie, zmiany przepisów prawnych, wzrost cen usług.

Słowa kluczowe: outsourcing, rachunkowość, informacje ekonomiczne.

1. Introduction

The process of globalization of the economy, the dynamically changing market conditions (growing international competition), and the formal and legal conditions of the entity's operation enforce changes in the sphere of choice of goals and shape a new way of enterprises' activity. The socio-economic changes taking place also determine the process of the changes taking place in the accounting system, so that they are adapted to the current conditions in which the economic units operate.

Changes in the accounting system take place in two directions – formal and qualitative. The formal aspect results from national and international regulations, e.g. EU directives, the Accounting Act, and accounting standards. At the same time it should be emphasized that the applicable regulations have both an obligatory nature, i.e. are mandatory, guaranteeing the presentation of a faithful picture of the property and financial situation and the financial result of an entity, as well as have an optional nature, giving the individual the right to choose specific methods, rules or solutions allowed by the Act in terms of, for example, the valuation methods for assets and liabilities, and the method of recording and presenting financial information. Qualitative issues are related to the scope and value of information generated by the accounting system (reporting) for recipients, both external and internal. The purpose of modern accounting, including reporting, is to generate useful information for making rational economic decisions. It is worth emphasizing that “if financial information is to be useful, it must be helpful and faithfully present what they are supposed to present” [International Financial Reporting Standards 2014: par. CJ4, p. 42]. Business units are interested in a wide range of cross-sectional information generated by the accounting system, both financial and non-financial in business processes.

In times of social and economic transformations, strong competition, changing legal regulations, staying on the market, and the effective functioning of micro and small entities is possible thanks to delegating the provision of services in the field of accounting to outside highly specialized units.

The aim of the article is to present the role of accounting outsourcing in the aspect of the information needs of small and micro entities operating on the global market, indicating their chances and threats in light of the results of the conducted research.

The applied research procedure determined the structure of the article, which consists of an introduction, a theoretical and empirical part, as well as a summary and conclusions.

The first part discusses the essence of outsourcing and its objectives in a market economy. The importance of outsourcing as a tool for creating a stable development of an enterprise operating in a competitive environment is emphasized.

The second part describes the aim, method and scope of the empirical research and the socio-demographic characteristics of the examined entities. The main objective of the research was to determine the developmental benefits that can be achieved by micro and small entities through financial, accounting and advisory services for external entities. The basic methods were questionnaire surveys conducted on a sample of micro and small enterprises only using outsourcing in the area of accounting and tax consulting. The research covered 53 entities in the group of small and medium enterprises, which met the statutory criterion of the micro and small entity definition in accordance with the Accounting Act. The research was conducted in the second half of 2018 in the area of the city of Wrocław. The selection of the research area was targeted because in the analysed region large investments are being carried out, and there is a strong educational and scientific potential supporting the development of the SME sector. The research was conducted on social and demographic characteristics of entrepreneurs such as: location, company size, company age, sectoral affiliation, education profile/level of education of the entrepreneur, and gender. These data were used to obtain information on the characteristics of the sample.

The empirical part concerning “outsourcing of accounting – opportunities and threats” was prepared on the basis of the survey results. The questionnaire included questions that allowed to achieve the main objective of the article. The research served to answer the question of whether outsourcing in the area of accounting and tax consulting can be an important tool for micro and small entities in the area of building competitive advantage, constructing business models and creating their development. In this context, the direction of research was outlined, in which a hypothesis was put forward that outsourcing used in accounting and tax consulting is a tool that generates multi-sectional financial information useful for the development of micro and small entities in the face of the challenges of the global environment. The implementation of the main objective requires the formulation of the following detailed research questions:

- the reasons for using the services of an outsourcing company in the field of accounting,
- methods of settling accounts of entities with the Tax Office,
- places and people keeping accounts in the surveyed entities,
- execution of additional services provided by external companies,
- assessment of the benefits resulting from the use of outsourcing of accounting services,
- assessment of the risks resulting from the use of outsourcing of accounting services.

