

# Effectiveness of Public Sector Financial Audit on Police Department of Abu Dhabi, UAE: Proposition of a Conceptual Framework

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## Abstract

The purpose of the study is to identify factors impacting the effectiveness of financial audit services on police department of Abu Dhabi, UAE and proposing a conceptual framework. State owned companies and institutions are required by law in several jurisdictions to have their affairs examined by a public sector auditor. In many countries, public sector audits are conducted under the supervision of the auditor general which is an institute responsible for strengthening public sector accountability and governance and promoting transparency. Public sector audit therefore goes a step further than the financial audit of private organizations which primarily focuses on the reliability of financial statements. Based upon a case study of a large public sector in UAE, the paper proposing a framework with the factors such as technical qualification of audit stuffs, mechanism of financial regulatory body, monitoring mechanism, and compliance with IPSAS those influence on the effectiveness of both internal and external audit. In the further study we will examine the level of effectiveness. As the research scope is limited so the generalizability of conclusion is limited too.

**Keywords:** Financial Audit, Public Sector, Effectiveness, UAE

## Introduction

Audits of public sector companies are becoming increasingly concerned with the efficiency, effectiveness and economy of resources used in state organizations which has given way for the development of value for money audits. Audit comes from the Latin "au dire" which means "listen"; the English verb "to audit" is translated as "check, monitor, inspect". Economic organizations have always been forced to be controlled. In general, the audit consists of an independent professional review of the manner in which an activity, and

on information developed by managers, against criteria of appreciation relating to this activity.

ISO 19011 defines audit as a systematic, independent and documented process for obtaining audit evidence (*records, statements of facts or other information, which relate to audit criteria and are verifiable*) and evaluate them objectively to determine the extent to which the audit criteria (*set of policies, procedures or specific requirements*) are met.

Spicer and Pegler describes Auditing as such an examination of books of accounts and vouchers of business, as will enable the auditors to satisfy himself that the balance sheet is properly drawn up, so as to give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the business and that the profit and loss account gives true and fair view of the profit/loss for the financial period, according to the best of information and explanation given to him and as shown by the books; and if not, in what respect he is not satisfied." There have two types of audit. Internal audit and external audit.

External audit, also known as *financial audit and statutory audit*, involves the examination of the truth and fairness of the financial statements of an entity by an external auditor *who* is independent of the organization in accordance with a reporting framework such as the IFRS. Company law in most jurisdictions requires external audit on annual basis for companies above a certain size. Okpala (2012) revealed that though external auditors have strong positions in an organization, the internal audit committee has an important role in corporate governance.

Alleyne and Howard (2004) found that organizations with good internal control, auditors, and strong audit committee can cope comprehensively with fraud at any practice. The Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) defines internal audit as: "An independent, objective and impartial activity, exercised in an organization (company, organization,), by trained people (most often from the organization and in teams), conducted to produce added value for this organization in him providing assurance on its operation and tips to improve it. According to Howard F. Stettler, "internal auditing is an independent appraisal activity within an organisation for the review of operations as a service to management."

Internal audit, *also referred as operational audit*, is a voluntary appraisal activity undertaken by an organization to provide assurance over the effectiveness of internal controls, risk management and governance to facilitate the achievement of organizational objectives. Internal audit is performed by employees of the organization who report to the audit committee of the board of directors as opposed to external audit which is carried out by professionals independent of the organization and who report to the shareholders via audit report. As part of the internal Audit measures to ensure accuracy and consistency of financial records, management conducts thorough checks to authenticate the true value of assets, properties and transactions over a period of time. It is also done for the purpose of planning and evidence of the existence of physical asset on site or designated location as stated in the books of accounts (Tricker & Tricker, 2015).

