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Research Article

Envisioning The Well-Being of Indonesian General Insurance: Reflecting from The Retrenchment Strategy of Allianz Utama 2022

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ABSTRACT

In the heat of commission war in Indonesian General Insurance industry at the end of 2021, PT Asuransi Allianz Utama Indonesia (the company) took a bold maneuver to stop competing in the high-acquisition-cost market. The company did not stop operating, but consciously executing a significant downsize in targeting due to the exit from the unhealthy market in the motor and property line in Brokers and agency distribution channel. This brave retrenchment strategy resulted in a successful company turnaround in 2022. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of this maneuver as a best practice sharing in the industry that is very much needed. The novelty of this study is the first in Indonesian General Insurance retrenchment case. This study became urgent due to the company having made a successful turnaround and needing to decide on the strategy going forward. The method used is primary data interview and secondary data document review to create SWOT matrix analysis for strategy formulation. This study concludes that the retrenchment was a must do maneuver and very much aligned with the condition and strategy fit in the company. Aside from contributing to the company, this study could also contribute to regulator and players in the industry, as a real case example about walking away from saturated market and grabbing untapped opportunities by capitalizing one's unique strength. It is a recommended strategy for the market players in Indonesian general insurance industry. Also, as the first study in Indonesian general insurance strategy, the implication of this study can become a trigger to a lot of strategic research in the vast Indonesian general insurance field.

Keywords: *General Insurance, Retrenchment, Strategy, Turnaround*

Introduction

Indonesian General Insurance industry is not an easy battlefield. This is due to the nature of insurance which is considered a tertiary

need for people in developing countries, with no regulatory mandate to insure like in more developed neighboring countries.

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This causes slow growth while the very broad market potential exists. In general, insurance consumers comprise of corporations or business entities that really have the need for compliance with insurance needs, and a small number of individuals who already have insurance awareness.

Based on research by Arintoko et al (2021), the Indonesian General Insurance Industry in 2014-2018 formed a tight oligopoly with a high level of concentration. This is evident from the market structure which is controlled by the assets of several companies in the industry (among more than 70 companies), which results in an imbalance of assets in the industry.

For the majority of general insurance companies that do not have captive businesses, this situation results in difficult competition, price/commission wars, and large acquisition costs that must be incurred to obtain business. This is a portrait of the Indonesian general insurance industry (Salim & Sukarman, 2018).

Since 2007, Ministry of Finance Regulation No. 74 /PMK.010/2007 began setting reference rates for motor vehicle insurance line. In 2013, this regulation was further strengthened by the Financial Services Authority Circular Letter (SEOJK) No. SE-06/D.05/2013 which regulates premium rates and acquisition fees for the 2 (two) largest lines of general insurance business: property insurance and motor vehicle insurance. This provision was updated in 2015 with SEOJK No. 21/SEOJK.05/2015, then the most recent in 2017 with SEOJK No. 6/SEOJK.05/2017.

Initially, in the tariff regulation in SEOJK No. SE-06/D.05/2013 it was stated explicitly that companies are prohibited from giving additional commissions to intermediaries in any form, and giving premium discounts directly to customers. This situation is running temporarily, until the issuance of SEOJK No. 21/SEOJK.05/2015 which removes this provision. With the new arrangement, direct premium deductions to customers are allowed while acquisition costs remain set at a maximum of 15% (Property) and 25% (Motor). This gives the customer the right to ask for a maximum premium discount allowable by the Tariff, consuming a portion of the acquisition costs, thereby not leaving room for intermediary

commissions. Therefore, companies and intermediaries have started to use the 'marketing fee' loophole which is not regulated by OJK Tariff as the substitute for commissions that have been allocated as premium deductions directly to customers.

PT Asuransi Allianz Utama Indonesia (hereinafter referred to as 'Azut') is a general insurance company that plays in this industry. Based on the published 2021 financial reports, Azut has never yielded profit from 2017 to 2021. This is a very appalling condition.

At the end of 2021, Azut took a bold stance to limit itself in the commission war. This action went against the market current that was practiced by more than 70 general insurance companies which were still struggling in the commission war.

The momentum for this change in strategy also coincides with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic which has forced changes in the ways of working since 2020, which must make more use of technology and work very efficiently (Imanipour et al., 2019).

There are some studies that indirectly examine retrenchment strategy but mostly due to the pandemic effect. But there has never been any research that directly examines retrenchment strategy on the profitability and sustainability of general insurance company, especially, due to the phenomenon of the high-acquisition-cost market that has been occurring for many years in the Indonesian general insurance market.

This study will specifically highlight the retrenchment strategy taken by Azut in response of unfavorable market conditions that has been going on for years. The result of this study can become an inspiration to Indonesian general insurance industry.

The success of a turnaround strategy depends on the ability of the company to implement it effectively. This requires strong leadership, a clear vision for the future of the company, and a willingness to make tough decisions. In addition, the company must be able to communicate its strategy to stakeholders, including employees, customers, and investors, in order to gain their support and buy-in.

"Turnaround strategy is a management strategy that focuses on reversing a company's

decline in performance. It involves cutting costs, improving operational efficiency, and reorganizing the company's structure to create a leaner and more competitive business. Turnaround strategy can be a complex and difficult process, requiring strong leadership, a clear vision for the company's future, and a willingness to make tough decisions (Brahmana et al., 2020).

