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The Institute of
Internal Auditors
Australia

White Paper

Integrated Risk-Based Internal Auditing

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Integrated Risk-Based Internal Auditing

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Introduction

Purpose

The public, investors and other stakeholders through their respective groups demand value for money and an optimal return on investment. Therefore any cost incurred should provide some benefit to justify the effort.

Integrated¹ risk-based internal auditing aims to deliver increased value through effective, efficient and relevant internal auditing. It does this through a combination of aspects, approaches, and techniques into a single audit while focussing on areas of highest risk to customers, stakeholders, organisation, community and the environment. It is focused on achieving business objectives and an overall sustainable outcome by taking into account the interrelated nature of business areas, risks and the wider environment in which it functions.

It is a powerful approach for ensuring the internal audit activity stays effective and relevant. It is a mindset change,

to focus internal audit attention on things that will make the area of focus successful, or that could cause it to fail. It is flexible for each organisation to consider to what extent it will identify and minimise coverage of the less important components of the organisation.

Background

The public, investors and other stakeholders through their respective groups demand value for money and an optimal return on investment. Therefore any cost incurred should provide some benefit to justify the effort.

Conventional audits still have a place to provide assurance of outcomes, or that areas have been comprehensively covered and comply with legislation. But this conventional way of auditing cannot cost-effectively cover all aspects of the organisation and the environment in which it functions. The conventional auditing approach allows, for example, auditors to assess the organisation's financial position after a financial and controls audit.

Conventional way of Auditing to focus on one or a few aspects

› Financial	› Risk
› Compliance	› Environmental
› Operational	› Information Systems
› Performance	› Health & Safety
› Security	› Management
› Review	› Procurement
› Probity	› Assessment
› Ethical	› Investigation
› Fraud	

Approach mainly focuses on a narrow scope, part or aspect of the organisation

As internal audit mostly works for the audit committee and management, their focus is not just about assurance, but identifying weaknesses, improving value-for-money, enhancing processes, and discovering errors or fraud. Therefore internal audit helps the organisation to identify risk and deal with it in a cost-effective way; it is not about checking every aspect, but to hone in on key matters.

A financial and control audit covers just a small part of the organisation or area, the objectives it needs to achieve, the risks it faces, and the transactions, discussions and decisions it makes every day.

1 The IIA's Practice Guide - Integrated Auditing, July 2012

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Therefore, to conduct specialist individual audits purely on the types of elements in the adjoining box, may not be the most effective and efficient way to uncover problems and control weaknesses, and maximise business and improvement opportunities.

Providing coverage across the organisation in width, length, height and depth is expensive, whereas integrated risk-based auditing can cover a lot of ground quickly.

Drivers for Change

- > Escalating Costs
- > Customer Demands
- > Corporate Governance
- > Increasing Complexity
- > Legislative Requirements
- > Growth in People & Services
- > Technological Improvements
- > One Stop Shop Demands

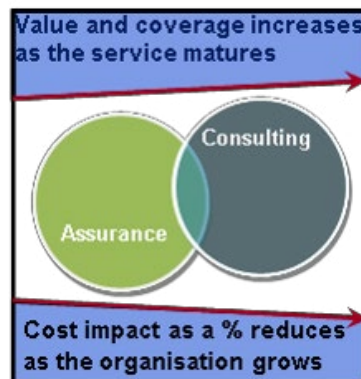
Audit clients often prefer one audit covering their whole area of business, rather than various audits covering small parts continuously over a period of time. They also have more interest in key aspects of their business in order to help them to be successful, or to prevent them from failing. Comprehensive audits have a greater possibility of delivering significant benefits across the business and its bottom line.

The conventional way of auditing might be the safest way to audit with a narrow, clear and ring-fenced audit scope.

This is actually a contradiction, as the safer approach might provide fewer challenges but result in less impact, less value, and less relevance.

As an alternative, integrated risk-based internal auditing might be too complex for persons new to internal auditing, as it requires a broad understanding and experience. This can be overcome by using newer auditors as part of a team to work with more experienced auditors.

