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INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL IN INTERNAL AUDITING: A REVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

Today's business survival is always allied to the people behind it. Strategies and success are created and driven by individuals. Indeed, the knowledge, expertise and skills that one possesses is like one precious gem stone that money cannot buy (Brooking, 1997; Bontis and Fitz-enz, 2002; Roos *et al.*, 2005). It is an intangible asset and commonly termed as intellectual capital (IC). Though IC has no physical form nor is it easily measured in monetary form, nevertheless, it is extremely important to appreciate and appropriately manage IC particularly to upbeat positive corporate performance (Bontis et al., 2000; Usoff *et al.*, 2002).

IC is frequently referred as intangibles that includes information, knowledge, skills, experience, innovation, customer loyalty, patents, trademarks, relationships and intellectual property will force innovation and value creation of an organization (Bontis *et al.*, 2000; Usoff *et al.*, 2002; Tayles *et al.*, 2007). Indisputably, the existence of IC in the global business would allow companies to gain a competitive edge and promote sustainable growth of the business. It is evidenced in Bontis et al. (2000), Bontis and Fitz-enz (2002), Usoff *et al.* (2002), Pek (2005), Roos *et al.* (2005) and Tayles *et al.* (2007) that IC is a positive attribute that influences corporate performance.

The importance of IC, particularly human capital is highlighted and documented in The Ninth Malaysian Plan. Human capital is stressed as one element that is crucial to achieve the nation's mission. The paragraph 11.02 of The Ninth Malaysian Plan (2006) states:

> *The quality of the nation's human capital will be the most critical element in the achievement of the National Mission, and thus human capital development will be a key thrust in the Ninth Plan period. Human capital development will be holistic; encompassing the acquisition of knowledge and skills or intellectual capital including science and technology (S&T) and entrepreneurial capabilities as well as the internalisation of positive and progressive attitudes, values and ethics through education, training and lifelong learning.*

Obviously, in Malaysia the importance of IC is already in the limelight of the government administration but implementation wise, there is yet empirical evidence that IC in Malaysia has already reached a top notched level of its practices. This undeniably requires attention and urgent action.

Under the Securities Commission revised Malaysian Code on Corporate Governance, effective 1 October 2007, all Malaysian public listed companies (PLCs) are required to establish an independent internal audit department to facilitate adequate internal control, risk management and enhance effective corporate governance. Company crashes involving the Enron-Andersen and World.Com alike could have been avoided if an independent audit function (particularly in Enron case) was able to perform their duties objectively, ethically and independently.

Ideally, the knowledge, skills, expertise, ethics, and so on embedded in the internal audit function (IAF) of Malaysian PLCs is strongly viewed as the intangible assets that can drive the companies' value creation and competitive edge. There is a risk of extreme loss of profitability, creativity, customer loyalty, competitiveness, and so on if IC is not managed and measured in a systematic manner (Brooking, 1997; Usoff *et al.*, 2002).

This paper has two aims. First, we seek to review some of the existing literature on IC and internal auditing. Deriving from this review, we then seek to link IC with the IAF, show the importance of managing and measuring IC, and the consequence of failing to do so. Finally, we show how IC in IAF could contribute in enhancing corporate performance. Our second aim is to extend our literature analysis to initiate a basis for future research by presenting a proposal on how we foresee a study on IC in IAF in Malaysia can take place.

Indeed, IC research is in its developing phase and there are vast opportunities to explore the area (Petty and Guthrie, 2000; Mouritsen, 2006). This is a conceptual paper where it reviews IC literature critically to draw attention on important issues that requires action. Finally, this paper suggests future research that aims to fill the gap or potholes in IC research and provide fruitful contribution to existing literature.

Definition and Classification of IC

Amidst the IC evolution, visualizing IC in a global perspective is not easy due to lack of appropriate model to account intangibles monetarily (Edvinsson, 2000), the absence of a unique globally accepted IC measuring and managing method, and also unavailability of a standardized unified definition (and classification) of IC (Kaufmann and Schneider, 2004; Marr and Moustaghfir, 2005; Kristandl and Bontis, 2007). The emergence of enormous literatures in the past ten years has shown that IC pose one magnitude of value within today’s global business.

