

Analysis of the application of the principle of prudence in accounting practice

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Abstract: This paper provides an in-depth study of the application of the prudence principle in accounting practice, focusing on assessing its role in providing robustness and reliability in financial reporting. While analyzing the achievements in the current application of the prudence principle, it also explores the challenges and controversies, such as excessive prudence that may lead to distorted financial reporting. In the future, the article points out that the prudence principle may evolve towards a more flexible, digital and internationalized trend, incorporating new technologies and international accounting standards to better adapt to the changing business environment. Finally, recommendations are made to optimize the application of the prudence principle, including developing a more flexible application framework, enhancing transparency, promoting the widespread use of digital technologies, and providing professional training for accountants.

1. Introduction

Accounting is at the heart of decision making within and outside the organization and provides key financial information to managers and stakeholders [1]. Transparent financial reporting helps investors, creditors, government agencies, and other stakeholders to better understand and assess the financial position of an organization. With accurate accounting records, management can make better strategies and decisions. Financial statements provide a picture of an organization's financial health [2] and help management to forecast, plan, and allocate resources to support the long-term sustainability of the business. Accounting practices help ensure that businesses comply with regulations and legal requirements and are critical to meeting tax, regulatory and legal obligations. Investors tend to invest in businesses that have transparent financials and reliable financial statements. Accounting provides a means of assessing the health and stability of a business, enhances investor trust in the business [3], and contributes to the smooth functioning of financing and capital markets. With accounting information, management can manage and optimize business resources more effectively. The public, customers and suppliers are usually concerned about the financial health of a firm, and good accounting practices help build a firm's reputation [4-5].

The purpose of this thesis is to explore in depth the application of the principle of prudence in accounting practice and to answer the following key questions, whether there are differences in the application of the principle of prudence in different industries and sizes of firms, how the practical embodiment of the principle of prudence in financial reporting affects stakeholders' assessment of firms, and whether the principle of prudence needs to be adapted to the changes in the face of new

technologies and the development of international accounting standards.

2. Literature Review

The principle of prudence is one of the fundamental principles of accounting, emphasizing that a conservative approach should be taken when faced with uncertainty and risk. The principle helps to ensure that the financial statements reflect the financial position of the enterprise more truthfully and reliably. The elements of the principle of prudence are twofold: first, it is important to be alert to possible risks and losses, reflecting them in the financial statements in a timely manner and avoiding the concealment of potentially negative situations. Second, it is important to be cautious about possible profits and to ensure that they are recognized as profits only after actual revenues have been realized [6]. The principle of prudence is interrelated with the principle of consistency. While maintaining prudence, it is also important to ensure consistency in accounting methods [7] in order to compare financial information between periods. The principle of prudence is complementary to the matching principle. The matching principle requires that expenses should be recognized in line with corresponding revenues, while the principle of prudence requires vigilance against possible losses, which helps to avoid excessive overestimation of profits. The principle of completeness requires that financial statements must include all material information, while the principle of prudence ensures that factors that could negatively affect the financial position are not overlooked. The primary purpose of the principle of prudence is to help businesses manage risk effectively [8]. In business operations, there are many uncertainties and potential risks, including market fluctuations, economic changes, and adjustments in laws and regulations [9]. By adopting a prudent attitude, businesses are better able to cope with these risks, prepare for them in advance, and minimize possible losses. Another key purpose of the principle of prudence is to ensure the truthfulness and reliability of financial statements. It requires accountants to focus not only on possible gains, but also to consider potential losses in a timely and prudent manner in the face of uncertainty and to adequately reflect this information in the financial statements to provide a comprehensive understanding of the financial position of the business.

3. Application of the principle of prudence in accounting practice

3.1 The necessity of applying the principle of prudence in accounting practice

In the process of enterprise operation, the accuracy of financial information has an important impact on the development of enterprises and social economy [10]. The application of the principle of prudence in accounting practice becomes crucial. By applying the principle of prudence, falsehoods in financial information can be reduced [11], ensuring that accounting information is more truthful and reliable, and thus more accurately reflecting the economic situation of the enterprise. The principle of prudence helps to identify possible losses and risks, warns business managers in advance, provides them with good advice, and thus reduces the financial risks faced by the enterprise in the process of operation. The application of the principle of prudence makes accounting information more objective, eliminates "water" in assets and profits, and helps operators make scientific and reasonable decisions.

