

# **The Role of Accounting Standards in Tax Avoidance Incentives and Opportunities**

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## **Abstract**

Tax avoidance is a critical challenge facing tax and accounting systems globally, as it undermines financial transparency, reduces investment efficiency, and weakens corporate competitiveness. This study aims to explore the role of accounting standards in influencing the motivations and opportunities for tax avoidance. Initially, various motivations for tax avoidance such as ambition, rewards, fear, power, competence, attitudes, creativity, and others were identified and grouped into three analytical levels. Subsequently, the study analyzed the opportunities for tax avoidance, including the impact of accounting standards in reducing incentives, improving investment efficiency, maintaining future cash flows, lowering capital costs, manipulating profits, and enhancing competitive advantage, across four levels. The research focuses on the year 2024 and is based on expert input from members of accounting standards-setting committees, senior managers and supervisors of the Audit Organization, and tax professionals with high academic and practical qualifications. Using a structured analysis, the study reveals that effective accounting standards play a vital role in reducing both the motivations and the opportunities for tax avoidance by increasing financial transparency and limiting earnings management practices. As a result, the study presents a conceptual model that clarifies the relationship between accounting standards and tax avoidance, offering practical recommendations for managers, policymakers, and future researchers to enhance tax compliance and economic performance.

**Keywords:** Accounting Standards, Tax Avoidance, Tax Incentives.

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## 1- Introduction

Tax avoidance refers to the restructuring of transactions to increase post-tax income and cash flows, potentially leading to higher tax credits and reported earnings (Rego & Wilson, 2012). However, if detected, companies may face tax penalties, government audits, and political costs (Hanlon & Slemrod, 2009). Numerous studies have investigated factors influencing tax avoidance, such as corporate governance, managerial incentives, and the role of auditors (Okafor et al., 2019). Research has also shown that the government, through its tax system, acts as the largest minority shareholder in companies, and that tax regulations, enforcement, and new accounting standards may influence the extent of tax avoidance (Hanlon, Hoopes & Shroff, 2014).

Previous studies have primarily focused on the impact of adopting International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) on various aspects of financial reporting and accounting quality (Barth et al., 2008). Some studies suggest that IFRS adoption may reduce tax avoidance, as managers refrain from abusing reporting flexibility to avoid attracting the attention of tax authorities (Erickson, Hanlon & Maydew, 2004). However, only a limited number of studies have examined the direct relationship between accounting standards and tax avoidance, including the impact of IFRS on effective tax rates (Lee & Swenson, 2010) and managerial tax incentives (Karampinis & Hevas, 2013).

The present study focuses on the characteristics of accounting standards and evaluates their role in creating incentives and opportunities for tax avoidance. It is expected that accounting standards, by improving the quality of financial information and the internal environment of companies, will influence the level of tax avoidance.

Despite the many studies on corporate tax behavior and the impact of accounting standards, several gaps and deficiencies remain (Chetri et al., 2023). These include:

Lack of comprehensive studies on the interaction between accounting standards and tax behavior: Most existing studies have either explored general aspects of tax avoidance or focused independently on accounting standards. The intersection of these two areas has received less attention (Van Ngyen & Lu, 2024).

Absence of practical and localized models: Many studies have been conducted in international settings and have not adequately addressed the specific economic, cultural, and legal contexts of developing countries, including Iran.

Lack of evaluation of indirect effects of accounting standards: Few studies have investigated the role of accounting standards in creating hidden opportunities for tax avoidance (Khang et al., 2020).

In addition, the following aspects demonstrate the perceived importance of the topic:

**Economic significance:** Tax avoidance can lead to reduced government tax revenues and increased pressure on public financial resources. A better understanding of the role of accounting standards can help improve tax policy (Agy et al., 2020).

**Social necessity:** Reducing tax avoidance contributes to greater tax justice, reduces inequality, and strengthens public trust in the economic system (Khan et al., 2020).

