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WHETHER DIVERSITY IN TRAINING IN PUBLIC PRACTICE CAUSE INTERNAL DIFFERENTIATION IN CAREERS WITHIN THE PROFESSION? EVIDENCE FROM SRI LANKA

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Abstract

The study aims to empirically elicit the training processes in a Big Four Audit Firm (hereafter ABC Audit Firm) and an Indigenous Audit Firm (hereafter XYZ Audit Firm). Based on the qualitative approach to research, the data was collected through face-to-face interviews and documentary reviews. The theoretical framework was developed based on Abbott's (1988) writings in the sociological analysis of professions. The data was analyzed using the key concepts of the theoretical framework. Based on the data analysis technique; thematic analysis, the themes, and sub-themes, emerging from the empirics collected from multiple sources, were matched with the key concepts of the theoretical framework developed for the study. The study elicits the distinctions in the training processes of a Big Four Audit Firm; ABC vis-à-vis an Indigenous Audit Firm; XYZ, which provide diverse career paths to prospective accounting professionals in public practice. These diverse career paths have led to an internal differentiation within the accounting profession. However, the public continues to be of the mistaken belief that, the profession is a homogenous group. The study provides insights to the prospective accounting professionals in public practice when selecting an audit firm to obtain training. The study also provides insights to an Indigenous Audit Firm on how its training processes can be further developed. The study contributes to the accounting professionalizing research agenda by eliciting the nature of the training obtained by the prospective accounting professionals in public practice.

Keywords: Accounting Profession, Career Path, Public Practice, Training

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1 INTRODUCTION

Based on the writings of the sociological analysis of professions, a profession is a social collectivity, which disseminates knowledge, gains recognition and acceptance, and gains access to work (Johnson 1972, Freidson 1975, Larson 1977, Abbott 1988, Macdonald 1995). In the writings of the sociological analysis of professions, Abbott (1988) argues that a profession could gain access to work from the public arena, legal arena, or the workplace arena. Abbott (1988) states that, in the public arena, the nature of discourse when gaining access to work is that, a profession is a homogenous group. However, Abbott (1988) argues that, it is a mistaken belief within the public domain, and that within a profession, that there is heterogeneity. In this study, it is empirically addressed, how diversity in the training processes brings heterogeneity into the profession.

In the accounting professionalizing research agenda, the focus has been on public practice. Authoritative recognition from the State is necessitated to carry out the public practice, e.g., audit and taxation. The knowledge required to carry out public practice would be disseminated by the profession through its education and training processes. The focus of this study is on the training processes of audit firms. The prospective accounting professionals intending to engage in public practice can opt to obtain training in one of the Big Four Audit Firms or an Indigenous Audit Firm. Due to the differences in the training processes of the Big Four Audit Firms and the Indigenous Audit Firms, heterogeneity could be brought into the profession. This study is an explanatory case study focusing on the Sri Lankan context, where the Big Four Audit Firms as well as Indigenous Audit Firms, groom prospective accounting professionals to engage in public practice.

In the accounting professionalizing research agenda, there have been studies on how, the diversity in the nature of work performed by the professionals, brings in heterogeneity to the profession (Anderson et al. 2007). However, how the diversity in the training obtained by the prospective professionals brings in heterogeneity to the profession, has not been empirically addressed, and will be addressed in this study. This study will provide insights to the profession, to implement strategies to improve the training obtained by the prospective professionals engaging in public practice.

Having provided an introduction to the study, next a literature review will be carried out to tease out the research questions central to the study. Thereafter, Abbott's (1988) writings relevant to the sociological analysis of professions will be discussed to elicit the theoretical underpinnings relevant to the study. This will be followed by a discussion of the methods of data collection and the method of data analysis. Thereafter the case context and the case will be presented, followed by a discussion and conclusion.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers, as well as practitioners, are of the view that training is a critical factor when grooming prospective professionals (Gault et al. 2000). Training has been the preferred and more effective way of learning (Karns 2005) among the learning methods such as classroom discussions, case analysis, live case projects, and lectures (Gault et al. 2000). Liu (2012) states that training is not only associated with practical implications of what interns have already studied, but also it creates the foundation for the future career path. The interns create links with the professionals to find employment opportunities in the future through training (Hynie et al. 2011). Moreover, the interns' level of confidence relevant to opting for a particular career path is enhanced through training (Neapolitan 1992).