What is IC? IC is commonly referred to as the difference between the market value and physical asset of an organization that is also termed as intangible asset of which among others includes knowledge, experience, professional skills, values and norms, technologies, innovation, processes, goodwill, patent and trademarks

(Brooking, 1997; Andriessen, 2001; Usoff *et al.*, 2002; Tayles *et al.*, 2007).

Nerdrum and Erikson (2001) defined IC as individuals' complementary capacity to generate added value and thus create wealth. Roos *et al.* (2005) defines IC as all nonmonetary and nonphysical resources in organizations that would create value. They argued that IC resources are being controlled by the organization particularly human resources and structural resources.

Interestingly, there is a more comprehensive definition of IC as proposed by Ismail *et al.* (2005). They described IC as the intangible assets managed in organization to bring profitability. These intangibles include human capital, structural capital, relational capital and spiritual capital. This is consistent with Zohar and Marshall's (2004) view that companies with high spiritual capital are better at placing and achieving wealth, goals, sustainability and vision.

IC is commonly categorized into three components; human capital, structural capital and relational capital (Mayo, 2000; Roos *et al.*, 2005; Tayles *et al.*, 2007). Human capital is the attribute which are uniquely entrenched in an individual which is not transferable into a physical substance (Roos *et al.*, 2005). Human capital is one important aspect of IC because firms rely heavily on human knowledge and skills to generate profitability, foster value and growth, and improve overall organizational performance (Petty and Guthrie, 2000; Mayo, 2000). Human capital includes competence, knowledge, professional skills, experience, networks, creativity, leadership, education, innovativeness, motivation, changeability (Brooking, 1997; Roos *et al.*, 2005; Tayles *et al.*, 2007).

Structural capital are stored knowledge which remains in an organization even if an employee leaves the organization such as brands, innovation capital, patents, processes, organizational structures, databases, organizational charts, strategies and any other resources that bring higher value than its material value (Bontis *et al.*, 2000; Roos *et al.* 2005; Tayles *et al.*, 2007). Whilst, relational capital is usually customer and market related (Leliaert *et al.*, 2003) and more of networking oriented. It is the intangibles that develops over time in an organization, like marketing channels, customer loyalty, customer and supplier relationships, governmental and industrial networking, intermediaries, partners, lenders, and the like (Bontis *et al.*, 2000; Roos *et al.*, 2005; Tayles *et al.*, 2007).

Albeit to the commonly found definitions and classification of IC, Ismail *et al.* (2005) proposed a new IC definition which is represented by the 'Intellectual Capital Central-Triangle Model'. Ismail *et al.* (2005) defined IC as all intangible assets, which include human capital, structural capital, relational capital and spiritual capital that can be leveraged or converted into value or profit.

In our opinion, the definition by Ismail *et al.* (2005) can be described as the most comprehensive at this point because it includes spiritual capital as one important component of IC which is seen to be very inclusive, relevant and practical. Spiritual capital is further defined as the 'intangible' knowledge, faith and emotion of individual, whilst the organization carries vision, direction, guidance, principles, values and culture.

Spiritual capital is a new emerging concept which came after religious capital however it has no specifically clear definition or measurement related to it (Finke, 2003). Nevertheless, Zohar and Marshall (2004) phrased Spc as the amount of spiritual knowledge and expertise embedded in an individual or a culture. They defined Spc as "the wealth that helps sustain future humanity and wealth that nourishes and sustain human spirit". These spiritual wealth embedded in individuals are capable of generating decent profit and guarantee sustainability to a business.

Managing IC

Comprehending the importance of IC in creating competitive advantage and value, and the cost of ignoring it (Brooking, 1997; Usoff et al., 2002), more organizations are captivating mounting interest in managing and measuring IC. In fact, in today's practices IC is sometimes poorly documented and poorly managed (Roos et al., 2005). Though managing IC requires much effort, but the risk of disregarding it can be paramount to a business or organization. With more companies that make profit by only having intangibles assets, Brooking (1997) pledged that a system of monitoring, managing and valuing IC must take place.