**Professional relevance:** This research can contribute to the development and improvement of accounting standards so that their flexibility and transparency are designed to minimize opportunities for tax avoidance (Regan et al., 2020; Irani & Nozari, 2024).

**Policy-making assistance:** The findings of this study can aid policymakers and legislators in drafting fair and transparent tax regulations based on accounting standards (Goodfellow & Aden, 2019).

**Scientific innovation:** Research of this kind can expand the boundaries of knowledge in the fields of accounting standards and tax behavior by addressing existing gaps (Malik et al., 2025; Fallah & Nozari, 2021).

By emphasizing the role of accounting standards in the motivations and opportunities for tax avoidance, this study offers both practical and theoretical solutions to enhance financial transparency and tax fairness. The findings of previous studies indicate that no research has yet been conducted in Iran on the role of accounting standards in the motivations and opportunities for tax avoidance. Therefore, one of the key contributions and innovations of this study is addressing the empirical gap in evaluating and analyzing the impact of accounting standards on corporate tax avoidance in the Iranian context. As a result, this research, by revealing the influence of accounting standards on tax avoidance levels, provides substantial evidence regarding the usefulness of accounting standards in decision-making from a tax avoidance perspective.

## **2- Literature Review**

There is no universally accepted or structured definition for tax avoidance. The term can hold different meanings for different individuals, and the more thorough the studies conducted, the greater the possibility of reaching an acceptable definition (Hanlon & Heitzman, 2010; Kalogeras et al., 2022). Slemrod (2004) defines tax avoidance as legal actions intended to reduce tax liabilities. Such definitions are limited only to legal actions, particularly due to the difficulty in determining whether the implemented activities are aimed at legally or illegally reducing the tax burden (Atwood et al., 2012; Dyreng et al., 2008; Hanlon & Heitzman, 2010; Kalogeras, 2021).

Dyreng et al. (2008) point to numerous areas in which tax laws are ambiguous, especially in complex transactions that can lead to questionable interpretations. Therefore, Hanlon and Heitzman (2010) highlight two reasons why, from a technical standpoint, legal tax avoidance behavior is not clearly distinguishable from illegal behavior:

(i) Most of the discussed behaviors revolve around transactions that are generally considered legally permissible, and

(ii) The legality of tax avoidance transactions is usually determined retroactively.

Chen et al. (2010) define tax avoidance as management’s efforts aimed at reducing taxable income through financial planning activities—whether legal, questionable, or illegal. As noted by Atwood et al. (2012), Dyreng et al. (2008), and Hanlon & Heitzman (2010), the term “tax avoidance” encompasses concepts such as “tax noncompliance,” “tax shelters,” “tax evasion,” and “tax aggressiveness.”

The following figure illustrates the tax avoidance continuum:

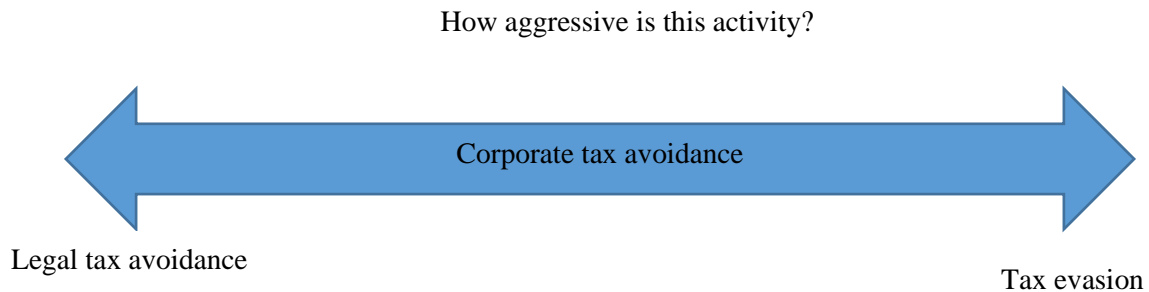


Figure 1. Tax Avoidance as Presented by Hanlon and Heitzman (2010)