Fulfilling the training requirement is in accordance with the requirements of the Initial Professional Development (IPD), specified under the International Education Standard (IES) No. 5, issued by the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC). This requirement is made mandatory by all IFAC member bodies across the globe, including the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Sri Lanka (CASL). The CA Sri Lanka is the indigenous premier professional accounting body formed in 1959, where only the members of CA Sri Lanka could engage in public practice in Sri Lanka. The aim of this IES No. 5 is to ensure that, prospective accounting professionals seeking to qualify as accounting professionals, have acquired the appropriate training, at the time of qualifying.

In the accounting professionalizing research agenda, the mainstream of research has been on public practice (Puxty et al. 1985, Willmott 1986, Richardson 1989, Lee 1995, Chua & Poullaos 1998, Walker & Shackleton 1998, Annisette 2000, Yapa 2000, Caramanis 2002, Uche 2002, Okike 2004, Bakre 2005, 2006, 2008, Sian 2006, 2007, Edwards et al. 2007, Gallhofer et al. 2011, Mihret et al. 2012). In public practice, the focus is on ‘State-profession dynamics’ where the work-related claims are determined in the legal arena and secured by statute.

As stated at the outset, the prospective accounting professionals groomed to carry out the public practice can opt to obtain training in one of the Big Four Audit Firms or an Indigenous Audit Firm. There are studies relevant to the advantages of obtaining training in a Big Four Audit Firm. As Big Four Audit Firms deal with most of the listed and well-established entities, those clients have more advanced technology such as advanced Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems, which will enable the interns to obtain hands-on experience of using advanced tools (Zach & Munkvold 2012). To achieve clients’ interests, global firms such as Big Four Audit Firms have to hire a skilled labour force, or these firms have to develop their labour force through training and development (Boussard 2018). Levasseur (2013) argues that technical skills can be taught, while other skills need to be grabbed whilst working with peers. The interns whilst obtaining training with peers and superiors will be able to develop a range of skills that could be obtained only from the Big Four Audit Firms.

Prior researchers have elicited the advantages of obtaining training in a Big Four Audit Firm. However, the training processes that lead to the aforementioned advantages are yet left unaddressed. Therefore, in this study; What are the training processes in a Big Four Audit Firm when grooming prospective accounting professionals in public practice? will be empirically addressed. The prospective accounting professionals in public practice can also opt to obtain training in an Indigenous Audit Firm. Therefore, in this study; What are the training processes in an Indigenous Audit Firm when grooming prospective accounting professionals in public practice? will also be empirically addressed. Hence, the objectives of the study are; to understand the training processes in a Big Four Audit Firm when grooming prospective accounting professionals in public practice, to understand the training processes in an Indigenous Audit Firm when grooming prospective accounting professionals in public practice, to distinguish between the training processes of a Big Four Audit Firm and an Indigenous Audit, and to understand how the diversity in training processes could lead to a diversity in career prospects of the prospective accounting professionals in public practice. These situational realities will be unraveled in this study.

1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the writings of the sociological analysis of professions, Abbott (1988) states that

professions are not archetypical or homogenous units of archetypical individuals, but organized groups of individuals who do different things in different workplaces for different clients. Consequently, these diverse individuals have diverse careers. According to Abbott (1988), every profession has typical careers as in most aspects of professional life there is one official pattern and a variety of unofficial ones. However, the general career line itself is an important differentiator within the professions. It too means that professionals are not interchangeable, some are young, some are old, some have training and experience, some have training only. The structure of this career-line generates effects within the system of professions and absorbs them.

