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MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING

A Review of Contemporary Developments

Robert W. Scapens

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For W. R. Scapens

Preface

In 1982 I wrote a survey paper on management accounting for the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC – at that time, SSRC). My objective in writing that paper was to survey the development of management accounting in the academic literature over the preceding twenty years or so in an attempt to assess the current state-of-the-art. The paper reviewed contemporary developments in management accounting research in quite broad terms and when I decided to use the general themes of the survey in my undergraduate teaching, I found it necessary to give students a number of lectures to introduce them to the concepts and techniques which have been discussed in the research literature. This book has arisen out of these lectures.

Readers who are familiar with the management accounting research literature are urged to read the survey paper, which has now been published along with two other ESRC-commissioned surveys in *Management Accounting*, *Organizational Theory and Capital Budgeting* by R. W. Scapens, D. T. Otley and R. J. Lister (Macmillan/ESRC, 1984). This present book is intended for readers who have not explored the research literature in any depth, but have some knowledge of standard textbook treatments of the subject. The contents of the book are aimed at second/third year students of management accounting and others who want to understand the directions of contemporary management accounting research.

It is assumed that the reader has had at least an introductory course in management accounting and is familiar with the topics typically covered in introductory textbooks. But a reader who has studied or is currently studying an intermediate management accounting textbook will also find this book very relevant. An attempt has been made to limit the complexity of highly mathematical topics – where mathematics are used they are kept as simple as possible and the interested reader is referred to more detailed treatments elsewhere. In general, emphasis is given to the interpretations and conclusions which can be drawn from mathematical analyses, rather than to the form of the analyses themselves.

No attempt is made to achieve a comprehensive coverage of all research which can be described as being within the field of management accounting. Certain important topic areas have been selected to illustrate the general nature of contemporary developments in management accounting research. Having completed the book, the reader should have an understanding of current academic thought in management accounting, a knowledge of where it has come from, and some ideas as to where it might lead.

I would like to express my gratitude to the ESRC for commissioning the survey paper which has led eventually to this book. In addition, my thanks are due to Professor Mike Bromwich, who first suggested that I should expand my survey paper into a book, and whose comments, criticisms and advice in the editorial process have contributed greatly to the end result. Mention should also be made of a number of my students who offered critical comments on earlier drafts. Finally, I would like to express my special thanks to my wife, Maureen, for her support and encouragement and for the many hours she spent word processing the material for this book.

December 1984

Robert W. Scapens