The initial research on tax avoidance tended to focus on company-level factors that might lead to tax avoidance (i.e., indicators) (Shackelford & Shevlin, 2001). More recent studies have also considered the financial consequences of tax avoidance. These financial consequences, due to the principal-agent problem that has been the focus of much of the recent work on tax avoidance, can differ between managers, the company, and its shareholders. Tax avoidance involves keeping a company’s cash resources within the company that should be paid to the government. These resources may lead to an increase in the company’s value (and thus the shareholder’s value). However, the relationship between shareholder value and tax avoidance can be weakened by principal-agent problems related to the separation between shareholders and managers. First, the shareholder/management separation may provide opportunities for managers to exploit the benefits of tax avoidance behaviors for personal gain, which can harm the company’s value. Second, companies may hide their tax actions through complex and opaque transactions to avoid disclosing tax avoidance to tax authorities; such ambiguity can also reduce transparency for shareholders. Third, tax avoidance may result in a long-term loss of reputation. Fourth, tax avoidance may not be in line with socially responsible behavior (Shika, 2010), which could matter for some shareholders. Shareholders may also prefer socially responsible companies (McKee et al., 2007).

### Corporate Tax Avoidance Motivations

The motivations for corporate tax avoidance are more complex than those for individual tax avoidance, primarily because companies have a separation of ownership and control (Islamrud, 2004). In the case of publicly traded companies, the large number of shareholders can create additional challenges. As a result of the separation of ownership and control, the motivations for

companies to avoid taxes should be discussed from both the perspective of managers and representatives (Li, 2018).

Representatives are individual shareholders who, if economically rational, have incentives to maximize the return on their investment in the company. Return is typically in the form of dividends or capital gains, both of which depend on the company's after-tax profits. Therefore, if corporate income taxes are not fully integrated with shareholders' personal income taxes, they form a cost that needs to be minimized in order to maximize after-tax returns for shareholders (Li, 2018).

However, since shareholders are not involved in the day-to-day operations of the company but delegate their rights to managers, they need mechanisms to ensure that managers engage in tax avoidance activities to maximize company returns. These mechanisms usually involve linking managers' compensation explicitly or implicitly to observable outcomes such as the average effective tax rate or the company's post-tax profitability (Islamrud, 2004). According to Chen and Chow (2005), such compensation should not only reward managers for managing tax debt downward but also compensate for the risk they take despite the loss of efficiency due to double compensation. Studies by Hanlon, Mills, and Islamrud (2005), Phillips (2003), and Rigo and Wilson (2012) provide evidence for the effectiveness of using compensation to encourage managers to participate in corporate tax avoidance.

Therefore, from the managers' (agents') perspective, their first motivation for avoiding corporate income tax arises from higher compensation, which can be achieved if positive net savings result from tax avoidance activities, thus increasing post-tax profits. The second motivation, as suggested by Desai, Dicks, and Zingales (2007), is the use of complex corporate structures that not only reduce corporate taxes but also conceal the diversion of company resources for private use by managers. The diversion of company resources can be reduced by implementing strong foreign tax or strong internal corporate governance.

