Nohora García*

Understanding Mattessich and Ijiri

García (2018)’s Book Summary

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Abstract: This article summarises the purpose and contents of Nohora García’s book on the contributions of R. Mattessich and Y. Ijiri to accounting theory

Keywords: accounting thought, R. Mattessich, Y. Ijiri, golden age of a priori accounting research

The book ‘Understanding Mattessich and Ijiri: A Study of Accounting Thought’ is part of an academic tradition of examining ideas that have shaped accounting theory over time and geography. It is in this sense that the book constitutes volume 21 of the series *Studies in the Development of Accounting Thought*, edited by Gary Previts. As the name of the series indicates, this work is neither an example of accounting history nor of accounting theory; it is an attempt to account for changes that occurred in accounting literature of the nineteen sixties and seventies, taking the classic works of two notable authors, Richard Mattessich and Yuji Ijiri as a reference. These works were written at the University of California (Berkeley) and at Carnegie Mellon University (Pittsburgh) respectively.

Accounting and Analytical Methods (AMM) by Mattessich (1964) stands out for introducing the idea of building a general theory of accounting systems to guide practitioners in the design of a specific accounting system. Furthermore, Mattessich (1964) made a radical proposal to assimilate accounting to management science, following the interdisciplinary movement prevailing in academic centers in the United States at the time.

Although AAM was well received by some and criticized by others, it marked modern accounting theory by challenging the accepted notion of accounting. It also aimed to stimulate the reader’s interest in assimilating various theoretical, formal, and technological developments to strengthen the theory, teaching, and practice of accounting.

In spite of following a similar interdisciplinary perspective, in his book *Theory of Accounting Measurement*, Ijiri (1975) focused on proposing a theory for conventional accounting. For this, he took the centuries-old connection

*Corresponding author: Nohora García, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogota, Colombia, E-mail: negarcial@unal.edu.co

between accountability and accounting measurement of business income as a paramount aspect of conventional accounting. Ijiri, as well as formalizing the basis of conventional accounting, proposed various alternatives to preserve and extended conventional accounting: incorporating adjustments for inflation, introducing the recognition of commitments, and requiring the disclosure of forecasted financial information.

Ijiri was also conscious of behavioral conditions (i.e. conflicts of interests) that pervaded the work of accountants. This fostered his interest in proposing and refining notions such as objectivity, hardness, and reliability in the measurement of income and the design of accounting systems. In this way, Ijiri (1975) contributed to accounting theory by proposing an alternative to the then-emergent decision usefulness paradigm.

Understanding Mattessich and Ijiri emphasizes the processes and circumstances that led each of these authors to propose their respective theories. By combining historical aspects of the context, biographical notices of the two authors, and analysis of their works, this volume complements and qualifies the dominant argument used to explain the accounting literature of this transition period: one of the major motivations and consequences of a-priori accounting literature of this 'golden age' was the elevation of the methodological rigor of this academic discipline.

The book has eight chapters, the first of which shows the existence of a certain disdain for the legacy of a priori accounting literature of the second half of the twentieth century, particularly concerning the works of R. Mattessich and Y. Ijiri. This has not been the case, for example, with Chambers, whose work has been, and continues to be, examined by several authors. For sake of illustration, see the book *Accounting Thought and Practice Reform: Ray Chambers' Odyssey* (Clarke, Dean, & Persson, 2019).

In the second chapter, methodologies for research on accounting thought are reviewed. With regard to the variety of methodological options identified, about which there is no consensus, an eclectic approach was chosen, in order to i. review research on accounting thought; ii. identify certain contextual and biographical aspects of the authors; and iii. carry out an analysis of the works following an interdisciplinary perspective.

In the third chapter, based on a review of similar research, which shared the interest in comprehending accounting literature of the first half of the twentieth century, a typology of possibilities for carrying out research on accounting thought was identified. Furthermore, this review enabled the identification of some questions set out in the first half of the twentieth century, in order to determine whether the classic works of Richard Mattessich and Yuji Ijiri had dealt with these problems.

After the methodological and conceptual reviews, in the fourth and sixth chapters the institutional and biographical aspects behind the conditions that caused these two authors to dedicate themselves to accounting research are set out. Chapters five and seven set out a review of Mattessich's (1964) book and Ijiri's first works (1965, 1967, 1975), taking into account both the influence of theoretical tendencies in economics and management science, and the role of mathematical and statistical tools in the work of these authors.

The last chapter contains two sections. In the first part, some questions identified in literature on accounting thought (see Table 1, Chapter 3), mainly from the first half of the twentieth century are answered from the perspective of Mattessich (1964) and Ijiri (1965, 1967, 1975). The second part concentrates on setting out some matters that could be the subject of future accounting research. There are some alternatives. Firstly, the need to examine the various logical-conceptual schemes that orient the design of accounting systems which were proposed in both accounting and economics. Secondly, it is possible to deep into how the different approaches of theory of measurement has been used to shape accounting theory. Thirdly, in this book two classical accounting books have been studied. However, researchers may wish to explore how the accounting theories set out by Mattessich and Ijiri have influenced other accounting scholars.

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