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ACCOUNTABILITY THEORY AND ITS IMPLICATION IN PUBLIC FINANCE

Abstract. In recent decades in developing and developed economies, the discussion of the importance of accountability in public governance has increased significantly and been considered as a necessary tool of reformation and advanced management. Thus, the overlook of the theory of accountability and views at this concept of classic and modern scholars is well-timed and caused by the reformation trends in Ukraine. The aim of the research is to investigate the theoretical background of the accountability and the empirical evidence of the accountability implementation in public finance in Ukraine, including how the interaction between the institutions involved in the public finance occurs. The paper is based mainly on the secondary data analysis and qualitative methods of research. The findings of the research are based on the comprehensive analysis and generalization of the theoretical views on the nature and essence of the accountability and discover the peculiarities of the accountability processes in public finance management, which is widely promoted as means toward the effective reformation of government and democratic transformations in Ukraine today. Practical implications: The findings are useful for practitioners and researchers to gain theoretical and practical knowledge about the accountability and its implication in the Ukrainian realities. The research sheds light on the necessity of the future development of this topic and may be used as a basis for further academic research. The research is selective and does not attempt a total coverage of the topic. However, it identifies current problems in the current state of the accountability concept in Ukraine.

Keywords: public governance, public finance, accountability, transparency, public finance management.

JEL classification: H20, H80, J18, J58, O38.

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КОНЦЕПЦІЯ ПІДЗВІТНОСТІ ТА ЇЇ ЗНАЧЕННЯ В ПУБЛІЧНИХ ФІНАНСАХ

Анотація. Досліджено теоретичні засади підзвітності та емпіричні дані про впровадження підзвітності в державних фінансах в Україні, у тому

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числі особливості взаємодії між установами, які здійснюють управління державними фінансами. Із застосуванням якісних методів дослідження проведено комплексний аналіз і узагальнено теоретичні погляди на природу і сутність терміна "підзвітність", а також виявлено специфіку процесів підзвітності в управлінні державними фінансами, що широко пропагуються сьогодні як засіб ефективного реформування уряду і демократичних перетворень в Україні. Отримані результати будуть корисні науковцям і практикам для набуття теоретичних і практичних знань про сутність підзвітності та її впровадження в умовах українських реалій. Зроблено висновок про необхідність подальшого дослідження цієї теми.

Ключові слова: державне управління, державні фінанси, підзвітність, прозорість, управління державними фінансами.

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КОНЦЕПЦИЯ ПОДОТЧЕТНОСТИ И ЕЕ ЗНАЧЕНИЕ В ПУБЛИЧНЫХ ФИНАНСАХ

Аннотация. Исследованы теоретические основы подотчетности и эмпирические данные о внедрении подотчетности в государственных финансах в Украине, в том числе особенности взаимодействия между учреждениями, осуществляющими управление государственными финансами. С применением качественных методов исследования проведен комплексный анализ и обобщены теоретические взгляды на природу и сущность термина "подотчетность", а также выявлена специфика процессов подотчетности в управлении государственными финансами, широко пропагандируемых сегодня как средство эффективного реформирования правительства и демократических преобразований в Украине. Полученные результаты будут полезны ученым и практикам для приобретения теоретических и практических знаний о сущности подотчетности и ее внедрение в условиях украинских реалий. Сделан вывод о необходимости дальнейшего исследования этой темы.

Ключевые слова: государственное управление, государственные финансы, подотчетность, прозрачность, управление государственными финансами.

Many scholars nowadays have recognized that the organization's activities had an impact on the external environment and suggested that such organizations should be accountable to a wider audience than just to its shareholders. Accountability is a matter of concern for many countries due to widespread public demands for transparency in governance and global protest against corruption [1].

Sinclair [2] allows that accountability is similar to chameleon and that researchers in different spheres focus on different types of accountability. Some of them concentrate on accountability in financial statements and accounting information, including disclosure [3]. On the other side, human resource management and social psychology explain accountability through organizational

and human behavior [4; 5]. Accountability is also an integral important principle for public administration for better governance [6].

