

MY JOURNEY TOWARDS BEING A CIA

MY STORY BY RAJA AZURA RAJA MAHAYUDDIN



Name: Raja Azura Raja Mahayuddin, 50

Current employment: Co-Founder, AKRAB Resources Sdn Bhd, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Work experience:

May 1997 to Feb 2002: Assistant Manager, Assurance & Business Advisory, Services Group, Arthur Andersen & Co

Feb 2002 to May 2003: Manager, Internal Audit Department, Malaysia Airlines

June 2003 to Feb 2005: Head, Organisation and Methods Department

Mar 2005 to June 2009: Chief Internal Auditor, Audit & Business Advisory Department

July 2009 to June 2010: Senior Vice President, Strategic Human Capital Management Division (SHCM), Khazanah Nasional Berhad

July 2010 to Jan 2012: Executive Vice President, Human Capital Division, Malaysia Airlines

Feb 2012 to Feb 2019: Chief Executive Officer, Yayasan Peneraju Pendidikan Bumiputera (Yayasan Peneraju)

April 2021 to present: Co-Founder, AKRAB Resources Sdn Bhd

Education background :

1991 to 1992 - Matriculation Certificate, Universiti Utara Malaysia

1992 to 1997 - Bachelor of Accountancy (Hons), Universiti Utara Malaysia

2019 to 2021 - Master of Business Administration with Distinction, Heriot Watt University

2022 to 2023 - The Chartered Institute of Management Accountant

IIAM membership category :

Professional Member, CMIIA

1. Why did you decide to pursue a career as an internal auditor?

I was an internal audit manager when I joined Malaysia Airlines in 2002, and I believe that a career as an internal auditor would be able to provide me with the added advantage of obtaining great exposure to understanding the business operations and the overall insights of the organisation, not just from a governance standpoint but also from the strategic and commercial angles of how business should be driven.

My interest has always been in ensuring good governance and how to implement change that can soar the organisation to greater heights. As internal auditors, we have the opportunity to highlight areas that can be improved, not just from the aspect of internal control but also by providing value-added or creation recommendations that can impact the financial position, trigger new business opportunities and enhance business processes that can improve productivity in assisting the organisation to achieve its business sustainability.

2. How important is an Internal Auditor's role in the organisation?

It is crucial considering its independent roles and objective assessments that provide the board of directors with the state of internal control, risk management, and governance structure effectiveness of an organisation. We, the internal auditors play an important role to assist the board in discharging their duties and ensuring the internal control and risk management systems are in place within an organisation. Additionally, our role as internal auditor is to assist management in enhancing transparency, accountability, and the overall organisation's performance.

We may not be able to help implement change directly, but if we are able to provide valuable recommendations to management, that will help make an impact on the organisation. One important role that internal auditors may have forgotten to undertake is the role of educating the organisation on the importance of internal controls. Making the members of the organisation at all levels understand what internal control is, how management and the organisation as a whole thrive to ensure that in every activity that they undertake, proper internal control has been put in place to uphold proper governance, minimise business risks and issues, and improve the organisation's performance.

3. What is the typical challenge internal auditors generally face? And amongst them, can you highlight what would be one of the biggest challenge?

Typical challenges face by internal auditors are:-

- Perception of being a watch dog instead of a trusted business advisor hence, a lot of time are spent facing problems to get full cooperation and support from management in discharging their duties effectively.
- Ability to keep abreast with the latest changes and development within the industry or even the profession to ensure internal auditors can stay relevant and continuously update their skills and knowledge.
- Earning trust from stakeholders and managing their expectations – management, board, regulators, shareholders etc.

- The balancing act of being independent and also collaborating with business operations and/or management.
- Ethical dilemmas – ability to manage conflict of interest as at times, internal auditors may have been pressured by management or other stakeholders to downplay certain risks or findings as this can potentially compromise the integrity of audit process.

Earning the trust of stakeholders has always been the biggest challenge faced by the internal audit fraternity. It is about understanding each stakeholder's challenges, concerns/issues and how we will be able to play our roles well to provide them the assurance required (with substance) and appropriate actions that can assist making them sleep better at night. Consistent engagement must be in place to provide an open platform to discuss and receive timely feedback so that both auditors and stakeholders are always on the same page and able to communicate effectively.

4. Does the Institute play a role in supporting your Internal Auditor scope of work? If yes, in what ways? And if no, what can we do better?

The Institute currently provides support to the scope of work of internal auditors in a few key areas, namely the certification of internal auditors, providing learning and development opportunities, be it technical as internal auditors or other skills required by the members, and providing other services such as external quality assessment reviews and technical guidance that definitely will be able to assist internal auditors in increasing their knowledge, experience, and skills. IIAM has also been the platform where members can share their experiences and the IA community can engage each other to widen their network and net worth.

