

Name: Alissa Irgang

Location: Canberra

Work role: Director – Assurance and Risk – Callida

Professional role: Internal Audit

Community role: Chair of the Youth Leadership Committee for the IIA–Australia.

How did you get a start in internal audit?

I was working as an actuary and wanted to branch out. When I talked to an internal audit partner about the work they did, it sounded really interesting to be able to work with senior executives on a variety of projects. And once I'd started, I fell in love with internal audit and have specialised in it ever since.



What's the coronavirus drama effect on you?

It represents an interesting time for our profession. It's been an incredibly busy time for internal audit to step up and demonstrate real value. While our clients are going through significant operational changes due to COVID-19, it's been crucial for us to move beyond traditional retrospective internal auditing. Organisations and the senior executives need immediate and ongoing risk advice which has shifted the role and approach of internal audit functions. This means more agile internal auditing, live advice, multi-stage audits and on-the-spot advice. While it has been a challenging time for organisations, it has been very rewarding to deliver value for clients by keeping internal audit functions adaptable and flexible.

What risks would you say are heightened by coronavirus?

The impact on risk profile and risk appetite has varied for every organisation depending on the nature of their operations. Organisations need to be aware of increased fraud risk during COVID-19, together with risks related to a remote working environment. Additionally, increased operational risks to support business as usual require organisations to re-examine critical controls and their continuing effectiveness. While organisations originally focused on the shift to remote or altered working arrangements, we have now seen a move to a new business as usual. At this time, organisations need to be thinking about risks related to transitioning back as this becomes an equally complex exercise. Current and future risks may relate to ICT asset management, mixed on-site and off-site management, and wind-down of other changes made for COVID-19.

What is the biggest challenge facing internal auditors?

The biggest challenge is staying relevant and adding value. We have the technology to work broader, deeper, faster and smarter with continuous monitoring, robotic process automation and data analytics, and we need to be utilising this more. Beyond that, we need to change more than the style of internal audits. This means focusing on purpose over paperwork when doing an audit. Every internal auditor needs to ask themselves "what will change for the better for the organisation after 1 day, 1 month or 1 year onwards as a result of our advice?" If the answer is "not much", then we need to challenge ourselves further.

What has the IIA–Australia been doing lately?

The IIA–Australia has been focusing on its member engagement strategy in a remote environment. This includes the move to webinars, online classroom and changing the way members are engaged.

What is your most memorable internal audit moment?

It's not just one moment, but I started working with a client where "audit" seemed to be a dirty word and areas would go out of their way to dodge audits. It took time, engagement and focus on delivering value – but we reached a point where business areas would actively come to internal audit for assistance and that was a really memorable achievement with that client.

What are you working on at present?

COVID-19 means the role of internal audit needs to be ready to change. So, while I have previously been working with clients on transitioning to new arrangements for COVID-19, the focus now is on working with clients on ongoing risks and planning for the transition back.

What is on your desk right now?

When I'm working from home, a lot more chocolate than normal.

Concert or event you would most like to attend?

Apart from SOPAC? When concerts start up again, I am very keen to get my 90s on with the Backstreet Boys and also go see a local Canberra band Sputnik Sweetheart.

What would you change if you could?

There still seems to be a widespread view that the focus of internal audit activities is to produce the "audit report" as the ultimate goal. Yes, this is a tool we use, but internal audit and our role as a trusted business advisor is changing and we need to be flexible and adaptable in our how we provide services and advice.