Due to the fact that accountability is discussed in many areas, there are several theories relating to accountability, for example, the agency's theory, which considers the principal-agent relationship as a relationship of accountability [7]. Cultural perspectives are also linked to accountability. Many civilized countries have developed a set of procedures aimed at increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of public financial control. These procedures also aim to improve the activities of executive authorities and other bodies that use public resources in their activities, as well as to increase accountability and to be able to determine personal responsibility for decisions and actions in public authorities.

As a consequence, academic literature on accountability is rather inconsistent because authors create a specific definition using their own concepts, conceptual views, and the framework for accountability learning [8].

For instance, according to Lawton and Rose [9], accountability is a process where a person or group of people is required to report on their activities and the way in which they performed or failed to perform their duties.

The central to all definitions of accountability is the idea that one person or institution is required to report on its activities to another person or institution. The general patterns of accountability relate to any relationship of this kind. In governance, responsibility relates to relationships between public and private actors. The application of general models to specific cases of relations between the government and citizens is often a matter of doubt, not least because the rules of what is considered appropriate vary from one country to another, one sphere of state activity to another, and so on. Norms in the relationship of accountability also change over time.

Concidering Ukrainian research experience in the field of accountability it is worth noting works of such scholars as Kosinov who investigates accountability and control over public bodies as a important principle of democratic state.

Korol and Chumakova [10; 11] highlighted the issue of accountability in the frames of implementation process of the internal control system and training of state internal auditors in Ukraine. Shulha [12] developed approaches to accountability in public internal financial control bodies.

Other scholars like Barynina, Gasanov, Mishchenko, Iefymenko and others [13–16] also investigate accountability concept from different perspectives related to their field of academic interests.

Thus, it is evident that there is wide academic research experience of the theory of accountability in international environment, although not all aspects of this topic has been uncovered and are clear and sufficiently investigated from the Ukrainian perspective.

Accountability is clearly caused by liability, so those who is responsible is thus accountable. According to Stanley [17], civil servants are accountable in the following items:

 public finance management, including: regularity (means the requirement that all costs and receipts should be considered in accordance with the law), effective control systems and value for money;

- relevance: with state policy and initiatives; with law; with public expectations of proper behavior;
- performance, including: setting goals and objectives; providing acceptable levels of public service.

According to the Bovens [18], accountability is social relations in which the actor feels the obligation to explain and justify his behavior to some significant others. The concept of accountability is primarily due to the delegation of powers from the shareholders (principals) to managers (agents) and the way to ensure the relationship between agents and managers. In order to determine who is the principal and who is the agent, the question of who is responsible to whom and what needs to be answered. This issue led to a discussion of the responsibility of stakeholders outside the organization, as well as between different levels of organization, that is, external and internal relations. Thus, it is possible to distinguish internal and external accountability.

The public sector accountability traditionally deals with relations between politicians and citizens, as well as relations between politicians and public managers. Bovens [18] notes that the concept of public sector accountability has become a "rhetorical" device that serves as a synonym for many freely determined political causes such as transparency, justice, democracy, efficiency and integrity.

Through the change of paradigm, accountability is seen as a more interesting area for studying with the involvement of public administration and accountability, which is discussed in the latest scientific literature, namely, from the New Public Administration to the New Public Management. The NPM is introduced as an alternative, built on the basis of market decisions and managed by the management client. At that time, the NPM developed into public sector management and worked on something more accessible.

Since this concept has recently been expanded, it can now be applied to more complex relationships. Accountability is not limited to the principal-agent relationship, and vice versa, entities can be responsible to many organizations inside and outside the organization. To this end, different types of accountability have been identified depending on the type of relationship, which means that it can now involve a wider range of stakeholders. Due to the heterogeneity and complexity of the interests of public sector, public organizations can lean to controversial strategies and objectives that are less likely to reject voter than clear policy and allow politicians to maintain or increase their political consensus [2].