Table 1: Literature Review

Researcher (Year)	Research Title	Findings
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<b>Mahdipoor &amp; Bozorgmehrian (2025)</b>	The Impact of Implementing International Financial Reporting Standards on the Relationship Between Financial Statement Comparability and Tax Gap	The study found a significant negative relationship between financial statement comparability and the tax gap. The implementation of international standards strengthens this negative relationship, and financial reporting transparency increases the accuracy of tax information.
<b>Abedini &amp; Darabi (2024)</b>	The Relationship Between Tax Avoidance and the Expertise of Audit Partners and Audit Committee Members	The expertise of audit partners and audit committee members has a significant relationship with tax avoidance.
<b>Haj Sadeghi (2023)</b>	The Effects of Taxable Profit Changes on Tax Avoidance with Emphasis on Tax Evasion	Changes in taxable profit aimed at reducing taxes significantly relate to tax avoidance.
<b>Falah Souqa &amp; et al. (2023)</b>	Investigating the Factors Affecting Tax Avoidance Using Linear Regression Models	Financial reporting transparency and managerial assurance have a significant impact on tax avoidance. Company size and investment intensity had no effect on tax avoidance.
<b>Fakhar &amp; et al. (2023)</b>	Investigating the Impact of Tax Avoidance Factors and Proposing a Model for Preventing Tax Avoidance	Corporate complexity, corporate governance, and accounting variables (disclosure quality, financial fraud, etc.) significantly affect tax avoidance.
<b>Sheikhi &amp; et al. (2022)</b>	Investigating the Impact of Accounting Standard Changes on Financial Status of Listed Companies	Changes in accounting standards enhance the accuracy of financial status evaluation models for companies.
<b>Khani &amp; et al. (2020)</b>	The Impact of Accounting Standards on Profit Prediction for Companies	Transitioning to international accounting standards improves profit forecasting and boosts investments for non-listed Spanish companies.
<b>Namazi &amp; Esmailpour (2019)</b>	The Impact of International Financial Reporting Standards on Tax Evasion and Tax Avoidance in Iran	International financial reporting standards positively prevent tax avoidance and increase the reliability of financial statements.
<b>Tayfeh &amp; et al. (2018)</b>	Ranking the Factors Affecting Corporate Tax Avoidance	Business factors, corporate governance, auditors, and financial reports have the greatest impact on tax avoidance.
<b>Ali Ahmadi &amp; Soroush Yar (2016)</b>	Evaluating the Role of Accounting Standards Formulation Approaches and Auditor Expertise on Aggressive Financial Reporting	The results showed that accounting standards formulation approaches and auditor expertise influence aggressive financial reporting.

<b>Vali Poor &amp; et al. (2014)</b>	A Comparative Study of the Impact of Tax Differences and Accounting Standards in Iran on the Difference Between Taxable Income and Final Taxable Income	A significant difference exists between declared and final taxable income. The lack of documentation for expenses and their relationship to income are the main factors contributing to tax differences.
<b>Ko &amp; et al. (2024)</b>	Corporate Governance and Tax Avoidance: Evidence from Governance Reforms	Stronger governance in companies shows less tax avoidance. Governance reforms have a significant impact on family-owned and non-listed companies.
<b>Malek &amp; et al. (2024)</b>	Corporate Tax Avoidance and Performance: The Moderating Role of Ownership Concentration and Board Independence	Ownership concentration and board independence have a moderating effect on corporate tax avoidance in different companies.
<b>Kavoks &amp; Vernax (2024)</b>	Accounting for Tax Uncertainty Over Time	New evidence suggests an improvement in the comparability of tax reserves over time.
<b>Hosseini &amp; et al. (2024)</b>	Tax Avoidance and Tax Evasion: Current Insights and Future Research Directions in an Emerging Economy	Three categories of factors affecting corporate tax avoidance have been identified: individual taxpayers, corporate taxpayers, and tax authorities.
<b>Chen &amp; et al. (2021)</b>	Information Processing Costs and Corporate Tax Avoidance	The use of expandable business reporting language reduces tax avoidance.
<b>Alharbi &amp; et al. (2020)</b>	The Relationship Between Local Culture and Tax Avoidance	Findings showed a positive and significant relationship between cultural priorities and tax avoidance.
<b>Okafor &amp; et al. (2019)</b>	The Impact of Adopting International Financial Reporting Standards on Corporate Tax Avoidance in Canada	The adoption of international financial reporting standards in Canada leads to reduced tax avoidance in the short term.
<b>Zheng (2019)</b>	The Impact of Governance and National-Level Accounting Standards on Corporate Tax Avoidance	Companies in countries with stronger governance show less tax avoidance. Adherence to international financial reporting standards also helps reduce tax avoidance.