Public sector audit involves the scrutiny of the financial affairs of the state owned enterprises to assess whether they have been operated in way which is in the best interest of the public and whether standard procedures have been followed to comply with the requirements in place to promote transparency and good governance (e.g. public sector procurement rules). Public sector audit therefore goes a step further than the financial audit of private organizations which primarily focuses on the reliability of financial statements. According to (Bogt & Tillema, 2016), in order to maintain confidence and trust in state institutions, efforts must be made to enforce the laws governing the establishment of these public organizations

with a conscious effort to adequately sanctions prescribed by these laws . Evaluating the presence of internal control systems in any public institution requires an independent assessment and monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance to accounting standards, safeguarding assets and maintaining an orderly working environment that will encourage performance according policies and ethical values contained in the mission and vision of the organization (Acheampong, 2016).

### **Problem Statement**

In the recent decade a large focus among scholars and practitioners within public administration has been the grand shift in the governance and control of the public sector. From central regulation and detailed instructions to decentralization, market solutions and ex-post controls, all within the New Public Management (NPM) reform package. This change increased the demand for oversight, inspection and audit of the public sector; to the extent that Power (1999) claimed that we are facing an “audit society.” Power (1999) argued that this would have several undesirable consequences for society, and in line with him much of the literature has in general been focused on the harmful impact of inspection and audit activities. It has been argued that by making organizations auditable, the measurability of activities becomes more important than the kind of activities carried out in the organizations. This in turn has been argued to lead to lower levels of efficiency, lack of professionalization and mistrust and resistance among public employees (Dahlstrom and Lapuente 2010). Although many scholars have tended to highlight the negative effects, there have only been a limited number of empirical studies demonstrating the impact of oversight, inspections and audit on public sector performance (Cabral and Lazzarini 2014). Existing empirical studies provide a mixed picture of how monitoring activities, such as auditing, impact the performance of public sector organizations. Some studies demonstrate positive correlations, other insignificant or negative correlations between auditing and better public sector performance (Carlson, Cowen and Fleming 2013). The same kind of audit activity has also been demonstrated to impact performance in different ways in the same organization. In her study of underperforming schools, Rutherford (2014) finds that audit interventions in schools increased their performance on some indicators at the same time as there were no improvements on other performance indicators. Although Rutherford (2014) argues that monitoring can lead to improvements, a common counter argument in the literature is how performance improvements in some areas most likely has negative consequences in other areas, as a result of resources and focus primarily being directed to the areas being subject to audits.

Increasingly, good performance in the public sector is not simply seen as achieving what was planned. The conduct of business issue mentioned earlier is always on the public agenda; the public expect that their tax money and the authority given to governments are used with prudence, probity, honesty, and fairness. Said et al., (2016) argue that the capacity to adapt is a key feature of a successful public organization: organizations need to have the capacity to continue to deliver and to change and learn as future events unfold.

Both the developed and developing countries continue to struggle with the increasing complexities of public financial management and the pace of change. Not least, finance professionals working within the public sector are concerned with improving financial management and budgeting, responding to changes in financial reporting, securing better regulation, strengthening institutions, improving risk management and governance, and eradicating fraud and corruption. In addition, the spotlight is currently on public financial

management as governments across the world increasingly struggle with achieving fiscal sustainability and managing fiscal risk. New and more sophisticated models and tools will be required to help governments deal with fiscal management. Also, there will be more than ever a focus on achieving effective resource allocation, particularly, in resource constrained environments.

As well as the increasingly complex financial management landscape, the problems of the lack of strong leadership and political support, staff shortages, training and retention, poor reward systems and the lack of a public financial management infrastructure mean that the issues are more acutely felt in developing countries and emerging economies. For example, China is reported to have about 130,000 qualified accountants in the public and private sectors, fewer than half the estimated 300,000 it needs to support improvements in financial reporting and corporate governance and increase the rate of growth in China.

Public sector financial management reforms lags behind those in the private sector which includes:

- Skills deficit and retention issues
- Losses and waste in the public sector
- The need to improve accountability and transparency over public spending for the general public and tax payer
- Weak resource allocation
- Serious deficiencies in financial data and budget reporting
- Accounting and auditing systems were antiquated
- There was a need to comply with internationally accepted accounting practice
- The need to strengthen governance in a developing country The need to improve efficiencies and effectiveness in service delivery
- The legislative framework was weak

Finally, if there would be no control and monitoring of the public officials, there is an impending risk that fraud, corruption and other mismanagement would increase (Axelsen et al., 2017). However, a quick empirical lookout in the world tells us that to merely have a national audit office conducting audits of the public sector does not produce the desired effect to curb such malpractices.