To summarize, the concept is clearly very broad. However, given the different understanding of this concept, it is a good basis for addressing accountability issues. A possible starting point is the work of Bovens [18], which distinguishes the concept into two main categories: accountability as a "mechanism" and "virtue".

Regardless the widely shared calls for accountability in the public sector, some researchers suggest that there are restrictions to the phenomenon. For instance, in accounting research, Gray [19] criticized the extant financial and management accounting practices in contributing to what they see as a limited understanding of public accountability. Sinclair [2], after carrying out accountability investigation on public sector managers, explained that there are risks, exposure and invasiveness which limit accountability.

Moreover, Messner [20] explained that it would be advisable to require greater accountability; however, accountability itself may become more problematic. For example, the reason why a public servant took a certain course of action may not be clear to that person (that is, a decision can be taken instinctively). In such a situation, responsibility is limited to the non-transparent nature of human experience; therefore, a person cannot fully tell that he or she were not completely conscious.

Scholars have different approaches regarding types and classification of accountability in the public sector. The concept of accountability can be classified according to the type of accountability and / or the person, group or institution responding to public officials. For example, there may be two main types of accountability, political and managerial accountability. Additionally, authors distinguish direct and indirect; internal and external; vertical and horizontal.

Besides, Sinclair [2] identifies a wider set of public sector accountability forms, which goes beyond the scope of financial dimensions, by also including political (or democratic), public, managerial, bureaucratic, professional, and personal accountability. In addition, scholar determines accountability as multiple "being accountable in one form often requires compromises of other sorts of accountability".

The first type is public accountability. This type is "more informal but direct reporting to the public, interested groups of communities and individuals". It is more informal than political responsibility. The right of citizens to knowledge lies at the heart of this type of responsibility. The power of public audit can support public accountability. Public servants should treat the public fairly.

The next type is the political responsibility that was used in the Athenian era when it meant bringing officials to justice for their actions. Later it was extended to ministerial and parliamentary accountability. Political responsibility is that those who have delegated authority are responsible for their actions to people, whether directly in ordinary societies or indirectly in complex societies.

From this point of view, public servants, politicians, government members, legislators and political parties must be responsible to voters. The chain of political accountability in the parliamentary system connects civil servants with directors of individual departments that are accountable to ministers, then to the government, parliament and, finally, voters. For some countries, the chain directly connects public executives with representatives and political parties.

One more type of accountability is the accountability of organizations, although some scholars use the term "administrative liability". This is usually based on relationships between chiefs and subordinates in organizations or hierarchical relationships. This type can be divided into three sub-types: fiscal / regularity, process / efficiency accountability and program / effectiveness accountability. These three sub-types focus on input, output, and outcome accordingly, and are a means of checking the proper use of resources, achievement, output efficiency and effectiveness of the result.

Another type of accountability is professional responsibility. Civil servants should be accountable to a group of experts that they are a member. However, the degree of control is the difference between bureaucratic or organizational accountability and professional responsibility. The level of control is high in the

case of bureaucratic accountability, while it is low for professional accountability. In addition, professional bodies usually have their own code of conduct or standards for all their members.

This type of accountability is required when the government deals with complex or difficult problems and requires the use of qualified or expert officials. These officials should be accountable to professional colleagues. Although external professional bodies can directly influence the decisions or actions of the expert, either through standards or through education, the main body belongs to the agency for monitoring or controlling the operational process.

Personal accountability is defined as "fidelity to personal conscience in core values such as respect for human dignity and acts in a manner that takes responsibility for the impact on the lives of others". Individuals should be responsible for actions that may affect other people. This type of accountability focuses on the personal ethics of responsibility.