Distinctively, Lelieart et al. (2003, p.207) showed the flow on how intellectual capital is managed as shown in Fig. 1. According to Lelieart et al. (2003) a manager should understand how and what actions that might influence company's IC, seek for ways to modify and improve its IC and search for tools to calculate or measure IC.

Accounting Changes
14
12
15
20
17
21
15
19
12
25
20
15
10
5
0
Year
Frequency

Year
1991
1992
1993
1994
1995
1996
1997
1998
1999

No. of Accounting
Changes
14
12
15
20
17
21
15
19
12
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9

(Source: Lelieart *et al.*, 2003)

Figure 1: Measuring is Knowing

IC and IAF

The Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) 2004 new definition of internal auditing:

> *Internal auditing is an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve an organization's operations. It helps an organization accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control, and governance processes.*

IAF is usually responsible for certified internal auditors, accountants or other professionals, generally titled 'internal auditors'. Evaluating, analyzing and monitoring organization's procedures, controls, risk management becomes IAF's prime concern. Rittenberg et al. (2008) states that internal auditors are required to have broad knowledge of organizational operations, understanding management strategies and risks associated to the strategies. Hass et al. (2006) expressed that the existence of internal auditing would increase the value of the organization and stakeholders through understanding organizational goals.

Consistently, Abdolmohammadi et al. (2006) strongly believed that in the expanding complexity of global business activities, internal auditors are required to hold new knowledge and skills to keep pace with the ever changing environment. Furthermore, Dittenhofer (2001) describes that internal auditing responsibilities is taking an important role in organization and also becomes part of the management, thus critical in ensuring continuous success of a business.

Hence, the IC substance of internal auditors can be said to appear as a core driver to a business's success. Knowledge, skills and experiences that internal auditor possess will be futile if not utilized for the benefit of the organization (Usoff et al. 2002). Chatzkel (2003) argues that corporate failure cases such as Enron demonstrates that intangibles do exist, carrying values that can be powerful to drive business success, however can be manipulated and destroyed for wrong reasons. In their course of duties, internal auditors should avoid any conflicting relationship either with the management or audit committee. This suggests that IC in IAF could not be ignored whether intentionally or unintentionally.

In Malaysia, having an internal audit function in all PLCs is required under Securities Commission revised Malaysian Code on Corporate Governance, effective 1 October 2007 (Adequate Internal Audit in Most PLCs, 2007, October 3). Under this code all Malaysian PLCs are required to establish an independent internal audit department to facilitate adequate internal control, risk management and enhance effective corporate governance.

At post-Enron era, serious attention was placed on the issue of independence and outsourcing of internal audit function. Chatzkel (2003) conclude that Enron (being an intangible intensive company) and the similar failure cases were much attributed to the firm's internal decisions and practices. It was particularly the individual's behavior and intentional dishonesty that led to Enron's failure. This issue specifically refers to the essence of human capital and spiritual capital of (internal) auditors.

IC in IAF and Corporate Performance

Andriessen (2001) argued that there are synergies that exist among intangibles that create uniqueness and wealth. The combination of human capital, structural capital and relational capital are interrelated that makes the pact. Indeed, the importance of IC is apparent in uplifting a company's value, thus improve performance, providing competitive edge, profitability, efficiency, and the like (Brooking, 1997; Usoff et al., 2002; Roos et al., 2005; Tayles et al., 2007). Additionally, according to Zohar and Marshall (2004) companies with high spiritual capital are able to set goals and strategies, more alert with their achievement, vision and value led, have higher sense of holism, are more compassionate, courageous and have good sense of humility.

Bontis et al. (2000) study revealed that while IC components have significant influence over business performance, human capital were found to have a greater influence over other IC components in non-service industries compared to service industries. It is mainly the human capital capabilities (Bontis and Fitz-enz, 2002) such as knowledge, skills, know how, and so on that establish certain economic and corporate business outcomes. An investigation by Tan et al. (2007, p.76) using Pulic's framework on 150 publicly listed companies on the Singapore Exchange found IC and company performance are positively related and the rate of growth of a company's IC is positively related to the company's performance.