As others country in the world, the considerable growth and change of public sector financial auditing in UAE has gone largely unnoticed and unaffected. Research on the issue of audit reporting for accountability and performance and the factors influencing its ineffectiveness on UAE public sector financial auditing has had little attention from academics and professionals. Moreover, there has so far been a lack of detailed studies related to the comparative effectiveness of public sector financial auditing in UAE before and after the reforms of the early 2000s. There is also lack of research into the reasons behind the continuing failure (impediments) of audit effectiveness in UAE comparing the two periods (before and after audit reform in 2001).

Abu Dhabi government issued guidelines for financial statement that comply with International Public Sector Accounting Standard (IPSAS) under the supervision of Abu Dhabi Accountability Authority (ADAA). ADAA adopts the financial transparency in government departments including Ministry of Interior, Public Prosecution and Police (ADAA, 2018).

## **Literature Review**

### **Public Sector Audit**

Public sector audit activities must be configured appropriately to enable public sector entities to fulfil their duty to be accountable and transparent to the public while achieving their objectives effectively, efficiently, economically, and ethically.

Internal audit's main objective is to assist the Government to achieve sound public financial and operational management through effective public spending, financial accountability and transparency. However, the internal audit has not achieved this objective as evidenced by the numerous frauds and scandals in the public sector. Examples of such cases are the Bank Negara Malaysia Forex Scandal (1992), Scorpene Submarine Scandal (2002) and the National Feedlot Corporation's Scandal (2014)

The public sector consists of governments and all publicly controlled or publicly funded agencies, enterprises, and other entities that deliver public programs, goods, or services (Goodson, Mory, Lapointe, 2012)

A public sector organization may exist at any of these four levels which include international, national, regional and local government. On the other hand, public sector governance encompasses the policies and procedures used to direct an organization's activities to provide reasonable assurance that objectives are met and that operations are carried out in an ethical and accountable manner.

### **Key Elements of an Effective Public Sector Audit Activity**

The word effective means successful in producing a desired output or intended result, fulfilling a specified function in fact. An effective public sector audit activity strengthens governance by materially increasing citizens' ability to hold their public sector entity accountable. Auditors perform an especially important function in those aspects of governance that are crucial for promoting credibility, equity, and appropriate behavior of public sector officials, while reducing the risk of public corruption. Therefore, it is crucial that audit activities are configured appropriately and have a broad mandate to achieve these objectives. The audit activity must be empowered to act with integrity and produce reliable services, although the specific means by which auditors achieve these goals vary.

At a minimum, public sector audit activities need:

### **Organizational independence**

Organizational independence allows the audit activity to conduct work without interference by the entity under audit. The audit activity should have sufficient independence from those it is required to audit so that it can both conduct and be perceived to conduct its work without interference. Coupled with objectivity, organizational independence contributes to the accuracy of the auditors' work and the ability to rely on reported results. Independence is greatly impacted by how a chief audit executive (CAE) is appointed and can be terminated. The International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF) Practice Advisory 1110-1 states that "the CAE, reporting functionally to the board and administratively to the organization's chief executive officer, facilitates organizational independence." Important parts of this independence are the CAE's ability to be protected from management or political interference or retaliation resulting from carrying out legitimate duties in accordance with the Standards. The CAE also should be free to staff the audit activity without interference from management or undue political influence from public officials.

### **A formal mandate**

The audit activity's powers and duties should be established by the public sector's constitution, charter, or other basic legal document. Among other topics, this document would address procedures and requirements of reporting and the obligation of the audited entity to collaborate with the auditor.

### **Unrestricted access**

Audits should be conducted with complete and unrestricted access to employees, property, and records as appropriate for the performance of audit activities.