Abbott (1988) considers a pattern he calls ‘demographic rigidity’. A profession is demographically rigid if its current size and reproductive mechanisms prevent its expansion or contraction rapidly. This situation has graven consequences. Individual professionals can migrate between modes of professional practice. Such migration handles shifts in relative specialty demand. However, changes in overall demand may require sudden production of more or fewer professionals whereas demographic rigidity prevents this. Abbott (1988) states that a central aspect of demographic rigidity is the length and nature of the formally structured career. In some professions, the specified career is long, with several levels of training, several stages of practice to which the various training pathways lead.

According to Abbott (1988), internal differentiation provides the basic mechanism that keeps the public picture of professional life separate from the workplace one. Were there only one professional status, workplace, and client type in a given profession, any shift in these activities would at once become publicly evident. However, since there are many varieties of each, great changes can occur in their relative importance, without forcing any great shift in the public image of professional life. These changes lead to radical career shifts particularly for individuals in demographically rigid professions, but these shifts remain relatively invisible to the public eye.

The theoretical framework developed for the study is diagrammatically presented in Figure 1. The Training/internship obtained will bring in diverse careers among professionals creating internal differentiation within the profession.

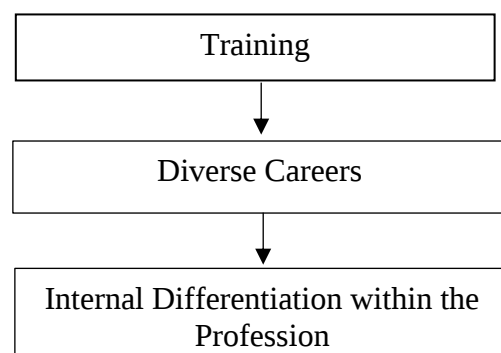


Figure 1: Internal differentiation within the profession due to diversity in training

Source: Author Constructed

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is a case study carried out based on the qualitative approach to research. Yin (1989) states that the ability to collect data from multiple sources is a strength of the case study method, as it enables triangulation. In this study, data was collected from multiple sources. The case

study conducted was explanatory. Scapens (2004) states that, in an explanatory case study, a particular phenomenon can be studied in a given context. Therefore, using an explanatory case study, it was possible to unravel the training processes of a Big Four Audit Firm and an Indigenous Audit Firm. The method of data collection in qualitative research plays a vital role in the deeper understanding of the research issue (Flick 2018). In this study, the data was collected using semi-structured interviews. Individuals at the executive level and interns carrying out public practice were interviewed. Fifteen semi-structured interviews were carried out. The interviews were carried out until the point of saturation. There was an interview guide prepared. However, the questioning process was flexible. The data collected through interviews were triangulated with the data collected through a documentary review.

Table 1: Interviews conducted

Serial Number	Date	Interviewee	Duration
INT 01	19 th September 2020	Manager in charge of Training of the Big Four Audit Firm	40 Minutes
INT 02	19 th September 2020	Assistant Manager of the Big Four Audit Firm	30 Minutes
INT 03	21 st September 2020	Intern of the Big Four Audit Firm	30 Minutes
INT 04	21 st September 2020	Intern of the Big Four Audit Firm	25 Minutes
INT 05	21 st September 2020	Intern of the Big Four Audit Firm	30 Minutes
INT 06	21 st September 2020	Manager in charge of Training of the Indigenous Audit Firm	30 Minutes
INT07	21 st September 2020	Intern of the Indigenous Audit Firm	25 Minutes
INT 08	23 rd September 2020	Intern of the Indigenous Audit Firm	30 Minutes
INT 09	23 rd September 2020	Intern of the Indigenous Audit Firm	30 Minutes
INT 10	23 rd September 2020	Intern of the Indigenous Audit Firm	30 Minutes
INT 11	23 rd September 2020	Intern of the Big Four Audit Firm	25 Minutes
INT 12	24 th September 2020	Intern of the Indigenous Audit Firm	40 Minutes
INT 13	26 th September 2020	Intern of the Indigenous Audit Firm	40 Minutes
INT 14	26 th September 2020	Intern of the Indigenous Audit Firm	35 Minuted
INT 15	26 th September 2020	Intern of the Big Four Audit Firm	30 Minutes