Tayles et al. (2007) study explored the perception of managers on IC and management accounting practices (MAP), and corporate performance. They found that the term 'knowledge' is commonly used rather than IC, and IC is reported internally. Human capital was the mostly recognized IC component, while structural capital is the least. Importantly, their findings indicate that the level of IC is associated with the level of business performance. This is consistent with Usoff et al. (2002) argument on the need for companies to measure and manage IC otherwise there will be loss of value and profitability. The implications for ignoring IC could be severe.

In the context of IAF, Hyland and Verreault (2003) agreed that internal auditors possess the expertise in risk management and financial measurement, they believed that these qualities could create values thus yield competitive edge to their clients. As evidenced in their study, a cost-benefit analysis performed by internal auditors on human resource management practices would eventually improve financial performance.

IC in IAF is reflected through the output and performance of the department via mission statement, its charter, integrity, behavior, reliability of financial information to name a few. Dittenhofer (2001) emphasized that productivity is very much associated with output, while the measures of performance is linked to effectiveness and efficiency. Brooking (1997) vie with the notion that losing an employee means a company loses a mass of corporate memory. The impact can be disastrous. Consistently, we believed that losing touch with an IAF identity or even losing one employee could possibly bring a company down.

Undeniably, previous researches results are indicative that IC has positive relationship with business performance. Inevitably, IC is viewed as the core driving forces to keep a company sustainable for a long period. Today's business must be made vulnerable to accept the fast changes in how business works.

FUTURE RESEARCH

In respect of theory grounding, Kaufmann and Schneider (2004) argued that the field of IC is still lacking the theoretical foundation that supports its research. Surprisingly, they revealed that most IC researches are fundamentally characterized by different views and interpretations. Since IC theory is still in its development phase (Andriessen, 2001), there is yet one principal or dominant school of thought or theory that can comprehensively govern works concerning IC.

Considering the heightened importance of IC in today's business, Kauffman and Schneider (2004) suggested that future research should consider IC to be more useful in its practical application, for example focusing on certain types of intangibles (other than knowledge) and investigate the functionality of intangibles. Focusing at specific industry types such as comparing traditional manufacturing industry with a service or multimedia based company will be very interesting (Kauffmann and Schneider, 2004).

Previous researches such as Bontis et al. (2000), Pek (2005) and Tayles et al. (2007) revealed that IC does contribute to corporate performance of Malaysian companies. However, there is no indication so far that the corporate performance is a result of IC in

IAF. Measuring and reporting IC in a formal manner for Malaysian PLCs seems to be less feasible at the current time because IC concept is relatively new to these companies and even to the wider society. However, efforts should be made to educate and encourage these companies to take an early first step.

Usoff et al. (2002) study on the importance of IC and performance measurement systems used internal auditors as respondents revealed that the size of the internal audit department is positively related to a company's stance on IC. They also argue that failing to measure and evaluate IC, a company risks inefficiency, effectiveness and loss of profits. Apparently, Usoff et al. (2002) proposed that future research should explore what are the characteristics of organizations that more highly appreciate the prospective contributions of IC.

A Malaysian study by Tayles et al. (2007) assessed the relationship between IC and management accounting practices, and its effect on corporate performance. They discovered that IC within management accounting practices does bring positive impact on corporate performance. Human capital was found to be the most recognized IC components. This shows consistency with what has been called The Ninth Malaysian Plan on human capital.

Further, Pek (2005) study on Malaysian commercial banks revealed that IC, particularly human capital, creates value to both domestic and foreign banks. Bontis et al. (2000) concludes that IC has a significant and substantive relationship with corporate performance in Malaysian industries regardless of its sector. However, their studies did not cover the interaction of various IC components with IAF. To date, there is yet such evidence.