Value versus Cost



Another way to get a transfer of knowledge is to use the tried and tested method of letting the business tell you what is wrong. Even junior auditors using integrated risk-based auditing have surprised others and themselves on what they are able to achieve using this approach.

As this type of internal audit service develops and matures, it has the ability to provide audits at a lower cost while delivering more value.

Discussion

Issue

The key consideration is whether internal audit can and should conduct audits in a conventional way or in an integrated risk-based manner ... or perhaps have a blended internal audit plan that includes both of these options depending on the nature and objectives of each specific engagement in the plan.

The key difference integrated risk-based auditing brings is that it allows auditors to immediately hone in on the key risks and controls over wider areas.

History

*"Integrated Auditing currently is considered a major element of the internal auditing function. However, portions of the integration philosophy have a history of being employed in internal audits of the 1940s."*²

² Sawyer's Internal Auditing earlier and 5th Edition – The Practice of Modern Internal Auditing page 162

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Gregg R. Maynard sums up the positive approach to risk by saying:

“Holistic risk management strategies have pushed aside internal auditors’ traditional myopic focus on controlling the downside of risk. A fully integrated audit operation now understands and embraces risk as a source of profit.”³

The Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) ‘International Professional Practices Framework’ (IPPF)[®] has clear indications in this regard, notably IIA Implementation Guide 2010 ‘Planning’:

“The chief audit executive must establish a risk-based plan to determine the priorities of the internal audit activity, consistent with the organization’s goals.... based on a documented risk assessment, undertaken at least annually...”

The internal audit plan is intended to ensure that internal audit coverage adequately examines areas with the greatest exposure to the key risks that could affect the organization’s ability to achieve its objectives. This review of the organization’s approach to risk management may help the CAE decide how to organize or update the audit universe, which consists of all risk areas that could be subject to audit, resulting in a list of possible audit engagements that could be performed.”

This clearly sets the path that internal audit should focus on the key risks and not attempt to audit all risk or controls.

An important consideration is that risk is not static and cannot therefore be pinned down. It is also a perception at a point-in-time and each organisation will have a different view on how serious a risk is. It is normally easier to agree on whether a risk is real to the organisation, but the actual rating of likelihood or impact is often a subjective judgement.

Therefore integrated risk-based internal auditing is more about agreeing what risks across a whole organisation or business unit are significant enough for attention, without having to agree on an exact rating. This requires internal

audit to effectively communicate over a broad number of subjects.

Audit Universe

The concept of the audit universe is to summarise potential internal audit topics in an easily understandable list. This is relatively straight-forward if only dealing with financial and conventional audits conducted in a standard way. In the twenty-first century the environment, risks and interrelationships are more complex.

Risk constantly changes, and this requires the auditor to include and exclude audit topics and approaches as the environment and requirements change. A standardised approach will, in many cases no longer suffice. Parts of organisations are interdependent and the strengths and weaknesses of various organisation areas impact on other areas. Very few, if any, areas work in isolation, and therefore auditors cannot readily ring-fence aspects or review them effectively on their own. For instance, finance may have a significant impact on engineering and, in return, engineering may have a significant impact on the financial position of the organisation.

Audit planning increasingly requires use of documents such as the strategic plan, service catalogue, business plan, budget, annual report and organisation structure as key planning inputs.

Gregg R. Maynard advocates “Combining objective and subjective analysis of the audit universe to reveal audit priorities.”⁴

Three Lines of Defence

The development of ‘The Three Lines of Defense’⁵ model demonstrates that internal audit is one assurance mechanism in a suite of assurance mechanisms. This clearly suggests the chances of something slipping through is lessened due to the many assurance mechanisms in place to review organisation activities as long as groupthink or consensus management does not dominate. This is reliant on organisations having effective reporting and escalation processes that ensures appropriate responses and actions to this type of information. This model provides a good way to identify

3 Maynard, Gregg R., “Embracing Risk,” Internal Auditor, February 1999, page 24-28.

4 Maynard, Gregg R., “Embracing Risk,” Internal Auditor, February 1999, page 24-28.

5 The IIA’s Position Paper, The Three Lines of Defense in Effective Risk Management & Control, 2013.

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gaps in assurance and areas requiring audit attention, and further supports the shift for internal audit to focus on the most important components. If well-coordinated these activities can be very effective in avoiding duplicating effort, minimising of costs and identifying gaps.