Answers to these questions were sought by means of a survey and a statistical analysis of the obtained results. The questionnaire was created for questions of a 0-1 character, allowing to obtain answers on the occurrence or not of given issues. It consists of questions concerning eight reasons for using the services of an outsourcing company in the field of accounting, two questions related to the place and person keeping accounts in the surveyed entities, six questions relating to the way of keeping accounting books and settling accounts of entities with the Tax Office, five questions concerning the implementation of additional services provided by external companies as well as questions concerning the assessment of the existence of eight benefits and seven threats.

2. The essence of outsourcing in a market economy

In the economic literature there are many views on the essence of outsourcing. W.T. Bielecki perceives outsourcing through the prism of implementing the executive function, defining outsourcing as “commissioning certain services or tasks to external companies specialized in a given scope” [Bielecki 2001, p. 192]. M. Alexander and D. Young describe outsourcing as “the process of separating specific areas, functions from the organization’s activities in order to increase its effectiveness” [Alexander, Young 1996, p. 117]. Some authors express the opinion that “outsourcing considered from a strategic perspective is today one of the most important and the most profitable business methodologies, it allows organizations of all types to fully utilize their capabilities and achieve optimal efficiency and flexibility in responding to customer needs” [Gay, Essinger 2002, p. 7]. I. Sobańska sees outsourcing as “the type of decision to eliminate specific activities from the organization, services that do not contribute to the growth of the company’s value and the strength of its competition” [Sobańska (ed.) 2003, p. 415].

In the views presented on the essence of outsourcing, it is noticeable that its essence usually comes down to the goal or the role it plays in the process of securing the company in the future against various types of burdens, the consequences of uncertainty and economic risk related to its operations. It also points to the fact that outsourcing was used to create a stable development of a company operating in a competitive environment.

Taking into account the purpose of the article, one should look at the essence of outsourcing as a function of a service provider of specialist financial, accounting and advisory services to entities interested in implementing their statutory goals in dynamically changing market conditions. At the same time, it should be added that the goals should assume active participation in the processes of changes taking place in the environment, expose the individual development predispositions of the enterprise and optimally exploit its potential [Komorowski 2011, p. 188]. Contemporary entities cannot avoid participation in the process of change and social and economic development because they exist to a large extent thanks to continuous

and mutual interaction with the environment [Steinerowska 2012, p. 114]. That is why it is so important to identify potential barriers, both internal ones resulting from owned assets and external ones from the environment, that limit the activity and development of micro and small entities, as well as seeking possibilities of minimizing or eliminating them.

In the modern world, in the process of socio-economic changes, the outsourcing of financial, accounting and advisory services can be an important tool for micro and small entities in the area of building a competitive advantage, constructing business models and creating their development.

3. Methodology, scope of research, characteristics of entities – research results

The research was carried out in the SME sector and included the population of entities: micro, small and other entities – a total of 53 companies based in the city of Wrocław. The selection of objects for research is intentional – the units meet the statutory criterion of the definition of micro and small unit¹ in light of art. 3.1b and 3.1c of the Accounting Act [Act... 1994, Article 3, paragraph 1b; Article 3, paragraph 1c] (see Table 1).

The main purpose of the author's research was to determine the developmental benefits that micro and small entities can achieve by commissioning financial, accounting and advisory services to external entities.

The research was carried out in an accounting office with its headquarters in Wrocław which supports, among others, micro and small units. The office employs eight employees, including two that have an accountancy certificate, and one qualified tax advisor. The office cooperates with the Chancellery of Certified Auditors in the scope of auditing its clients' financial statements and a law firm in the field of economic consulting, in order to provide comprehensive financial, accounting and advisory services.

The research was carried out with the help of questionnaires which were forwarded to the accounting office. The owner of the company involved in the research did not agree to provide contact details of the clients, and also stressed the need to maintain the anonymity of the collected material. A total of 100 questionnaires for micro and small units were submitted, of which a return of 53 questionnaires was received, i.e. the return ratio was 53%. After verification, all received questionnaires qualified for analysis.

