

Name: Mark Harrison

Location: Canberra, Australia

Work role: Managing Director of Sententia Consulting

Professional role: I am a Board member for the IIA-Australia and former IIA-Australia President. Until last year I was President of the Asian Confederation of Institutes of Internal Auditors (ACIIA). I am also on the Institute Relations Committee for the IIA Global.



Community role

Among other community roles I am Deputy Chair of the Board of the Southern NSW Local Health District which is the public healthcare provider for the southern region of NSW. This is an incredibly challenging role given the complexities of healthcare, especially in 2020 with bushfires and pandemics.

How did you get a start in internal audit?

After 8 years working in financial management, banking and financial consulting in Europe and North America, I had returned to Australia, joining one of the big accounting firms to do financial and management consulting. I was asked to fill in as Chief Audit Executive for a Government Department for 3 months which lasted for 4 years and I got hooked on internal audit. I never looked back!

What's the coronavirus drama effect on you?

I left my previous role with a global internal audit firm the Friday before the Prime Minister closed the country down in March and so the beginning of the pandemic coincided with a massive career change. I was lucky enough to be sought out by a number of parts of government to assist them with governance, process, continuity and strategic advice and assistance through the pandemic which ended up keeping me VERY busy.

Working from office or home?

I am blessed to have been able to work at client sites every day since the pandemic started. The roles have demanded that approach. This has been fine by me – our house is not big enough for me to work from home at the same time as my wife who works from home, my teenage son who is studying at home, and our cat who owns our home.

How has coronavirus changed the way you work?

Like everyone, I have become much more adept at working globally, but from one location. I have 'worked' in six countries and three Australian states, and delivered presentations at conferences or meetings in a further eight countries since the pandemic started ... all from Canberra. At one level I have missed the travel, but by the same token my family and I are pretty happy to be together a lot more, although the cat remains unsure if it's a good thing.

What risks would you say are heightened by coronavirus?

The main takeaway for me from the pandemic has been the influence of good leadership. Leaders who are strong, principled, ethical, genuine, agile and well-connected have succeeded – while others have struggled. That correlation has been even more pronounced in a pandemic than in 'normal' times.

The main risk I've observed has been heightened risk / resilience culture.

What is the biggest challenge facing internal auditors?

It really hasn't changed with the pandemic – it's internal audit relevance. If we do relevant, valued work we will succeed. But too many internal auditors are not doing that sort of work. The brilliant aspect of the pandemic is that opportunities to be relevant have expanded exponentially.

What has the IIA-Australia been doing lately?

Speaking of risk / resilience culture – the IIA-Australia has been highly focused on honing and leveraging this culture to ensure the continued success of the IIA and the profession. Even in a year like the one we have had, the IIA-Australia has been able to kick a bunch of great goals.

What is your most memorable internal audit moment?

Too many. For me, I love to be asked for my opinion on a vitally important matter to my organisations and clients ... and to be able to see my advice implemented and to have effect. This doesn't happen every day – but it's more often than you might expect – and that keeps me in this profession.

What are you working on at present?

My main job right now is risk and assurance adviser to the Australian Government COVID-19 Vaccine Project. As you can imagine, there are a few risks there to manage!

What are you reading at present?

I love a bit of escapism – right now its Matthew Reilly.

What is on your desk right now?

I love music and I am a bit old school – I still listen to CDs. So on my desk next to my laptop is a small CD player and CDs by Augie March, Things of Stone and Wood, Sabaton, Imagine Dragons and Sarah McLachlan.

Concert or event you would most like to attend?

Right now ... I'd go and see any concert that was available!

What would you change if you could?

Nothing. I believe we live in a lucky country and a great society and success is what you make it.