### **3- Research Methodology**

In this research, to examine the relationships between the study variables, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach was used, utilizing the Smart PLS software. This method was chosen due to its ability to analyze complex models, measure latent variables, and examine the direct and indirect effects of variables. The research population consisted of experts relevant to the field under study, and the data were collected through a questionnaire distributed among 167 experts. The questionnaire used in this study consisted of a set of standardized and researcher-developed questions, which were provided to the respondents after confirming its validity and reliability. To assess content validity, expert opinions and university professors were consulted, and the reliability of the measurement tool was examined using indicators such as Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR).

In the data analysis phase, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was first conducted to examine the relationships between observed variables and latent variables. Subsequently, the structural model of the research was estimated and tested using Smart PLS software. Model fit indices, such as Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability (CR), and Path Coefficients, were used to assess the quality of the model. Additionally, T-value tests were conducted to determine the significance of the relationships between variables. Finally, the results of the data analysis indicated that the proposed model fit well, and the relationships between the variables were confirmed based on the obtained values.

### **4- Research Findings**

At this stage, in order to validate the conceptual model of the research and to ensure the existence or absence of causal relationships between the research variables and examine the fit of the observed data with the conceptual model, the native model of the research was tested using Structural Equation Modeling. The results of the model test are reflected in the chart.