### **Efficiency public sector audit**

The public sector needs more accurate and up-to-date information on unit costs, activity and quality. It needs to understand better how it uses resources in the delivery of services if it is to increase productivity without affecting the quality of services. Public sector financial management is a matter of comprehensive economic agenda on the part of government to carefully manage the scarce resources and taxes that goes into the consolidated fund at the Central bank to meet the budgeted capital projects and other expenditures that are aimed at providing basic services to the citizenry devoid of irregularities (Othman, Aris, Mardziyah, Zainan, & Amin, 2015).

Further opportunities exist for savings to be made through more collaboration and joint working. In addition, service users and front-line staff have an important role to play in redesigning services to deliver savings and improve quality.

There is a need for a more joined up and coordinated approach across the public sector. This is necessary to improve productivity and safeguard the quality of systems of service delivery that require joined-up working, for example between health and social care. Better coordination would allow better sharing of good practice and more effectively facilitate whole system working.

### **The United Arab Emirates Public Sector**

The weaknesses in the internal control systems in the public sector resources and financial management is a critical area currently lacking attention considering the continuous disregard for control elements therefore subjecting the public sector to massive gross financial irregularities in the management, appropriation and accounting for state resources deployed at various public organizations.

The discussion of the UAE system of government from the outset, the founding fathers of the new state adopted a loose federal system of government to accommodate the already existing seven highly autonomous Emirates (sing in Arabic Emara i.e. governorates). These include the Emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al-Quwain, Ras Al-Khaimah, and Al Fujairah. In this arrangement, the public sector consists of three layers of administration: the federal, the Emara Government, and the local municipality levels. In this system, the legacy of the inherited patron-client relationships coexisted with the modern institutions of government and the public sector in the form of an informal organization. The federal government is involved in the provision of free education, health care, welfare, and social assistance services especially to the poor citizens in all Emirates. These services are not privatizable in the sense of transferring their provision to the private sector because of their centrality in the political legitimacy of the political system.

The patron-client relationship in its modern form underpins the political legitimacy of the UAE government. It has evolved now into an intricate system to channel wealth distribution, government grants, administrative jobs, and business rights allocations. This fact explains the government policy of drawing a clear borderline between citizens and non-citizens (expatriates) with different rights and access. (Mansour 2016). Based on that tribal patron-client system, or perhaps because of it, the government in the UAE has from the outset, like other gulf states, emerged as a paternalistic state (Mansour, 2008). Therefore, the existence of formal (legal) public sector institutions served as tools of maintaining this patron-client relationship rather than displacing it.

The coexistence of the patron-client relationship with modern bureaucracy produced a system similar to the prismatic administration described by Riggs (1964). For example, the present foreign investment law requests that foreign investors should have a citizen partner, or sponsor, owning at least 51 percent of the venture's shares. This partnership, in most cases, exists only "on paper" with agreed upon cashback arrangements for the citizen that render the venture to be actually owned and managed by the foreign investor. This practice has informally widened the net of patron-client relationship to cover indirectly foreign business firms and investments and represent one method to distribute benefits to clientele in the form of agreed upon amount of money in return for the sponsorship.

The UAE attempts to traverse from bureaucracy to the New public management to reform the administrative system arrived as a response to the imperatives of the UAE economy and to developments in local and international markets. This partial departure from bureaucratic methods as the dominant mode of administration to new concepts of new public management and governance started towards the end of the 20th century especially when globalization ensued and the country's economy was integrated into the international political economy. (Mustafa Mansour, 2017)

The UAE government, under the leadership of the visionary prime minister, are enthusiastically involved in efforts to free its market to comply with the requirements of a free market in line with the globalized neoliberal thought and neoclassical economics.