Among the 53 surveyed entities (Table 1), 20 entities, i.e. 37.74% are micro entities, while 30 companies, 56.60%, are small entities. Only three units – 5.66%, do not meet the requirements of the statutory definition of micro and small entity.

¹ For more on the essence of small and micro units in scientific works: [Maszczak 2015, pp. 127-149; Maszczak 2016, pp. 451-460].

At the same time it should be noted that employment in the surveyed units is varied. Small entities employing from 10 to 49 people, i.e. 47.17%, play a dominant role in the sample. In micro-entities, 10 companies, 18.87%, are self-employed, while in the case of the remaining 15 companies, 28.3%, the number of employees is between 2 to 9 people. This means that the surveyed entities are relatively small enterprises, which may be a factor favouring the use of outsourcing, i.e. the use of comprehensive financial and accounting services of a specialized external unit.

Table 1. Features of the studied entities

Declared by the surveyed entities		Total		Type of entity					
				micro total		small total		other total	
		number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
Total balance sheet assets at the end of 2018	1,500,000 PLN and below	20	37.74	20	100.0	0	0.00	0	0.00
	over 1,500,000 to 17,000,000 PLN	30	56.60	0	0.0	30	100.00	0	0.00
	Over 17,000,000 PLN	3	5.66	0	0.0	0	0.00	3	100.00
	Total	53	100.00	20	100.0	30	100.00	3	10.00
Net revenues from the sale of goods and products	3,000,000 PLN and below	20	37.74	20	100.0	0	0.00	0	0.00
	over 3,000,000 to 34,000,000 PLN	30	56.60	0	0.0	30	100.00	0	0.00
	over 34,000,000 PLN	3	5.66	0	0.0	0	0.00	3	100.00
	Total	53	100.00	20	100.00	30	100.00	3	100.00
Average annual employment in full-time equivalents	1 person only owner	10	18.87	10	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	2-9 people	15	28.30	10	50.0	5	16.67	0	0.0
	10-49 people	25	47.17	0	0.0	25	83.33	0	0.0
	over 49 people	3	5.66	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	20	100.0	30	100.0	3	100.0

Source: own study.

As the research on the organizational and legal form shows (Table 2), the vast majority in the group of micro entities, as many as 10 units (50%) is the economic activity of a natural person, 5 companies (25%) are organized into a limited liability company, other 4 entities (20%) are civil partnerships and 1 entity (5%) is organized

as a limited partnership. Small units are organized primarily in the form of limited partnerships (10 companies – 33.33%), limited liability companies (10 entities – 33.33%), civil partnerships (5 entities – 16.67%), limited joint-stock partnerships (3 entities – 10%), joint-stock companies (2 companies – 6.67%). The organizational and legal form is related to the entity size.

Table 2. Organizational and legal form

Organizational and legal form	Total		Type of entity					
			micro total		small total		other total	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
Economic activity of a natural person	10	18.87	10	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Private partnership	5	9.43	4	20.0	5	16.67	0	0.0
Limited partnership	0	0.0	1	5.0	10	33.33	0	0.0
Limited joint-stock partnerships	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	10.0	0	0
Limited liability company	38	71.70	5	25.0	10	33.33	3	100.0
Joint-stock company	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	6.67	0	0.0
Total	53	100.0	20	100.0	30	100.0	3	100.0

Source: own study.

In light of the conducted research (Table 3), the period of activity of the surveyed entities is related to their size. The vast majority of units, as many as 33 companies (62.26%), have existed on the market for over six years, including 10 units – 50% are micro entities, 20 companies, i.e. 66.67% are small entities and 3 entities belong to the group of others. The average age of the other entities is 18 years, small – twelve years, micro – ten years. In addition to companies with a long tradition, there are also relatively young micro and small units which have been operating for less than three years – a total of 10 entities, i.e. 18.87% (of which 5 are micro, i.e. 25% and 5 are small units, i.e. 16.67%). Their average age is eighteen months. The same number of surveyed units (10 companies, i.e. 18.87%) also has slightly more experience on the market. Their average age is four years and eight months.