On the other hand, Khotami [21] notes, that public accountability consists of two types: vertical and horizontal accountability. Vertical accountability is the responsibility for managing the funds of higher authorities, such as accountability of working units to local self-government bodies, regional accountability to central authorities, etc. And then horizontal responsibility is a responsibility that is passed on to the general community. The idea is that institutions such as parliament and the judiciary provide what is usually called horizontal accountability or the capacity of a network of relatively autonomous powers that can call into question, and eventually punish, improper ways of discharging the responsibilities of a given official. Alternatively, vertical accountability refers to the ability of the state's population to ensure accountability of its government through elections and political parties. It focuses on relations between citizens and their elected representatives. Thus, vertical responsibility includes the possibility of organizing political parties and participating in elections.

Vertical and horizontal reporting reflects the main role of formal institutions – elections, parliaments, courts – in the field of state supervision. However, the effectiveness of vertical and horizontal forms of accountability itself is limited. Such official accountability institutions may not have the ability to constantly monitor the daily activities of the entire state apparatus. Corruption and voting studies have shown that in practice citizens often cannot punish corrupt regimes through elections.

Thus, according to Goetz and Jenkins [22], the participation of civil society and the media in overseeing civil servants is diagonal accountability (Figure 1). Such accountability relationships operate diagonally because of their impact on vertical and horizontal reporting. Hence, diagonal accountability is aimed at attracting citizens directly to the functioning of the horizontal reporting agencies.

It is an effort aimed at strengthening the limited effectiveness of the functions of watchdogs of civil society by breaking the state monopoly into responsibility for official control of the executive.

From these ideas, although researchers use different approaches to describe the nature of accountability in the context of the public sector, the main issues of accountability are almost the same. In general, they focus on inputs, outputs or

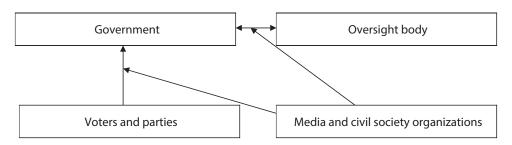


Figure 1. Direction of accountability relationships

Adopted from Lührmann, A., Marquardt, K., & Mechkova, V. (2017). Constraining Governments: New Indices of Vertical, Horizontal and Diagonal Accountability. *V-Dem Working Paper*, 46. Retrieved from https://ssrn.com/abstract=2956464.

outcomes, including processes, in order to assess whether public sector organizations are wise in using of public resources.

Accountability in the context of public finance administration is always interesting because the center of public finance administration practice lies precisely in accountability. According to Khotami [21], accountability is a form of responsibility that relates to who is accountable, which is understood as the obligation of the owner of the trust to ensure accountability, to report on all actions that are his responsibility to the creditor who has the authority to exercise such accountability. Government, private sector and civil society leaders are accountable to the public and relevant institutions. From the empirical findings, we see that civil servants are not only accountable to the highest authorities in the institutional chain of command but are also accountable to the public, non-governmental organizations, the media, and many other interested parties.

According to theoretical framework and empirical findings, there are two types of accountability in public finance sector in Ukraine.

First, it's horizontal accountability, which consist of formal relations in the state itself, where one state entity has a formal power to demand explanations or impose penalties on another.

For instance, it is interesting to see how the authorities involved in the debt management process interact with each other and, accordingly, explore the accountability process (Figure 2).

At present, debt management in Ukraine is carried out by a certain body in the structure of government. In our case, it is the Ministry of Finance. Accordingly, the Ministry and the Treasury, as it is a structural subdivision of the Ministry, must report to higher authorities, that is, Parliament. Also, the civil servants report to the Accounting Chamber, but during its inspection. It should be noted that there is a transfer of powers from the Cabinet of Ministers to the Minister of Finance to determine the type, currency and interest rate of external borrowing.

The second type of accountability that is intrinsic to the public finance sector in Ukraine according to theoretical framework and empirical findings is vertical accountability. Alternatively, vertical accountability is a means by which citizens, the media and civil society strive to ensure compliance with the standards of good performance of officials.