The UAE e-government is among the best e-government systems in the region and the Arab World. Within the GCC and Arab countries, it is considered second best only superseded by Bahrain (Mansour, 2016)

The UAE is mostly a tax-free country and the overall tax burden accounting for 22.4 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). On the other hand, the government spends about 28.2 of the country GDP, indicating a relatively small public sector size and moderately limited government. The UAE vast oil revenues enable it to run surplus budgets and keep its public debt below 15 percent of the GDP (Mansour, 2017). Agriculture represents a small proportion of the UAE economy, only 1 percent of GDP.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Financial audit is an independent, formal and systematic approach designed to examine and evaluate the fairness of the financial statements of an organization. The objective of a financial audit is to obtain reasonable assurance in accounts and to verify if the financial statements are free of misstatements. So that there is no risk of fraud, and public sectors can make the best and efficient use of public resources.

Butt and Palmer (1985) argue that effectiveness involves "ensuring that the output from any given activity (or the impact that services have on a community) is achieving the desired results". To evaluate effectiveness one needs to establish that approved or desired goals are

being achieved. A goal is defined as a “concrete expression of policy objectives” (Jones and Prowle, 2008).

The effectiveness of a public sector financial audit can be determined by the following factors:

- Technical Qualification of Audit Staffs
- Mechanism of Financial Regulatory Body
- Monitoring Mechanism
- Compliance with IPSAS

### **Technical Qualification of Audit Staffs**

Auditing is governed by professional standards, completed by individuals independent of the process being audited, and normally performed by individuals with one of several acknowledged certifications. The effectiveness of a public sector financial audit may follow the level of technical qualifications of auditor staffs. Here technical qualification indicates their professional skills, practical experience relevant to that environment, capabilities and competence, assessment etc.

Prospective Auditors shall receive some trainings including a training in fundamentals for audits with methods for identifying and following up corrective actions; and closing out audit findings and another training on general structure of quality management systems based on ISO 9001. The technical assessor will have to demonstrate a sufficient technical experience and knowledge for the technical sector. The signification of:

- “sufficient” may be understood as 10 years of professional experience in the considered technical sector,
- “Knowledge” may be understood as justified at least by an equivalent of license/bachelor level in the considered technical field.

### **Mechanism of Financial Regulatory Body**

The Financial Regulatory Bodies, are the public entities in charge of which the intermediation companies comply with the current legislation, and also maintain control over the development of the activity.

This translates into periodic controls by the regulatory body, as well as the obligation of companies to submit a series of documents, such as financial balances, customer registration, the documentation they use to qualify customers, etc. All with the intention of avoiding fraud and watch over small investors.

The members of financial regulatory body share financial information, discuss related regulatory issues and, if the need arises, co-ordinate responses to potential threats to financial stability. Financial regulatory body is responsible for.

Financial Regulatory Body has the power to issue the framework laws on the basis of which the Government will make the regulation of financial, stock and insurance activity and any other related to the management, use and investment of resources captured from the public. By providing unbiased, objective assessments of whether public resources are managed responsibly and effectively to achieve intended results, auditors help public sector organizations achieve accountability and integrity, improve operations, and instill confidence among citizens and stakeholders. But only examination or information by the auditor cannot make the auditing effective. Therefore financial regulatory body has to modify and arrange the financial regulations more effectively.

### Monitoring Mechanism

The system of monitoring mechanism includes some measures, which are practiced by the management of the company to ensure the good and economic functioning of the business entity. Monitoring mechanism has a significant effect on financial fraud prevention, which is one of the objectives of public sector financial audit. Therefore, proper monitoring mechanism of the public sector management can make the audit more effective.

### Compliance with IPSAS

International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) are a set of accounting standards issued by the IPSAS Board for use by public sector entities around the world in the preparation of financial statements. These standards are based on International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) issued by the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB). IPSAS have become the international reference for the development of public sector accounting systems worldwide. The worldwide process of globalization in economic activity has pushed for globalization also in accounting principles and practices: it is a fact that in the private sector there is a demand for harmonization, as demonstrated by the enlarged adoption of IAS/IFRS (International Accounting Standards/ International Financial Reporting Standards) and the convergence project of FASB/IASB (Nobes, 2011). The process of converging accounting standards aims to enhance the international comparability of financial statements, in order to satisfy the information needs of different kinds of stakeholders in international markets. As IPSAS are a set of accounting standards recognized worldwide, the audit report compliant with IPSAS can determine the comparative financial status of the organization through which the effectiveness of the public sector financial audit can be evaluated.