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This means an audit could include areas that management have identified should be considered based on their perception of high risk or purely for further assurance. Internal audit may include areas they know other stakeholders may be concerned about. An industry scan or colleagues in similar organisations are avenues to provide further aspects that could potentially be considered.

Any new ideas or methodologies could then provide new or different results. For instance, fraud risks could be considered systematically as part of the audit, and this approach could pinpoint contemporary fraud factors that are potentially overlooked with a conventional audit approach. Auditors have to adapt and modify their methods as the organisation environment changes.

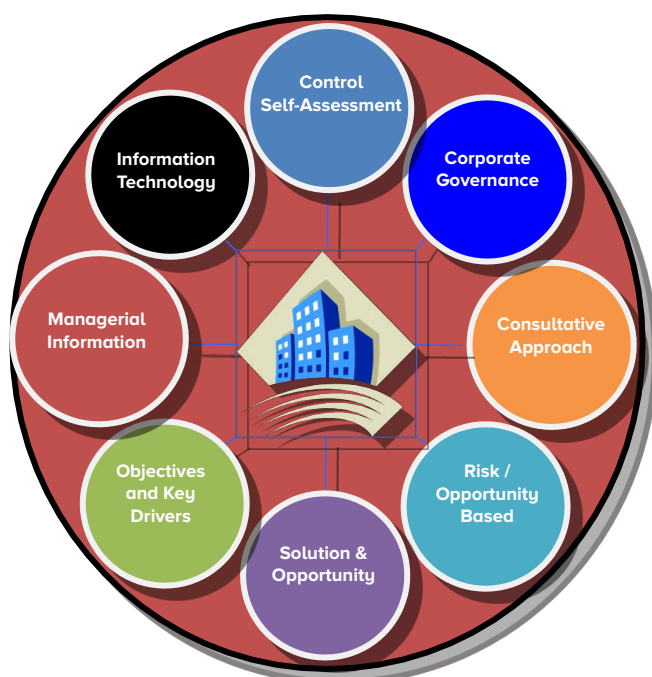
Integrated risk-based internal auditing could include various aspects based on the highest rated risks.

Could include various aspects based on the highest risks

Practical Elements

Historically, risk has been part of integrated auditing concepts; the key here is to make it one of the main driving factors of what will be included in the audit and to highlight the positive or upside of risk. It subscribes to the philosophy that it is not about how much we do, but more about what difference we make. Practical elements include:

- › Allows internal audit to focus on the more important, bigger-dollar and higher risk items, where the greatest impact can be achieved, making the internal audit service more relevant.
- › Does not just include financial risks, but includes other aspects of importance such as operational, information systems, performance, environmental, and fraud in a more holistic approach. It also uses different tactics and techniques to ensure different options and possibilities are considered.
- › The aim is not to do everything, but to use various kinds of risk indicators to focus internal audit on areas where it can make a significant difference. This is likely to include risk areas the audit client would like covered, without necessarily excluding what they do not want covered. The focus is more on risk management than pure risk identification.
- › The aim is not to just focus on audit objectives, but more on the strategic overall objectives and outcomes of the business area to ensure the organisation is sustainable in the long-run.
- › Areas of the same business do not work in isolation, with many risks interrelated, therefore the aim is to include all risks that have a significant effect on that specific business area or the organisation as a whole.



Pros and Cons

Pros

Integrated risk-based internal auditing has the potential to drive benefits for the business by:

- › Increasing the relevance and credibility of internal audit as it focuses its resources where they can have the most impact.