The surveyed entities (Table 4) represented diverse sectors concerning three types of activity: industry, construction and services. The majority of entities, as many as 38 companies, i.e. 71.70% (including 15 micro – 75%, 20 small units – 66.67%, 3 – 100% other) provide services (educational, legal, IT and design services). In addition, five small units (16.67%) conduct industrial activities and five small entities, i.e. (16.67%) in the field of construction, while five, i.e. 25% of micro entities, carry out industrial activities.

Table 3. Period of activity

Period of activity	Total		Type of entity					
			micro total		small total		other total	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
3 years and below	10	18.87	5	25.00	5	16.67	0	0.0
Over 3 years up to 6 years	10	18.87	5	25.00	5	16.67	0	0.0
Over 6 years	33	62.26	10	50.00	20	66.67	3	100.0
Total	53	100.00	20	100.00	30	100.00	3	100.0

Source: own study.

Table 4. Object of activity

Branches of activity of the surveyed entities (Wrocław headquarters)	Total		Type of entity					
			micro total		small total		other total	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
Industry	10	18.87	5	25.0	5	16.67	0	0.0
Construction	5	9.43	0	0.0	5	16.67	0	0.0
Trade and repair of motor vehicles	0	0.00	0	0.0	0	0.00	0	0.0
Transport and communication	0	0.00	0	0.0	0	0.00	0	0.0
Services	38	71.70	15	75.0	20	66.67	3	100.0
Total	53	100.0	20	100.0	30	100.00	3	100.0

Source: own study.

All the surveyed entities (Table 5) are located in the city of Wrocław, which is linked to the nature of their business and the local demand (sales market).

Table 5. The size of the locality where the company is based

Size of the locality in which the surveyed entities have their headquarters (seat in the Wrocław district)	Total		Type of entity					
			micro total		small total		other total	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
Village	0	0.0	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Town up to 10 000 inhabitants	0	0.0	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
The city of Wrocław	53	100.0	20	37.74	30	56.60	3	5.66
Total	53	100.0	20	37.74	30	56.60	3	5.66

Source: own study.

The conducted research characterizing entrepreneurs (Table 6) shows that entrepreneurs with a higher education prevail, i.e. 33 entities (62.26%), including the economic education of small entrepreneurs (10 companies – 33.33%), and the technical education of entrepreneurs of both micro entities (10 entities – 50%)

and small entities (10 entities – 33.33%). However, 15 entrepreneurs (28.3%), including 5 micro-entities (25%) and 10 small entities (33.33%) have a general secondary education. The male gender of entrepreneurs predominates – 33 entities (62.26%). The dominant age of the entrepreneur exceeds 36 years, both in micro and small entities. In the range of 36-50 years, there are five micro and five small units and the same number of entrepreneurs operate in the age of over 50.

Table 6. Characteristics of entrepreneurs – education, sex, age

Declared by the studied entities:	Features of entrepreneurs	Total		Type of entity					
				micro total		small total		other total	
		number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
Education	Higher economic	10	18.87	0	0.0	10	33.33	0	0.0
	Higher technical	23	43.40	10	50.0	10	33.33	3	100.0
	Higher humanistic	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Higher with academic title	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Professional secondary	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	General secondary	15	28.30	5	25.0	10	33.33	0	0.0
	Professional	5	9.43	5	25.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Elementary	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Total	53	100.00	20	100.0	30	100.0	3	100.0
Sex of the entrepreneur	Female	20	37.73	10	50.0	10	33.33	0	0.0
	Male	33	62.26	10	50.0	20	66.67	3	100.0
	Total	53	100.00	20	100.0	30	100.0	3	100.0
Age of the entrepreneur	Up to 25 years	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	25-35 years	10	18.87	10	50.0	0	0	0	0.0
	36-50 years	20	37.73	5	25.00	15	50.0	0	0.0
	Over 50 years	23	43.40	5	25.0	15	50.0	3	100.0
	Total	53	100.00	20	100.0	30	100.0	3	100.0

Source: own study.