When interviewing the employees at the executive level, the interviews were commenced by raising questions such as; What is your role in this firm? How long have you been in this position? What are your general duties and responsibilities? Thereafter, questions specifically relevant to the training processes within the audit firm were raised. The interviews carried out with the prospective accounting professionals in public practice or interns were focused on their expectations towards enhancing their capabilities, the exposure they obtained through training, and their level of satisfaction with the training provided by the firm (Table 1). An attempt was made to raise more open-ended questions to obtain the interviewees' views. Non-verbal communication such as facial expressions was observed when carrying out the face-to-face interviews. Data triangulation was carried out through a documentary review. The training processes existing within the audit firm to groom the interns were gathered through the documentary review.

In qualitative research, a theory is used as a method of seeing and thinking about the world. Golden-Bindle and Locke (1993) state, when composing post-positivistic research, the theory should provide the plot for the story. The theoretical framework developed for the study provided the concepts to analyze empirics. The empirics collected from multiple sources were analyzed based on the data analysis technique; thematic analysis. The themes and sub-themes emerging from the empirics collected from multiple sources were matched with the key concepts, in the theoretical framework developed for the study; training, diverse careers,

internal differentiation within the Profession.

4.1 The Case Context

In the Sri Lankan context, the Big Four Audit Firms are maintaining similarity with each other in the characteristics of their market segment, revenue, workforce, and quality of services. These firms provide various professional services such as; assurance, auditing, taxation, management consulting, fraud investigation, corporate financing, and actuarial. The Big Four Audit Firms provide training opportunities to school leavers, undergraduates, and those who are pursuing professional accounting examinations. Within the Sri Lankan context, approximately 80% of the listed company audits are carried out by the Big Four Audit Firm; 'ABC' considered in this study. The other three Big Four Audit Firms carry out most of the audits of the remaining listed companies. Audit procedures and resources differ from one audit to another, based on the nature of the organization to be audited. The Big Four Audit Firms operating in Sri Lanka, use advanced procedures and resources; which could be differentiated from the audit procedures used in the indigenous audit firms.

Indigenous Audit Firms operating in Sri Lanka, are smaller in all aspects when compared to the Big Four Audit firms. These indigenous audit firms also provide training opportunities to school leavers, undergraduates, and those who are pursuing professional accounting examinations. Indigenous Audit Firms are mostly involved in carrying out audits relevant to the private limited companies, which are small and medium-sized enterprises. The Indigenous Audit Firm 'XYZ' considered in this study had been formed in 1985, as a business advisory firm. Though the office is in Colombo, the XYZ Audit Firm has undertaken audits in different areas throughout the country. Though this Firm is an Indigenous Firm, it is affiliated with an international, professional service firm, to maintain the quality of the services provided. The XYZ Audit Firm provides; audit and assurance services, tax advisory services, corporate secretarial services, consultancy services, and accountancy services.

It was stated before that, in Sri Lanka, the accounting professionals educated and certificated by CA Sri Lanka, could engage in work determined by statute; public practice. The work relevant to public practice is carried out by the accounting professionals of CA Sri Lanka in the Big Four Audit Firms; ABC as well as in the Indigenous Audit Firm; XYZ. The prospective accounting professionals or interns may obtain training relevant to public practice in either of these two audit firms.

4.2 The Case

In this study, what are the training processes in the Big Four Audit Firm; ABC as well as in the Indigenous audit firm; XYZ when grooming prospective accounting professionals or interns will be empirically addressed. Firstly, the training processes in the Big Four Audit Firm and secondly, the training processes in the Indigenous Audit Firm will be discussed.

Big Four Audit Firm: ABC Audit Firm

The ABC Audit Firm has a globally developed training programme. This training module applies to every region of the ABC Global Network, and it is applied in different countries with certain modifications in accordance with the country-specific requirements. However, the core of the programme is similar in every country. Figure 2 elaborates the training programme of the ABC Audit Firm.