I am unsure as to whether IIAM currently plays a role in recommending its members for Board Member's and Chief Internal Auditor's roles, and whether, with the database of internal auditors in hand, IIAM will be in a great position to do so.

Additionally, I would like to recommend IIAM as the platform that will allow the personal growth of its members by providing an avenue for secondment opportunities to be made available and having strong connections with companies and industry players and to strengthen its position strategically, we need to get more board members (the Chair of the Audit Committee and Audit Committee Members) to have an ongoing channel to deliberate, discuss, and engage each other while contributing back to the Institute with a thematic engagement set to drive effective discussion.

5. Would you recommend IIA Malaysia to your fellow IA colleagues?

Yes, especially when it comes to obtaining technical knowledge and insights related to internal auditing and also being a party that will be able to conduct the external QAR for internal audit functions.

6. What motivated you to take the CIA exam?

I was the Chief Internal Auditor at the time I sat for the CIA Exam in 2006/2007. I realised that in order to make the internal audit transformation that we're undertaking at Malaysia Airlines successful, we need to ensure the internal auditors have the right mindset, knowledge, capability, capacity, and experience to make the internal audit department a progressive and trusted entity among its stakeholders. During the IA transformation period, we managed to secure a budget to run a special programme to get our internal auditors certified. To encourage everyone, the tone at the top plays a key role. I have then decided to sit for the CIA exam with the first batch of internal auditors, as I believe the success of our first batch will inspire the rest to pursue the same.

And knowingly, the skills that I obtained much earlier as an external auditor could definitely be complemented further by gaining all the necessary technical knowledge and know-how that I would acquire through my journey undertaking the professional exams. And alhamdulillah, I managed to pass the exams with straight sitting.

The knowledge that I acquired through my learning journey completing the CIA exams has definitely equipped me better as the Chief Internal Auditor and strengthened my overall skills to ensure the transformation would be on the right trajectory in meeting the expectations of our stakeholders and delivering outstanding performance. Additionally, it helps strengthen my credentials, and I am happy to have been appointed as a board member (also chairman of the audit committee) with public-listed companies and government agencies.

7. What were the challenges you encountered when attempting the CIA exam?

Having appropriate and adequate time to study for the exams as the role of Chief Internal Auditor was really demanding as, at our end, we were undertaking internal audit transformation and the whole organisation was going through business transformation at the same time.

8. How did you manage your study time while working?

I actually allocated a few hours to focus on my study every week as I was not able to do so every day, but focus and meeting set goals are important. I would ensure that I met the target audience and understood the gist of what I learned. But what I think the best I did then was, throughout the learning journey, I would assimilate what I had learned from each topic back to the reality of what I had experienced on a day-to-day basis as the Chief Internal Auditor or relate the experiences shared by my fellow audit managers and internal auditors. That had helped give me a holistic perspective and grasp the knowledge even deeper than just learning the contents of the materials.

9. As a CIA certified professional, where do you envision yourself?

Happy of what I have achieved so far, I have been appointed as Board Members, Audit Chair and Audit Committee Members for some of the organisations that I had served and currently serving.

I look forward to contributing to the Institute in any way I can – experiential sharing, leadership engagement/training to inspire more internal auditors to see greater career pathways soaring to greater heights as organisation leaders.

10. How important is CIA for an internal auditor?

With the current environment, having a professional certification is key, either to be able to secure a job or even to be considered for your promotion to the next level. Having a professional certification like the CIA will provide you with the added advantage of personal growth and career progression, but it's not just that because it will equip you with the right knowledge and technical know-how to be a competent and capable internal auditor.

11. Please provide 3 main advice for those attempting to take the CIA examination?

- Set the End in Mind – you should know the purpose of why passing CIA exams is important to you. That will help you stay focused, positive and motivated to do well in your exams.
- Study at your own pace, but effectively! For those who are attempting CIA exams especially when you have to balance between work, study and life chores, structure your learning based on how you can reap the knowledge using your best approach (self-study, study in a group, online tutorial, etc). Understand the overall contents, you need to know how to approach your study best (the best effective time, how much effort is required) and prepare your study plan effectively.
- Practice make perfect! Don't forget to consistently practice the questions and understand how to strategize well to attempt the questions. There will be ways of how you structure your answers that will help you score the important points. Additionally, always give real life examples by relating your answers to your own experience as an internal auditor or any circumstances that you have observed or seen. That will surely score more points as you then are able to relate what you have learnt to what you're practising/doing at work or what you have experienced.