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Prioritizing the Role of Effective Psychological Factors in Mental Representation on the Justification of Behavior and the Decision-Making Process of Management Accountants

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1. Introduction

Management accounting decisions are inherently tied to decision-making processes. Contingency theory posits that psychological characteristics interact with situational factors to shape decisions. Psychology focuses on mental phenomena, such as emotional reactions, motivations, or mental frameworks of information. In psychological theory, mental frameworks act as an environment that stimulates motivations and emotions and directs behavior toward goals, driven by cognitive and emotional processes. In the field of management accounting, psychological theory supports a contingency-based approach to understand and explain the performance and effects of management accounting practices by considering how they affect individuals' mental states and behaviors. Previous studies show great diversity in the use of psychological theories and sub-theories in behavioral accounting and management accounting research on judgment and decision-making. This study contributes by addressing the limitation of prior research, which often focuses on specific psychological theories. Despite the growing importance of behavioral aspects, the management accounting literature lacks a systematic review of psychological theories' applications. As a result, research findings are scattered and impede the accumulation of knowledge about psychology's role in tackling challenges like enhancing judgment quality, decision-making, and firms' economic growth and competitive advantage. If these factors are prioritized, organizations will be able to strengthen their positive attributes and address weaknesses by leveraging a novel behavioral framework to harness management accountants' psychological potential. Thus, this study uses systematic review, content analysis, and expert opinions to prioritize psychological factors shaping the mental frameworks that justify management accountants' behavior and decision-making.

2. Research Questions

Q1: What is the model of psychological factors shaping mental frameworks that justify the behavior and decision-making of management accountants? Q2: How are psychological factors prioritized in shaping mental frameworks that justify the behavior and decision-making of management accountants?

3. Methods

This applied research adopts an exploratory, mixed-method approach. In the qualitative phase, based on the content analysis approach, psychological factors shaping accountants' behavior and decision-making were identified. After coding and classifying the identified theories, the conceptual model was presented. In the quantitative phase, the prioritization of psychological factors shaping mental frameworks was determined by surveying 10 experts in management accounting using the fuzzy Delphi method and paired comparison questionnaires with hierarchical analysis. In this research, 10 experts (including faculty members and management accounting lecturers, and corporate managers or board members with professional experience in management accounting reports) were selected as panel members through a homogeneous qualitative sampling method.

4. Results

In the qualitative section, a total of 39 sub-theories were identified, which were classified into 4 dimensions of psychological theory and the conceptual model was presented. The prioritization results showed that motivational, social, personality, and cognitive psychological factors have the highest priority, and among sub-theories, goal setting, social comparison, and cognitive dissonance have the greatest impact on mental frameworks that justify accountants' behavior and performance. This result indicates that management accountants' behavior and information processing are influenced by psychological factors beyond logical information analysis, impacting accounting procedures.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this research, the theories of four fields—cognition, motivation, social psychology, and personality—were investigated. The model, developed through content analysis and expert opinions, revealed that all four dimensions include sub-theories that justify the behavior and decision-making of management accountants through mental frameworks. Management accountants' behavior and information processing are influenced by psychological factors, beyond logical analysis, affecting accounting procedures. Among sub-theories, goal setting, social comparison, and cognitive dissonance have the greatest effect on mental frameworks that justify accountants' behavior and performance, highlighting the dominant role of motivational and social psychology over cognitive and personality factors. Understanding the decision-making processes of management accountants, key players in corporate investment decisions, and recognizing cognitive biases in their judgments can pave the way for research to enhance judgment quality, decision-making, and firms' economic growth and competitive advantage.

Keywords: Psychological factors, mental frameworks, behavioral justification, decision-making, management accounting.