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- › Making internal audit more cost-effective, so it can cover more ground while focusing on the more important aspects with a better holistic view.
- › Demonstrating that internal audit can increasingly make a difference to the organisation.
- › Integrating knowledge into a single audit producing a more effective outcome through a holistic approach.
- › Having fewer audits for managers, with one report honing in on significant aspects of a business area.
- › Allowing managers to control, accept, avoid, diversify, share or transfer risk.
- › Meeting higher customer demands by providing a one-stop-shop, holistic view or opinion.
- › Helping decisions on risk by broadening perspectives and 'thinking outside the box'.
- › Using technology and advanced data analytics so more data can be evaluated and compared at an increased speed.
- › Using new ideas and methodologies to achieve different results.
- › Allowing for a more flexible and consultative approach.
- › Using the 'Three Lines of Defence' model to provide a safety net for the risk of something slipping through.
- › Spending more time auditing business areas with Greater potential area to make the organisation more successful.
- › Spending more time auditing business areas with greater potential area to make the organisation more successful.
- › improved understanding of the organisation leading to enhanced credibility.
- › Putting the 'elephant in the room' in scope.

Cons

Potential downsides of integrated risk-based internal auditing may include:

- › May not be able to vouch compliance as the aim is not to audit everything in a business area.
- › May be difficult to achieve if auditors are not appropriately qualified, skilled or experienced.
- › Requires organisations maturity for things to be open to challenge.
- › Possibility of something not being considered important or missed altogether – counter argument to the 'Three Lines Model' safety net.

- › Might create too much focus and pressure for busy line managers or create an opportunity to use that excuse.

Further development of data analytics and artificial intelligence through enhanced use of technology will reduce the risk of something slipping through unnoticed.

Conclusion

Summary

The aim and approach to integrated risk-based auditing is to cover extra ground during auditing and thereby be more effective and efficient. It is not a narrowly focused approach requiring a series of audits to provide coverage, but rather an approach that considers key risks in a business area. For instance, management is likely to gain greater insights from an audit of their whole business area rather than smaller elements periodically.

Therefore it neither restricts the scope of an audit, nor overly tries to classify it according to whether it is compliance, operational, performance, financial, or another type of audit. This means audit time can be spent where it makes the most difference, as all key aspects within an area could be within scope.

Conclusion

This approach can be powerful and help ensure internal audit stays effective and relevant. It requires a mindset change that can be difficult and challenging, but if done well it can be rewarding. It encourages auditors to spend more time on things that can make their organisation more successful.

All the parts together are shown in the following page:

This approach will not work in all situations. But if auditors allow themselves to do one or two of these types of audits in appropriate areas, their audit clients will gain value in having one audit with one report that covers the key aspects of their business area, and typically with a number of significant findings with significant business benefits.

If auditors can focus and deal with the bigger and more important matters, then their impact will be greater.

The idea with the integrated approach is to mainly focus on the aspects that will make your organisation successful or make it fail.

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The following table illustrate a simplified sustainable way of keeping organisations successful and some of the key elements:

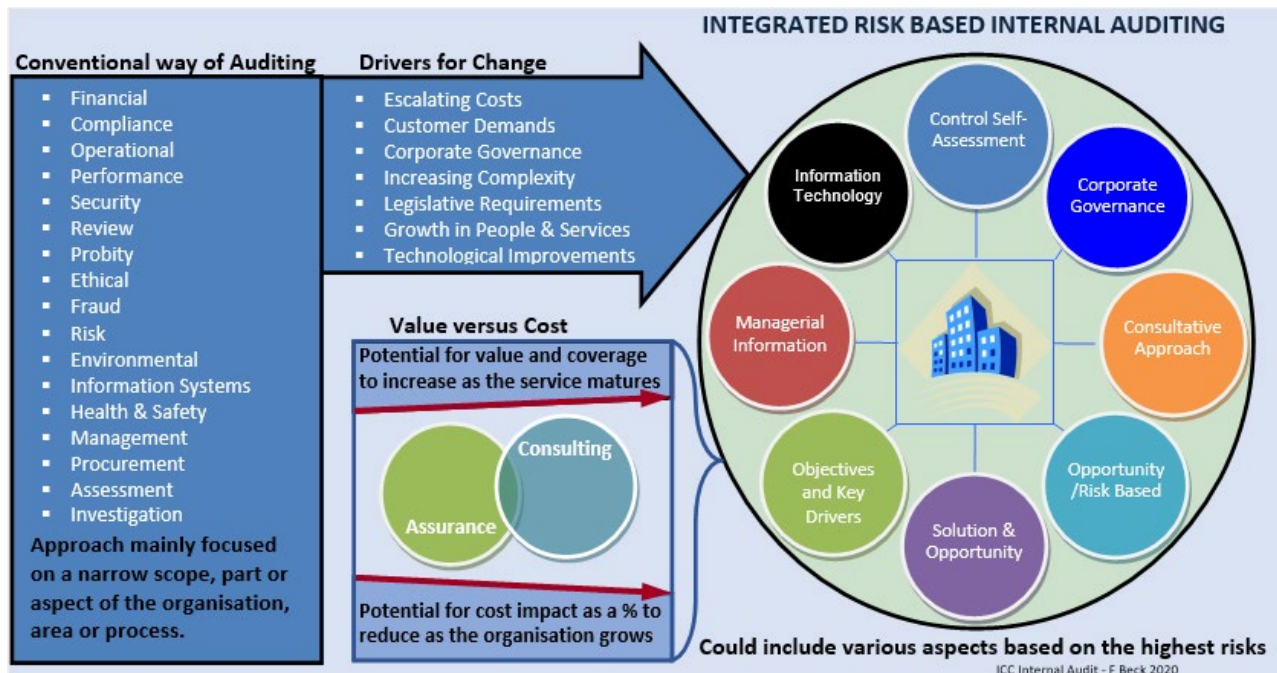


The motivation to adjust is further supported by IIA Implementation Guidance.

“The complexities that chief audit executives (CAE’s) face in delivering assurance, advice, and insight must be addressed against a backdrop of the organization’s culture, operational maturity, budgets, and enterprise goals and priorities. Key stakeholders, including regulators, boards, and executive management, frequently require new or additional internal audit deliverables that can help enhance and protect organisational value.”⁶

The organisation might not be satisfied with the current standard of service from internal audit and it might not be because the service level is too low but rather too high and unrealistic, or too much pressure to their liking. That is why it is important to gain and keep organisational acceptance of the internal audit strategy and approach and to be somewhat flexible in what services are offered.

All the parts together are shown below:



⁶ The updated Integrated Approaches to Internal Auditing 2022©

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¹ Sawyer’s Internal Auditing earlier and 5th Edition – The Practice of Modern Internal Auditing page 162

² Maynard, Gregg R., “Embracing Risk,” Internal Auditor, February 1999, page 24-28.

³ The IIA’s Position Paper, The Three Lines of Defense in Effective Risk Management & Control, 2013.

⁴ The IIA’s Practice Guide - Integrated Auditing, July 2012

⁵ The IIA’s Position Paper, The Three Lines of Defense in Effective Risk Management & Control, 2013

⁶ The updated Integrated Approaches to Internal Auditing 2022

Purpose of White Papers

A White Paper is a report authored and peer reviewed by experienced practitioners to provide guidance on a particular subject related to governance, risk management or control. It seeks to inform readers about an issue and present ideas and options on how it might be managed. It does not necessarily represent the position or philosophy of the Institute of Internal Auditors–Global and the Institute of Internal Auditors–Australia.

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Freddy Beck is a career internal auditor and accountant for more than 30 years. He is accredited in conducting internal audit quality assessments on behalf of the IIA–Australia. He is currently the Chief Audit Executive at Ipswich City Council in Queensland, Australia.

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About the Institute of Internal Auditors–Australia

The Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) is the global professional association for Internal Auditors, with global headquarters in the USA and affiliated Institutes and Chapters throughout the world including Australia.

As the chief advocate of the Internal Audit profession, the IIA serves as the profession’s international standard setter, sole provider of globally accepted internal auditing certifications, and principal researcher and educator.

The IIA sets the bar for Internal Audit integrity and professionalism around the world with its ‘International Professional Practices Framework’ (IPPF), a collection of guidance that includes the ‘International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing’ and the ‘Code of Ethics’.

The IIA-Australia ensures its members and the profession as a whole are well-represented with decision-makers and influencers, and is extensively represented on a number of global committees and prominent working groups in Australia and internationally.

The IIA was established in 1941 and now has more than 200,000 members from 190 countries with hundreds of local area Chapters. Generally, members work in internal auditing, risk management, governance, internal control, information technology audit, education, and security.



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