3.2 Responses to applying the principle of prudence in accounting practice

The principle of prudence requires a cautious approach to possible losses in the presence of uncertainty. In practice, accountants should prudently assess various risks and uncertainties and reasonably estimate possible losses in light of the actual situation [12]. However, this does not mean

being overly pessimistic, but rather making reasonable judgments based on objective facts and reliable information. Second, grasping the scale of the use of the principle of prudence also includes being prudent when it comes to accounting estimates and the selection of accounting policies. Accounting estimates involve reasonable expectations of future events, while accounting policy choices involve the selection of appropriate accounting treatments. In both cases, excessive caution leading to false presentation of book values or performance should be avoided, while at the same time maintaining a moderate degree of prudence to ensure reliability and robustness of information. In addition, the scale needs to take into account the overall business environment and industry characteristics of the enterprise [13]. Different industries and enterprises may face different risks and challenges, so when applying the principle of prudence, it needs to be flexibly adjusted according to the specific circumstances to ensure that it reflects the true financial situation.

The application of the principle of prudence to profit is mainly in the recognition of revenue and the accrual of expenses [14]. In terms of revenue recognition, the principle of prudence requires that where uncertainty exists, a prudent approach is taken to ensure that the measurement of revenue is not unduly overstated. When there is uncertainty associated with a transaction, revenue should be recognized cautiously to avoid overestimating revenue from the transaction. With respect to the accrual of expenses, the principle of prudence requires a cautious approach when faced with potential expenses and losses to ensure that the measurement of expenses is not unduly underestimated. For example, when making provision for bad debts, it is important to assess the potential bad debt losses in the light of objective circumstances to ensure that the amount of provision made reflects the actual risk of bad debts. In applying the principle of prudence, accountants need to prudently assess the various risks and uncertainties associated with transactions, reasonably measure revenues and expenses, and ensure the prudence and truthfulness of financial statements.

The application of the principle of prudence in accounting estimation and selection of accounting policies requires accountants to adopt a reasonable and prudent attitude when facing uncertainties and risks. In accounting estimation, accountants need to make reasonable expectations of future events, consider various possible scenarios, and ensure the accuracy and objectivity of estimates. The principle of prudence requires that estimates be made with care to avoid being overly optimistic or overly pessimistic. In the selection of accounting policies, the principle of prudence requires accountants to carefully consider various factors when selecting accounting treatments to ensure that the selected methods can reasonably reflect the economic conditions and financial performance of the enterprise. In applying the principle of prudence, accountants need to prudently assess the reasonableness of estimates and policy choices to ensure that the financial statements are sound and true.

4. Challenges and controversies in accounting practice

4.1 Practical problems of the principle of prudence in practice

The practical application of the principle of prudence is subjective. Accountants may have different views of potential risks and losses, leading to differences in specific measurements and estimates. Determining when prudence should be applied is also challenging in practice. In some cases, reflecting potential losses in advance may result in information that is too early for stakeholders, while in other cases it may be too late by the time it actually occurs. It also sometimes happens that it is difficult to accurately estimate the magnitude of the actual loss, especially in cases involving future events and legal disputes. This may lead to some uncertainty in the application of the principle of prudence.

4.2 Different industries and company sizes have different needs for the prudence principle

There are significant differences in the demand for the prudence principle across industries and company sizes, which are closely related to factors such as the characteristics of the industry, the economic environment and the internal management structure of the company. Figure 1 shows the differences in the demand for the prudence principle across industries and company sizes.

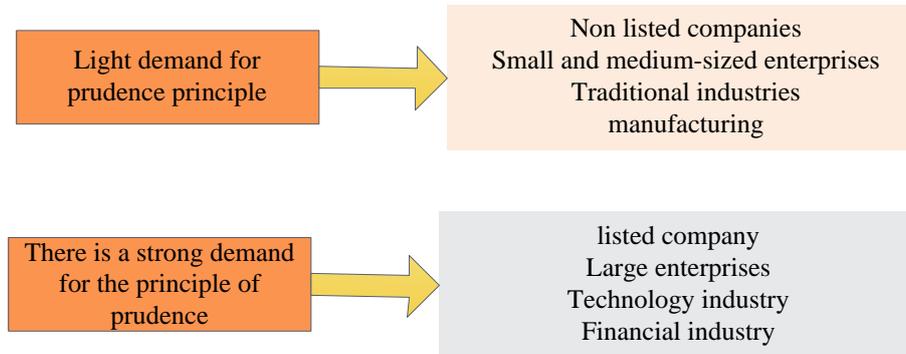


Figure 1: Differences in the need for prudence principles in different industries and company sizes