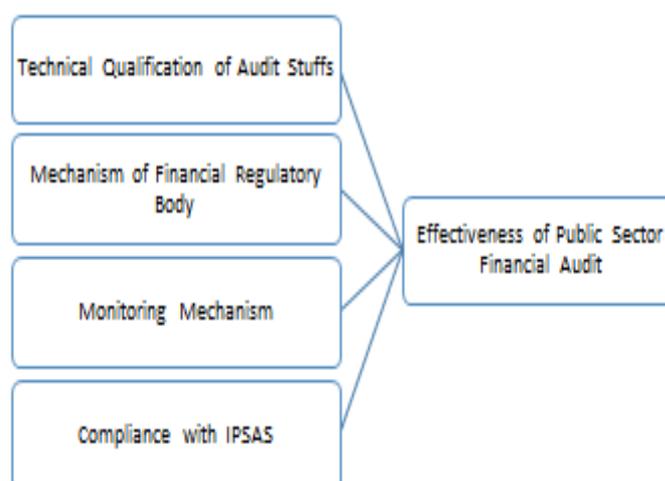


Figure: Conceptual Framework

### Conclusion

There are researches had been examine and study in the area of the financial interior audit in private and public sector. The effective and ability of it can contribute to the significant improvement to the quality of government management has raised the interest for researchers to explore into this matter. Effectiveness of financial internal audit will contribute to the effectiveness of the client and the government as a whole in public sector (Dittenhofer, 2001). The financial internal audit findings and recommendations are clearly vital to the management of public office to react immediately rectify the problems in the organization.

Mihret and Yismaw (2007) suggested public sector of any government are required to have an internal audit function to support effective and stable management in improving public funds.

This study is exceptionally crucial to demonstrate the adequacy of the internal audit by surveying the elements which decides the public sectors by inner review adequacy. And also, this study is vital for the exact proofs for the public population part workplaces to look at their approaches and methodology, and for the future researchers additionally critical to build up an applied writing advancement. The internal auditors have a noteworthy effect to control any resistance action in accordance with the built-up arrangements, arranges, strategies, laws and controls, set by the management which could significantly affect the institute's operations. The internal auditors are likewise crucial to increase the value of the organization, to stay away from disappointment and to spare the working and organization costs as per the association's approaches and methodology.

Internal audit of public department in UAE ensures effectiveness and the extent to which an internal audit staff meets its obligation, the result of the interplay among some factors are internal audit quality, management support; and organization setting. Therefore, internal financial audit should be viewed as a dynamic and continuous process that is created by the interactions among the factors mentioned above and to be study in the research.

The area of internal auditing is probably one of the most dynamic and yet important subjects to come to our attention. Internal audit is currently at a crucial stage in its development as there is a growing demand for audit services. What has yet to be formed is a consensus among theory and practise. This research did not have the intention of concluding the discussions over this matter; however, it is expected to be one more element to help the formation of opinions and to diffuse other discussions on the subject. This study has made a first and successful attempt to establish the positive relationship between the broad attributes of corporate governance and internal auditing. The main limitation of this study is that it is not focused on any specific industry sector or organizational size to any great extent. Taking into consideration that the interest in this field of research is rather new, it is necessary that the future orientation of the academics as well as of the practitioners be focused on the evolution of those governance mechanisms which will limit these troubles.

For this reason, it is recommended further research to take a more focused approach by examining the matters reported in this paper in different areas of industry sectors and organizational size, and evaluate the development of individual elements and steps of the approach. Also, further research might usefully refine the actual and potential impact of internal auditing on corporate governance, by examining case studies of internal audit work in practice. Finally, internal audit will see its great improvement in many management fields (Karagiorgos et. al, 2008). As the saying goes, "the future is bright, but the road ahead is tortuous". Realization of the major importance of internal audit in efficient management will set internal audit as a priceless support in the business management effort.

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