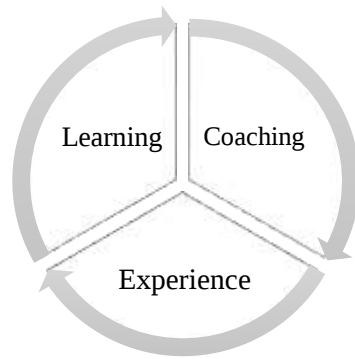


Figure 2: Training programme of the ABC audit firm

Source: Author Constructed

The manager in charge of the training of the ABC Audit Firm explained the structure of the training module: (INT 01)

“Our learning process is developed according to the international framework which is used in every country. It is comprised of three elements. First one is ‘Learning’, which is more structured, classroom training. Here we expect to provide more theoretical aspects and develop the technical skills. Then ‘Coaching’ means on the job training where the trainees gain skills and competencies while they are performing jobs under their seniors. Third one is ‘Experience’ which is referred to the experience gained by working under different clients, industries, and working conditions.”

It is evident that, there are three elements in the training process used to train the interns at the ABC Audit Firm; learning, coaching, and experience.

When the learning element is considered, the ABC Audit Firm uses persons with required technical skills in a certain area to train the interns. If there is a lack of knowledge within the firm with respect to certain knowledge areas, the firm hires specialists from other firms or from abroad, to carry out certain programmes. The Case Study method is usually used in classroom training to give a real-life experience to the trainees. The manager in charge of training further said: (INT01)

“We provide training in simulation basis where the trainees can practice real-life working scenarios in the training room.”

There is a continuous learning process involved. The ABC Audit Firm assumes that theoretical knowledge should be acquired by everyone. The firm has a specially designed online platform where the trainees are required to voluntarily get an understanding of the theoretical knowledge and procedures which help them to perform their day-to-day tasks. The manager in charge of training also said: (INT 01)

“We assume that, the theories are known by everyone. Therefore, we have developed an internal online platform where anyone in the ABC Audit Firm can access and develop their knowledge on theories.”

The ABC Audit Firm had a continuous learning process.

When the coaching element is considered, the ABC Audit Firm uses the senior staff to guide

the interns. An assistant manager said: (INT 02)

“When we take an audit team of our firm, it essentially consists of a manager or assistant manager who has working experience of over five years, and a supervisor and a senior in-charge of the audit. An intern is always guided by them.”

An intern said: (INT 03)

“From my first audit until I became an audit senior, I worked under a senior in charge of the audit and we reported to the manager of the engagement. I first didn’t know what to do. But gradually I learnt by working with them.”

Another intern said: (INT 05)

“First two weeks I was struggling to find formulae in Micro-soft Excel. Then my senior in charge, helped me.”

The ABC Audit Firm has a hierarchy within the firm. The interns are promoted by their performance and the duration of the experience. They are trained to handle different tasks in an audit engagement. Everyone in the team works towards a common goal to complete the audit. The assistant manager in the ABC Audit Firm shared his experience on his journey from an intern to becoming an assistant manager in the ABC Audit Firm: (INT 02)

“5years back I joined the ABC Audit Firm as an audit junior. Since then I worked under different superiors. When I was promoted as a senior accountant, I was allocated to an audit as in charge of the audit. There I had to manage the resources, time and the team under me. After becoming an audit supervisor, I had to handle two audits at once. Also, I had to handle a Public Limited Audit without the assistance of a manager. Now as an assistant manager, I manage five audit engagements and I am directly responsible to the audit partner for all the audits. I have to take decisions on situations that arise and have to manage everything under me.”

Within the ABC Audit Firm, one generation nurtured the next generation through coaching.

When the experience element is considered, the ABC Audit Firm has several clients in different industries where the interns are allowed to get experience by working in different industries during their internship period. One intern said: (INT 05)

“I worked in five different industries within my two years of training at the ABC Audit Firm.”