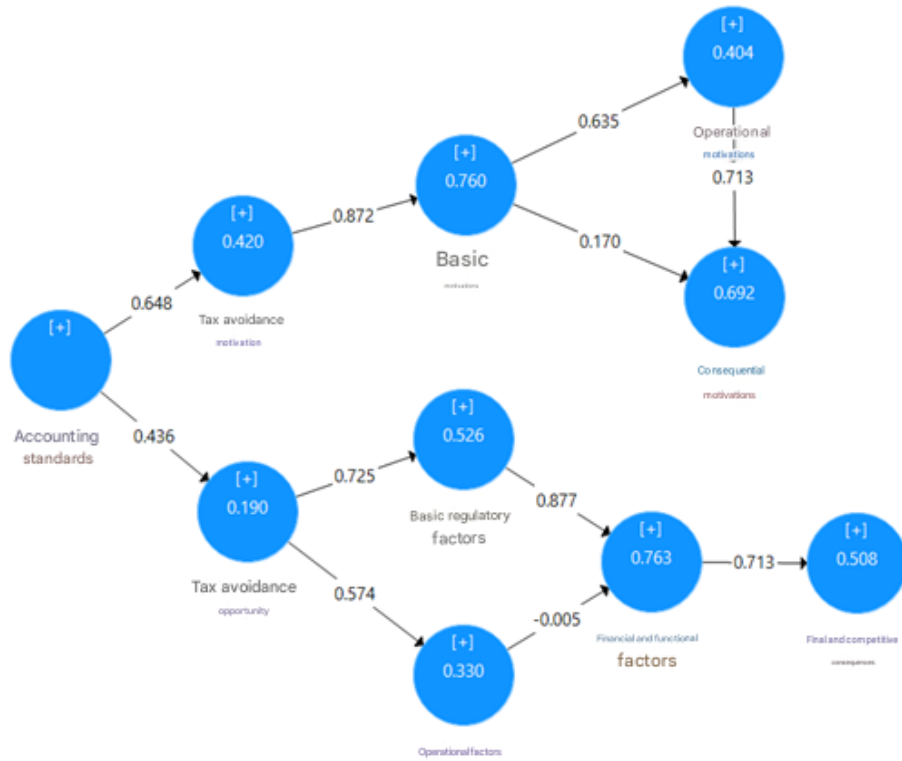


Figure 2: Measurement Model in Standardized State

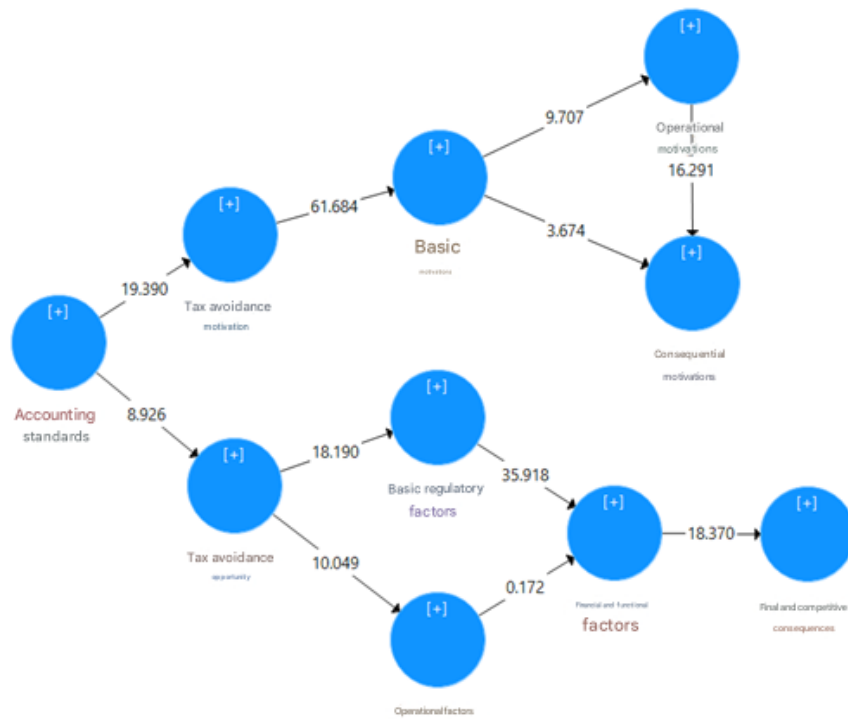


Figure 3: Measurement Model in Significant State

To assess reliability, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were used, while convergent validity was used to assess validity. To evaluate model fit, the GOF index was used.

Table 2: Reliability and Validity of External Models

Variable	CR	AVE	MSV	Fornell-Larcker Matrix		
				1	2	3
Accounting Standards	0.787	0.552	0.193	0.743		
Tax Avoidance Motivation	0.844	0.644	0.478	0.342	0.803	
Tax Avoidance Opportunities	0.918	0.651	0.423	0.331	0.47	0.807

Cronbach's Alpha value greater than 0.7 indicates acceptable reliability.

The CR value for each construct above 0.7 indicates appropriate internal consistency for the measurement model.

An AVE value above 0.5 indicates acceptable convergent validity.

Given the values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 as weak, medium, and strong for GOF, a value of 0.62 indicates a strong model fit.

## 5- Conclusion

Based on the findings of the present study, the role of accounting standards in tax avoidance motivations and opportunities has been examined. The results obtained from the collected data, through analyses conducted on questionnaires using SPSS and Smart PLS software, can be summarized as follows:

Accounting standards play a key role in shaping tax avoidance motivations and opportunities. On one hand, standards can reduce tax avoidance motivations by increasing financial transparency and requiring companies to adhere to accurate reporting principles. On the other hand, the complexity and flexibility of certain accounting standards may create opportunities for companies to reduce their tax burden through creative accounting strategies. This dual role highlights the need for continuous design and revision of accounting standards. Furthermore, the motivation of managers to adopt tax avoidance strategies is strongly influenced by standard-setting policies. For example, strict standards can limit managers' motivations, such as performance bonuses, fear of profit reductions, or the need to maintain competitive advantages, while flexibility in some standards may give managers the opportunity to exploit tax avoidance methods.

Tax avoidance opportunities emerge within a multidimensional framework, influenced by regulatory, operational, financial, and competitive factors. As the hierarchical model shows, accounting standards play a foundational role in reducing tax avoidance opportunities and controlling avoidance motivations. In fact, these standards act as the first line of defense against corporate avoidance behaviors and reduce the potential for exploiting tax policies through enhanced transparency, financial disclosure, and legal restrictions. However, in some cases, opportunities for tax avoidance remain due to profit manipulation, capital cost reduction, and cash flow optimization, allowing companies to adjust accounting methods to reduce their tax burden. This indicates that the impact of accounting standards on tax avoidance opportunities is not only dependent on the stringency of these standards but also on the effective monitoring of their implementation.