As the results from the conducted research and interviews show, entrepreneurs with a higher education and who are over 36 years of age run companies with the longest operational period on the market – over six years. It can be assumed that the high level of expertise possessed and the acquired practical experience, induce entrepreneurs to concentrate primarily on key areas (statutory goals) of the company's operations, and the activities related to financial and accounting services are commissioned to external specialists. It is also worth noting that men dominate

among entrepreneurs, which may result from the nature of their business such as manufacturing industry, construction.

4. Accounting outsourcing in micro and small entities – opportunities and threats

In the literature on the subject [Święta 2014, pp. 94-95] and in business practice, the view is expressed that the outsourcing of financial and accounting services creates many opportunities for the development of micro and small entities. In light of the conducted research on the reasons for using outsourced services (Table 7), micro and small entities indicated mainly the willingness to reduce the costs of running a business (reduction of labour costs) (micro 80%, small 86.67%). On the other hand, 90% of micro entities and 90% of small entities pointed to the willingness to concentrate on the implementation of key tasks (statutory goals) of the conducted activity. An important reason mentioned by respondents (85% of micro, 80% of small entities) is access to fixed assets (hardware, software) not available in the company. It is worth noting that micro-entities (60%) and, to a large extent, small entities (80%) as the reason for using outsourcing demonstrated the need to identify and reduce the liquidity risk. Other reasons indicated by the respondents include consultancy in the field of tax and financial strategy (micro 85%, small entities 76.67%), and access to current, specialist knowledge (micro and small entities 90%).

Table 7. Reasons for using outsourcing services in accounting

Types of reasons	Total		Type of entity					
			micro total		small total		other total	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
Labour cost reduction	42	79.25	16	80.0	26	86.67	0	0.0
Concentration on the implementation of key tasks (statutory goals) and development	40	75.47	18	90.0	27	90.0	3	100.0
Identifying and reducing the liquidity risk	39	73.58	12	60.0	24	80.0	3	100.0
Increasing the quality of financial and accounting services	42	79.25	17	85.0	24	80.0	0	0.0
Access to current, specialist knowledge	45	84.91	18	90.0	27	90.0	0	0.0
Advice on tax and financial strategy	43	81.13	17	85.0	23	76.67	0	0.0
Access to fixed assets (hardware, software)	44	83.02	17	85.0	24	80.0	0	0.0
Raising capital	23	43.40	2	10.0	21	70.0	0	0.0
Total	53	100.0	x	x	x	x	x	x

Source: own study based on research and [Radło, Ciesielska 2011, p. 25].

Considering the type and scope of the outsourced financial and accounting services, all the micro and small entities examined (Table 8) have shown that they conclude agreements regarding the conduct of overall accounting by specialized external entities (companies) that provide comprehensive financial, accounting and advisory services. Only in the other three units is there an accounting specialist employed, who performs a partial scope of accounting work. These are HR and payroll issues, inventory of assets and cash management.

Table 8. Place and person who conducts accounting in the studied entities

declared by the studied entities:		Total		Type of entity					
				micro total		small total		other total	
		number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
On one's own, including:	The owner alone	0	0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Accounting Specialist	3	5.66	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	100.0
	Other employee	0	0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
External companies, including:	Accounting office	50	94.34	20	100.0	30	100.0	0	0.0
Total		53	100.00	20	100.0	30	100.0	3	100.0

Source: own study.

Table 9. The method of settlement of entities with the Tax Office

Accounting records	Total		Type of entity					
			micro total		small total		micro total	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
Accounting books Progressive tax (18% and 32%)	38	71.70	5	25.0	30	100.0	3	100.0
Accounting books Flat tax 19%	5	9.43	5	25.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Revenue and expense ledger Progressive tax (18% and 32%)	5	9.43	5	25.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Revenue and expense ledger Flat tax 19%	5	9.43	5	25.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Tax card	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Registered lump sum tax	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	53	100.0	20	100.0	30	100.0	3	5.66

Source: own study.