As the ABC Audit Firm is handling large-scale audits, interns are not getting the chance to rotate much among different functions such as taxation, audit reviews, and book-keeping. An Intern said: (INT 03)

“During my training period, I was mostly engaged in financial auditing. Other functions such as taxation were not carried out much by our team, as our firm has a separate tax division.”

The ABC Audit Firm provides interns access to the latest technology. The interns are required to work using technology rather than manually. One intern explained his experience as follows:

(INT 04)

“We are assigned to more online-based audits where the entire audit is a paperless audit. Also, we are given the computer-based audit tools where the audit work is made easier and saves our time.”

Another intern said: (INT 03)

“I got the chance to work with ERP systems like SAGE, ACCPACK and ORACLE.”

The interns worked in teams when carrying out the audits. An intern said: (INT 05)

“I was supported by audit team members and as a team, we were able to meet the deadline by helping others.”

The communication within the firm and with the clients was carried out in the business language English. An intern said: (INT 03)

“I directly dealt with finance managers of companies and I was able to get over my fear of speaking in English.”

The ABC Audit Firm has also formed clubs and associations. One assistant manager said: (INT 02)

“We have formed a toastmasters club, sports club and a cultural association for interns to develop their skills.”

Interns also get the opportunity to attend events organized by the ABC Audit Firm. One intern said: (INT 03)

“I participated in the talent show, day outs, and annual gatherings of the ABC Audit Firm. It provided good exposure.”

Another intern said: (INT 11)

“As I am a member of the toastmasters club, I improved my communication and public speaking skills.”

The ABC Audit Firm provides exposure to the interns to obtain experience in different industries, different technological environments, and different types of clients. Under those different conditions, interns get the opportunity to gain a diverse range of experience.

Indigenous Audit Firm: XYZ Audit Firm

The XYZ Audit Firm has no structured training programme. However, a Training and Development Unit was maintained within the Firm. The manager in charge of training at the XYZ Audit Firm said: (INT 06)

“We update our trainees with the knowledge of new accounting standards to be applied, laws and regulations related to our profession. We arrange training sessions when there is a requirement.”

However, an intern said: (INT 07)

“We are given the training on updated standards through training sessions. However, after I joined, I have had only three training sessions.”

As the interns are going through an unstructured training programme, there could be many weaknesses in the training processes of the XYZ Audit Firm.

As the XYZ Audit Firm is operating on a small scale, the senior-level employees directly guide the interns without the intervention of middle-level supervision. At the XYZ Audit Firm, there is less delegation of work by the senior-level employees to the interns. An intern said: (INT 12)

“Most of the time I directly report to my manager in charge, and I participated in partner reviews in all of my audits.”

An intern said: (INT 10)

“Sometimes I feel that there are more chances of making mistakes as I do not have proper guidance.”

It is evident that there are weaknesses when coaching the interns as there is no middle-level supervision.

The XYZ Audit Firm is not in a position to provide interns with a diverse range of experience, and there are many contributory factors. An intern said: (INT 13)

“Clients whom I worked with mostly use Microsoft Excel to record their transactions. The client organizations I carried out audits did not have an ERP system.”

The manager in charge of Training of the XYZ Audit Firm said: (INT 06)

“Most of our clients are small and medium scale companies. Therefore, they are not in a position to afford expensive ERP systems.”

There was a similar pattern relevant to the transactions which occurred in the audits carried out at the client organizations of the XYZ Audit Firm. An intern said: (INT 14)

“Most of the time I audit smaller companies. These companies don’t have complex transactions.”

The clients are not fluent in the English language. Therefore, the interns have to communicate in the indigenous language; Sinhala, and not the business language; English. An intern said: (INT 08)

“We usually communicate with our clients in Sinhala.”

As the XYZ Audit Firm serves smaller clients, only a small number of staff is allocated to one audit. Therefore, the interns do not get the opportunity to be team players. However, they have the opportunity to engage in sports as team players through the sports club that has been formed.