From a financial and economic consequences perspective, tax avoidance can be considered a strategic tool to improve investment efficiency and enhance corporate cash flow, but in the long term, it poses a threat to tax equity and economic stability. Many companies use tax avoidance opportunities to reduce capital costs and maintain competitive advantages, which can significantly impact their competitiveness. At the same time, accounting approaches that facilitate tax avoidance may lead to market inequalities, placing a higher tax burden on other sectors of the economy. Therefore, creating a balance between flexible accounting standards and the requirement for financial transparency is a major challenge for policymakers in the field of finance and accounting.

In conclusion, accounting standards play a fundamental role in controlling and regulating tax avoidance motivations and opportunities, but their effectiveness depends on the extent of effective implementation and strict monitoring. While some tax avoidance motivations arise from managerial and competitive pressures, others are the result of the financial and investment structures of companies. Thus, a comprehensive approach combining the improvement of accounting standards, enhanced financial oversight, and tax system reforms can help reduce tax avoidance behaviors. Future research can explore the impact of new technologies such as artificial intelligence and blockchain on increasing financial transparency and reducing tax avoidance opportunities.

#### Role of Accounting Standards in Creating Tax Avoidance Motivations and Opportunities

The study highlighted that accounting standards, as a dual tool, can both reduce avoidance behaviors and create opportunities for tax avoidance. Strict standards and rigorous monitoring can limit motivations derived from bonuses, fear of profit reduction, or maintaining competitive advantages, while flexibility in some standards and gaps in financial reporting may provide an opportunity to exploit tax avoidance methods. Therefore, the design and revision of accounting standards should be done carefully, based on an analysis of the complex relationships between managerial motivations, company needs, and legal requirements, to minimize tax avoidance opportunities.

#### Implications for Management

#### Updating and Revising Accounting Standards to Reduce Tax Avoidance Opportunities

The findings suggest that accounting standards can both reduce and create tax avoidance opportunities. Therefore, standard setters should continuously review and identify weaknesses in the standards. Financial reporting methods should be clarified, and more specific requirements for financial disclosures could reduce the potential for exploiting legal loopholes.

### Increasing Financial Transparency and Requiring More Detailed Tax Disclosures

Since one way of tax avoidance is through creative financial reporting and profit manipulation, regulators and lawmakers should require companies to disclose more details about their tax strategies, tax exemptions received, and tax-reduction methods. Implementing this policy would help investors and other stakeholders make informed decisions and avoid non-transparent activities.

### Strengthening the Role of Regulatory Bodies and Independent Auditing

The findings showed that weak oversight could increase tax avoidance opportunities. Therefore, regulatory organizations and independent auditors should use advanced technologies like AI and blockchain to track financial transactions and detect unusual behaviors. Additionally, increasing auditor independence and imposing heavy penalties on companies using illegal tax avoidance methods can reduce violations.

Instead of solely focusing on penalizing non-compliant companies, governments should provide tax incentives to companies that have transparent financial reporting and properly pay their taxes. These incentives could include reduced tax rates for companies that adhere to higher transparency standards. Such policies could increase companies' motivation to comply with laws and foster a healthier tax culture.

The findings revealed that some tax avoidance motivations stem from managerial attitudes and beliefs. Therefore, training sessions for financial managers and accountants should be held to make them aware of the legal, economic, and ethical consequences of tax avoidance. Moreover, promoting an organizational culture based on transparency and financial accountability can significantly reduce tax avoidance motivations.

As one of the primary reasons for tax avoidance is high tax rates and complex tax systems, policymakers should aim to reform tax laws and reduce tax rates for companies that operate transparently and legally. Designing a fair tax system that minimizes opportunities for abuse can help reduce tax avoidance motivations. In general, implementing these recommendations can enhance financial transparency, increase government tax revenues, and reduce avoidance behaviors in companies. Furthermore, future research examining the impact of these measures in reducing tax avoidance can provide more effective solutions to combat this phenomenon.

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