The financial industry typically faces more risk and uncertainty, and thus the need for prudence principles may be more pronounced [15]. In contrast, the manufacturing industry may be more concerned with operational efficiency and cost control, and the need for prudence may be relatively low [16]. The technology industry may be exposed to faster market changes and innovations, and therefore may be more focused on prudence in accounting estimation and asset impairment [17] to adapt to the fast-changing business environment. In contrast, traditional industries may focus more on robust accounting policies to ensure stability in financial reporting. Larger firms tend to have more complex operational and financial structures and face more potential risks and uncertainties, so the need for prudence principles may be more prominent. In contrast, small and medium-sized enterprises may be more concerned with flexibility and cost-effectiveness, and may have a relatively lower need for prudence. Listed companies, which are subject to more regulatory and market pressures, may have a higher demand for the principle of prudence to ensure transparency and credibility in financial reporting. Unlisted companies may enjoy a degree of greater autonomy, but still need to be concerned about issues related to the trust of potential investors and partners.

4.3 Controversial aspects of the precautionary principle

The application of the prudence principle is prone to controversy because of the extremes of over-conservatism and under-conservatism. Over-conservatism may result in a firm failing to adequately reflect its actual profitability, while under-conservatism may lead to an underestimation of potential losses and mislead investors. Some scholars have argued that the over-application of the prudence principle may discourage business innovation and investment because over-conservatism may make firms conservative about potential future profits, affecting the long-term development of the business. In some cases, the principle of prudence requires estimates to be made using fair values, which may conflict with market values. For example, the use of fair value in the estimation of asset impairment may be controversial because fair value may be affected by transient fluctuations in market conditions.

In accounting practice, the application of the principle of prudence requires balancing various complex factors while maintaining truthfulness and transparency. Resolving controversial issues requires consideration of the characteristics of the industry, the size of the company and the different needs of stakeholders to ensure that accounting information provides useful and accurate

decision support to all parties.

5. Future development of the principle of prudence

5.1 Evaluation of the Current Prudence Principle

Currently, the application of the existing prudence principle in accounting practice has achieved some success in providing a basis for soundness and reliability in financial reporting. However, there are some challenges and controversies, such as excessive prudence may lead to distortion in financial reporting, while insufficient prudence may conceal the true risks of the business. A comprehensive evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the current prudence principle will help provide guidance for future development.

5.2 Development Trend of the Prudence Principle

In the future, the development of the principle of prudence will be affected by various factors, and the principle of prudence may develop in a more flexible direction to better suit the characteristics of different industries and enterprises. The development of more flexible guidelines will enable them to be applied flexibly in different contexts, maintaining robustness without losing authenticity. Future prudential principles may focus more on transparency and quality of disclosure to meet stakeholders' needs for more comprehensive and truthful financial information. This may include more detailed disclosure of contingencies and transparency requirements for accounting estimates. With the continuous development of digital technology, the principle of prudence may leverage advanced data analytics, artificial intelligence, and other technologies to more accurately assess business risks and improve the science and accuracy of decision-making.

5.3 Impact of new technologies and international accounting standards on the prudence principle

Advanced data analytics can help companies identify potential risks and uncertainties more accurately and thus apply the prudence principle in a more targeted manner. The application of data analytics is expected to improve the precision of risk identification and avoid over- or under-application of prudence. The updating and evolution of international accounting standards will also have an impact on the prudence principle. In line with international trends, the international consistency of the prudential principle will be improved through the revision of IAS, which will be better adapted to the needs of different enterprises in the context of globalization. More and more companies and investors are focusing on ESG elements. The prudential principle in the future is likely to pay more attention to corporate social responsibility, environmental impact and governance structure in order to reflect the value and risks of enterprises more comprehensively.

6. Conclusion

Through an in-depth study of the application of the principle of prudence in accounting practice, the main findings are summarized as follows: the principle of prudence plays a key role in accounting practice, providing a basis for soundness and reliability in financial reporting. Excessive or insufficient application of prudence may lead to distortion of financial reporting under certain circumstances, and therefore a moderate balance needs to be maintained in the application of the principle of prudence. The development of digital technology and international accounting

standards has had a new impact on the prudence principle, providing both opportunities and challenges for more accurate and transparent application. Based on the key findings of the study, the following recommendations are made to optimize the application of the prudence principle in accounting practice: Develop a more flexible framework for the application of the prudence principle to accommodate the differences in different industries and enterprises. Enhance the transparency of the prudence principle in financial reporting, especially the detailed disclosure of contingencies. Promote the wider use of digital technology in the application of the prudence principle to improve the accuracy of risk assessment and the feasibility of data analysis. Provide continuous professional training for accountants to enable them to better adapt to new regulations, technologies and developments in international accounting standards, and to improve their ability to apply the principle of prudence.

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