The conducted research showed (Table 9) that the dominant number of studied entities – 38 companies, i.e. 71.70% (including 30 small units – 100%, 5 micro entities – 25%, and 3 others – 100%), keep accounting books (commercial) and settlements with the tax office on account of income tax on general terms (progressive tax). It should be noted that in the case of five micro-entities, i.e. 25%, accounting books are kept and a flat tax is applied. However, in ten micro-entities (ten companies), a revenue and expense ledger is usually kept. At the same time, five companies (25%) apply a progressive tax in settlements with the tax office and five entities (25%) a flat tax. It should be noted that among the entities surveyed, no unit pays lump-sum taxation – a tax card and registered lump sum.

In the conducted research (Table 10), the respondents also pointed to additional services provided by the accounting office. These are mainly prepared reports for all entities (including 20 micro entities, 30 small entities, and 3 others). The respondents also indicated activities related to representing entities (micro-entities 50%, small entities 33.33%) in public-legal institutions, mainly in matters related to tax settlements, social security contributions and health insurance. The research also showed the provision of additional services regarding the receipt of documents at the customer 52.83% (micro 75%, small 43.33%), HR and payroll services 37.74% (micro 50%, small 33.33%). In the case of five small units (16.67%), Intrastat reporting is kept.

Table 10. Additional services provided by external companies

Types of additional services	Total		Type of entity					
			micro total		small total		other total	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
HR and payroll services	20	37.74	10	50.0	10	33.33	0	0.0
Receipt of documents	28	52.83	15	75.0	13	43.33	0	0.0
Representation in offices	20	37.74	10	50.0	10	33.33	0	0.0
Reports	53	100.0	20	100.0	30	100.0	3	100.0
Intrastat	5	9.43	0	0.0	5	16.67	0	0.0
Total	53	100.0	x	x	x	x	x	x

Source: own study.

Analysing the range of services provided, research was conducted to assess the benefits of using financial and accounting services (Table 11). The surveyed entities (90% of micro and small units and all others) indicated mainly the possibility of focusing on the implementation of the key tasks related to the objectives of the economic activity and development areas adopted in the statute. The same number of respondents (90% of micro and small entities) indicated access to current and specialist knowledge, which positively affects the quality of the decision-making processes. A large group of the surveyed entities (90% of micro and 80% of small entities) pointed to an increase in the quality of financial and accounting services,

which enables the implementation of the principle of a reliable and faithful image of the business result. It is worth noting that reporting as the final stage of the data processing in accounting generates reliable (useful) information that will allow identifying and reducing the liquidity risk, as indicated by respondents (60% of micro and 80% of small entities). In the conducted research, entrepreneurs (90% of micro and 80% of small entities) expressed the opinion that access to fixed assets (hardware, software) will allow the better efficiency of operations without investing, which will probably affect the reduction of labour costs (80% of micro and 86.67% of small entities) and higher profitability, according to the respondents (85% of micro and 86.67% of small entities). It will also allow the implementation of the principle of a going concern.

Transferring responsibility for the correctness of accounting activities to the accounting office, which respondents pointed out (80% of micro and 76.67% of small entities), will affect the timely and reliable settlement of liabilities with public law institutions due to e.g. taxes, insurance or other encumbrances. This will allow entrepreneurs, for example, for a rational time management in order to prepare a business (development) model for entities that operate in dynamically changing market conditions.

Table 11. Evaluation of benefits resulting from the use of accounting outsourcing services

types of benefits	Total		Type of entity					
			micro		small		other	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
Reduction of labour costs	42	79.25	16	80.0	26	86.67	0	0
Concentration on the implementation of key tasks (statutory goals)	48	90.57	18	90.0	27	90.0	3	100.0
Identifying and reducing the liquidity risk	39	73.58	12	60.0	24	80.0	3	100.0
Increasing the quality of financial and accounting services	42	79.25	18	90.0	24	80.0	0	0.0
Access to current and specialist knowledge	45	84.91	18	90.0	27	90.0	0	0.0
Transfer of responsibility for book keeping to the accounting office	43	81.13	16	80.0	23	76.67	0	0.0
Better efficiency without investing	44	83.02	18	90.0	24	80.0	0	0.0
Higher profitability	23	43.40	17	85.0	26	86.67	0	0.0
Total	53	100.0	x	x	x	x	x	x

Source: own study based on research results and [Radło, Ciesielska (eds.) 2011, p. 27].