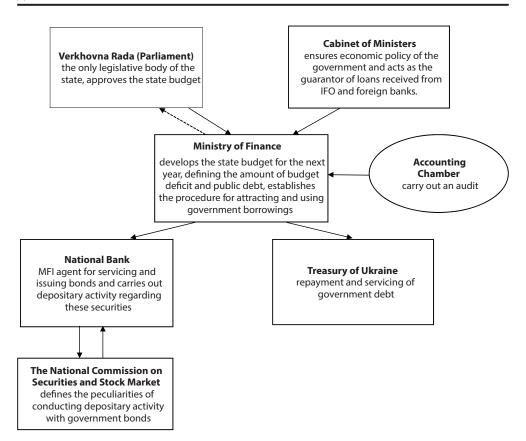


Figure 2. Structure of interaction between public authorities regarding public debt management

Compiled by author according to: Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. (2014). *On approval of the Regulation on the Ministry of Finance of Ukraine* (Decree No. 375, August 20). Retrieved from https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/375-2014-%D0%BF [in Ukrainian].

Taking again as an example the case of public debt management in public finance, citizens can see the medium-term strategy for public debt, the government debt management program, which is formed on the basis of the adopted budget on the official website of the Ministry. The Debt Management Report for the past years is disclosed on the site. Departments of the Ministry provide information on the implementation of payments, providing state guarantees on municipal borrowings. The Capital Markets Weekly places information on the announcement and results of the auctions. The Accounting Chamber also displays the results of the audit on the site.

It means that the accountability process between the structures is clear and valid. Although the problems are often concentrated on the upper levels of government. Good and clean government is also an important part of good governance. This means that the government should be free from corruption, conspiracy and nepotism. Unfortunately, these three components are present in Ukrainian realities. Parliament is a key actor. In terms of bringing civil servants to justice, parliament is the principal and official the agent. Parliament, as the principal,

requires the government and its officials as agents to implement the laws, policies and programs that it has approved – and forcing the government and officials to take into account their activities in this regard. Parliament is also an agent, as the electorate (principal) chooses legislators to pass laws and oversee the actions of the government on their behalf. The lack of accountability of the parliament as an agent to its voters leads to problems of horizontal accountability in many countries, besides in Ukraine.

A solution to this important problem of vertical accountability may be technology advancements. The implementation of an e-government technology is innovative and effective tool to ensure vertical accountability. According to Popescu [25] e-government has a systematic positive effect on reducing corruption, reducing external corruption by improving communication with citizens and internally through more successful control and supervision of employees, as well as promoting good governance and strengthening reform-oriented participants. In fact, the proliferation of the Internet has a significant positive impact on the degree of openness and the strong negative impact on the degree of corruption.

IT initiatives in Ukraine in the public sector include the creation of public registers, information systems, e-governance policies, hacking to create non-profit public utility services. Today, Ukraine actively borrows international experience in implementing e-government and creating public (non-commercial) IT services.

This theoretical background study shows that traditional forms of accountability mechanisms in public administration are often vertical and characterized by higher (supervisory) governments that require accountability from subordinates (agencies). Parliaments are key actors in what is called the "chain of responsibility". They, along with the judiciary, are the key institution of horizontal accountability not only on their own, but also as an institution to which many autonomous accountable institutions report. Accountability is tightly linked to the obligations of public institutions and officials to develop policies and actions in accordance with the values and needs of the society. Public accountability requires a clear and effective limitation of the bureaucracy.

Considering accountability in public finance and from the institutional point of view, Parliament has the biggest influence on public finance management. The accountability process which is characterized by the relations and interconnections between the Ministry of Finance and other bodies and by authorities is fulfilled in accordance with the law. The main problem lies in accountability between the Parliament and the Ministry of Finance, and accountability between the Parliament and citizens. Consequently, this problem may negatively affect the process of public finance management. The lack of vertical accountability leads to such results as the deterioration of situation. In this sense, further development and reformation processes are needed to increase transparency and accountability in this area, besides the continuation of applying an e-government in Ukraine. Then such processes as corruption, conspiracy and coercion will have a less impact on the Ukrainian economy.

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