Interestingly, other than the three main IC components, spiritual capital was found in Ismail et al. (2005) case study on Telekom Malaysia Berhad (TMB) to be another one important IC component that drives corporate performance. Their study found that managers of TMB perceived that spiritual capital pose greater affirmative influence on TMB's overall performance, better than the rest of IC components. In Huang (2008) study on the importance of

IC information, it was evidenced that Malaysian financial analysts and fund managers do consider IC information in their evaluations. However, this is not to the extent of relying on them simply because they view Malaysian companies have yet achieved the level of aggressively valuing IC.

In accounting context, IC is an area which is still young. The concept of IC is still new to the society. Therefore, massive opportunities of exploration are widely open within the field. Indeed, it is interesting to explore IC in IAF and its relative implications on business performance, particularly within the Malaysian setting. So far, there are some countable studies of IC in Malaysia, however none has explored the influence of IC in IAF on corporate performance. Whilst, most IC literature is found to address on IC disclosures (Kauffman and Schneider, 2004; Pek and Kwee, 2004) yet very little is discovered on internal auditing. Furthermore, Ali et al. (2006) discovered that auditing in Malaysia is a profession that is intertwined by politicsand socio-economics to reflect Malaysia as a modern economy and attract foreign investments. Realizing there is extremely little evidence linking IC and internal auditing, this study is held important in filling these absences.

We suggest that a future research should cover these two aims. First, to explore whether IC in IAF is acknowledged and managed in Malaysian PLCs, and to determine if IC in IAF varies with different types of companies. The second aim is to examine whether IC in IAF affects performance of Malaysian PLCs. It is an ultimate aim of this research to see if the IAF brings positive force to corporate performance in Malaysian PLCs. It is also worth considering embarking the study on IC intensive companies such as technology, consumers' products, trading and services and finance (Tayles et al., 2007; Huang, 2008).

Following the call for more IC research, we consider the research objectives recognized in future research are:

- To explore IC (Human Capital, Relational Capital, Structural Capital, Spiritual Capital) in IAF of Malaysian PLCs.

- To determine if IC in IAF vary with types of companies.
- To examine the effect of IC in IAF on corporate performance.
- To identify which IC attributes in IAF pose greater impact on corporate performance.

Inevitably, the intended new knowledge gained from future research is believed to benefit the academicians, standard setters, regulators and also add to the existing stock of literature. The expected contributions of this study are as follows:

- To present a better and thorough understanding on the scenario of IC in IAF in Malaysia. This study will provide important insights of the effect of acknowledging IC within IAF to further enhance business performance.
- To present the information gained to the standard setting bodies and governing agencies in the course of enhancing existing guidelines related to IC.
- Provide an impetus to Malaysian companies and encourage them to seriously acknowledge and utilize IC, as good as how they utilize their tangible assets in the organization to help sustain growth in their business.

CONCLUSION

Indeed, it is not easy to develop an employee's know-how, skills, knowledge or talent that might take years to establish. IC is important that Brooking (1997, p.11) argues "Lose the employee knowledge…lose the trademark and the business has no value". Furthermore, the latter suggests that the real value of a company lay in the intangibles not the tangible ones. Continuously improving professional development, knowledge, maintaining professionalism, being ethical in their duties are among the main responsibilities of internal auditors as professionals. In that respect, extending optimal utilization of their knowledge and skills are mostly important for the betterment of a company.

Malaysian studies covering IC includes Bontis et al. (2000), Pek and Kwee (2004), Ismail et al., (2005), Pek (2005), Tayles et al. (2007) and Huang (2008). Due to the absence of empirical research evidence pertaining to IC in IAF, therefore, it is critically important to conduct an empirical study on this topic area. This paper which attempts to draw attention on some important IC issues, concurrently exhibit our desire to suggest that future research should explore to see whether Malaysian PLCs do seriously acknowledge and manage IC.

Our literature review points to the importance of managing and measuring IC in all organizations, particularly public listed companies which usually has large numbers of staff. We also suggest that there are large stockpiles of IC in Malaysian PLCs, however little empirical evidence is found on the overall impact of IC in IAF on corporate performance leading us to highlight that future research should cover these issues. This is expected to provide fruitful contributions either academically or practically. In short, more research should be carried out to study IC in Malaysia as the area is still new in the country.

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