Analysing the results of the research, it should be stated that the benefits resulting from the process of financial and accounting outsourcing services are both qualitative (e.g. quality of financial and accounting information) and quantitative (economic, financial benefits, for example). They have a significant impact on the development processes of entities, and affect the reduction of operating costs, efficiency of operations, creation of human capital, elimination or minimization of the risk of loss of liquidity, profitability, and flexibility of operation.

The entrepreneurs, as the research has shown (Table 12), agree that accounting outsourcing, in addition to the impact on the development opportunities of entities, also poses some risks. Among the threats, the examined micro and small entities indicated the possibility of breaching the confidentiality of information regarding the company's operations (micro 85%, small 86.67%), the low quality of activities performed by outsourcing companies (micro 50%, small 70%), problems in the flow of documentation and information between the service provider and the ordering party (micro 80%, small 83.33%), limiting the possibility of controlling the company's financial result (micro 50%, small 80%), increase in the prices of services (micro 80%, small 66.67%), conflicts in the cooperation between the entities and the service provider (micro 50%, small 46.67%).

Table 12. Evaluation of threats resulting from the use of accounting outsourcing services

types of threats	Total		Type of entity					
			micro		small		other	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
Violation of the confidentiality of information about the entity	43	81.13	17	85.0	26	86.67	0	0
Problems in the flow of documentation, information	48	90.57	16	80.0	25	83.33	3	100.0
Limited possibility of controlling the result	34	73.58	10	50.0	24	80.0	3	100.0
Possibility of changing legal regulations	43	81.13	17	85.0	26	86.67	0	0.0
Poor quality of services	31	58.49	10	50.0	21	70.0	0	0.0
Increase in prices of services	43	81.13	16	80.0	23	76.67	0	0.0
Conflicts	24	45.28	10	50.0	14	46.67	0	0.0
Total	53	100.0	x	x	x	x	x	x

Source: own study based on research and [Zieliński 2008, p. 199].

The analysis of the opportunities and threats shows that accounting outsourcing can be considered as an effective tool to improve the functioning of micro and small entities in a competitive environment.

In summarising the considerations on the role of outsourcing of financial and accounting services in micro and small entities, it should be stated that it significantly contributes to building a competitive advantage on the market, which undoubtedly has a significant impact on the freedom of their functioning on the market and their development.

5. Conclusion

In the modern world, in an era of socio-economic changes, the outsourcing of financial, accounting and consultancy services can be an important tool for micro and small entities in the area of building a competitive advantage, constructing business models and creating their development. As the research has shown, accounting outsourcing enables entrepreneurs to concentrate on the implementation of the key tasks related to the objectives of the business and development areas adopted in the statute. Access to the current and specialized knowledge of specialists has a significant impact on the quality of decision making processes. Increasing the quality of financial and accounting services makes it possible to implement a reliable and faithful picture of the result of the conducted operations, which will enable to identify and to lowering the financial liquidity risk. Access to fixed assets (hardware, software) will allow better business efficiency, lower labour costs and greater profitability.

In addition to the many benefits demonstrated in the research, accounting outsourcing also poses some threats to micro and small units. Among the threats should be indicated the possibility of breaching the confidentiality of information about the company's activities, the low quality of activities performed by outsourcing companies, problems in the flow of documentation and information between the service provider and the ordering party, limiting the ability to control the company's financial result, increase in prices of services, and conflicts in cooperation between entities and the service provider.

In summarising the considerations on the role of outsourcing financial and accounting services in micro and small units, it should be stated that it is an important tool for building a competitive advantage on the market and creating business development.

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