The unstructured training processes within the XYZ Audit Firm have weaknesses where the interns will not be up to date with the new developments taking place within the knowledge sphere. The XYZ Audit Firm is small in size relevant to the number of employees and there is no sufficient coaching of interns. However, the interns have hands-on experience in working in diverse areas due to the limited number of divisions formed to carry out the work. It is evident that the clients of the XYZ Audit Firm are small and medium-size enterprises. The technology used in these client places is not sophisticated, there are no complex transactions and these clients are not conversant in the business language. When carrying out audits, due to the nature and size of transactions at the client places, only a few interns would be allocated to carry out an audit at the client place. Therefore, the interns will not get the opportunity to work in teams. Moreover, apart from the sports club, there are no other clubs formed for skill development or any events organized to obtain exposure when being groomed as interns to engage in public practice.

5 DISCUSSION

It was empirically elicited that, there is a distinction between the training processes in the Big Four Audit Firm: ABC, and the Indigenous Audit Firm: XYZ. This is due to the differences in the physical resources, client base, human resources, and organizational structure. The ABC Big Four Audit Firm when compared with the XYZ Indigenous Audit Firm has many physical resources, a well-established client base, skillful human resources, and a well-planned organizational structure. This enables the Big Four Audit Firm: ABC, to train prospective accounting professionals in public practice, to engage in careers that have a higher professional status within the profession, to carry out work in workplaces where there is complex work and modern technology, and work for high profile clients such as quoted public companies operating in large scale with high revenue. On the contrary, the Indigenous Audit Firm: XYZ, has limited physical resources, a low-profile client base, skill deficiencies in the human resources, and weaknesses in the organizational structure. This has brought in adverse effects to the career prospects of the prospective accounting professionals in public practice groomed by the Indigenous Audit Firm: XYZ. Consequently, the Indigenous Audit Firm: XYZ, is incapacitated to produce accounting professionals to engage in careers of high professional status, to carry out complex work in the workplace with modern technology, and work for high-profile clients. These professionals can work only in small and medium-sized companies. However, based on Abbott's (1988) writings, the general career-line within the profession has been able to absorb all the differences that exist in the training processes.

The long period of training of the prospective accounting professionals in public practice within the Big Four Audit Firm and the Indigenous Audit Firm has brought in demographic rigidity to the accounting profession. According to Abbott (1988), a profession is demographically rigid, if its current size and reproductive mechanisms prevent its expanding or contracting rapidly. Changes in overall demand may require sudden production of more or fewer professionals and it will not be met. However, individual professionals can migrate to various modes of professional practice; assurance, auditing, taxation, management consulting, fraud investigation, corporate financing, and actuarial. According to Abbott (1988), such migration handles shifts in relative specialty demand.

Differentiation in the training obtained by the prospective professionals in public practice which was empirically addressed in this study has brought in internal differentiation within the accounting profession in the Sri Lankan context. However, this internal differentiation is not publicly visible. According to Abbott (1988), if there were only one professional status, workplace, and client type in a given profession, any shift in these activities would at once become publicly evident. However, as there are varieties relevant to the professional status, workplace, and client type within the profession, Abbott (1988) states that the public continues to be of the mistaken belief that, the profession is a homogenous group.

6 CONCLUSION

It could be concluded that the differentiation in training obtained by the prospective accounting professionals in public practice in a Big Four Audit Firm: ABC and an Indigenous Audit Firm: XYZ, has brought in diverse career paths within the profession creating internal differentiation. Future researchers may explore, how the differentiation in the application of knowledge in professional practice by the accounting professionals who have obtained training in a Big Four Audit Firm and an Indigenous Audit Firm would create internal differentiation of the profession. This would provide further insights into the internal differentiation within the accounting profession due to the training obtained. The study provides insights to prospective accounting professionals in public practice when selecting an organization to obtain training. Moreover, the study provides insights to the indigenous audit firms on how their training processes could be further developed. The study contributes to the accounting professionalizing research agenda by empirically eliciting the training processes of the prospective accounting professionals in public practice.

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