Turnaround strategy involves the use of a variety of techniques to reverse a company's decline in performance. One such technique is cost cutting, which involves reducing expenses in order to increase profitability. This can be achieved through a variety of means, including reducing headcount, closing unprofitable divisions, renegotiating supplier contracts, and consolidating operations. The turnaround strategy is a set of actions designed to reverse a company's decline in performance. Typically, it involves cost cutting, asset sales, restructuring, and divestment of non-core businesses. The goal is to restore the company's profitability and competitiveness in the market (Arintoko et al., 2021).

"Retrenchment strategy is a strategy that involves cutting back on the size or scope of a company's operations. This can be achieved through a variety of means, including selling off unprofitable divisions, reducing headcount, and consolidating operations. The goal of retrenchment strategy is to improve the company's profitability and financial health by reducing expenses and focusing on its core competencies (Rico et al., 2021a).

Retrenchment strategies should be implemented only after careful analysis of the company's situation and consideration of alternative strategies. In addition, retrenchment strategies must be communicated effectively to stakeholders, including employees, customers, and investors, in order to gain their support and minimize negative consequences.

In the past five years, some studies have been found examining the defensive retrenchment strategy: positive significance on firm value (Ung et al., 2018); positive contribution on performance (Ung et al., 2018); positive and significant relation with performance (Muturi & Lawrence, 2019); low executive compensation gap has higher chance of success when

implementing retrenchment (Tao et al., 2020); retrenchment in general is not a universal solution for turnaround, the focus should be in liquidity and operational improvement that lower the debt, and that inventory and employees retrenchment must be done carefully (Rico et al., 2021a); CEO power improve the performance in retrenchment strategy (Brahmana et al., 2020); transformational leaders influence the organizational ethics and suppress the retrenchment effect on employee work satisfaction (Shulga & Busser, 2021); retrenchment has no significant effect on firm performance (Abdul Jamal & Salisi, 2021); support of the stakeholders and high cost enable survival and performance restoration, while aggressive employee termination is damaging to revive bankruptcy (Rico & Puig, 2021b); unique difference in crisis strategy to turnaround expectation, depending how the crisis initially influence the SME, as a victim, immune, or exploiter (Klyver & Nielsen, 2021).

However, there has never been any research that directly examines retrenchment strategy on the profitability and sustainability of general insurance company (even going way back further than past five years). When getting more specific due to the impact of the high-acquisition-cost market that has been occurring for many years in the Indonesian general insurance market, there is no such academic study yet. This is the first.

Methods

Due to the researcher's role as an 'insider' in the company under study and the extent of the interrelationships of many factors in this topic, the research design will be qualitative ethnographic in nature. This is to allow in-depth observations of the culture, behaviour, and social context of the company, to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied. This research cannot be separated from the knowledge and experience of the researcher who has been following the dynamics and developments of this industry for nearly two decades.

This approach will be supported by processed publications of company data, association, and regulator, which will be woven with

the understanding of the researcher as an experienced practitioner in this industry.

On the primary data analysis. Researcher has interviewed Azut's Board of Directors. The interview data are processed using qualitative data analysis techniques from Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), by reducing long and complex data into a main theme/category, where each SWOT point is reduced to one keyword.

Results and Discussion

The finding will be elaborated in four (4) phases of the phenomena: the previous state (until 2021), the change (2022), the result (end of 2022), and the beginning of the next episode post previous year success (Q1 2023). And a supplementary SWOT matrix analysis derived from interviews with Azut Directors. In the first phase, the Net Premium Income with Investment Income never overcomes the Claim Paid and Operational Expensed.

Table 1. Azut Financial Review 2017-2021

Information	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Gross Written Premium	755.203	1.178.196	1.222.813	1.189.819	996.993
Net Premium Income	296.411	652.155	748.275	686.033	645.009
Gross Claim Paid	(394.658)	(460.805)	(609.285)	(512.278)	(602.773)
Investment Income	71.804	85.407	85.957	86.574	68.336
Operational Expenses	(224.949)	(257.527)	(250.462)	(236.212)	(244.326)
Profit (Loss) Before Tax	(25.276)	(53.341)	(10.654)	(16.752)	(38.837)
Profil (Loss) After Tax	(27.048)	(53.735)	(8.988)	(65)	(46.186)

In 2021 especially, the Gross Written Premium dropped 35% from 2020, while the Net Premium Income Ratio even dropped below 40%, indicating the heavy use of Reinsurance in the business. With the Gross Claim Paid Ratio hike higher than 50% and Operating Expense nearly reached 30%, this is not a healthy condition (Amani & Markonah, 2021). By the end of 2021, Azut took drastic measures to limit itself

in the commission war, and therefore was able to predict production decline and adjust the target especially for its two main Lines of Business, namely Motor Vehicle Insurance and Property Insurance, and two main distribution channels, namely Brokers and PC Agents. In 2021, the 'red' segment will have a total proportion of 49% as shown in the table below (Markonah et al., 2019).

Table 2. Azut Line of Business and Channel Matrix

	Brokers	PC Agency	Other Channels	Total
Motor Vehicle	5,23%	10,31%	0,57%	16,11%
Property	21,18%	12,37%	7,92%	41,47%
Other Lines	13,53%	23,23%	5,66%	42,42%
Total	39,94%	45,91%	14,15%	100,00%

The execution of this change in strategy at the end of 2021 surprised the market. This is very clear in the company's repositioning, where Azut no longer wants to spend excessive marketing fee to get business from the PC Agents and Brokers distribution channels. This repositioning changed the bargaining position between Azut and the two intermediaries, where previously Azut was always in a position of being held hostage that if Azut did not want to pay the additional acquisition costs which

are called 'marketing fee', then the intermediaries would not give their business to Azut, because their competitors always ready to do this.

Due to these conditions, the repositioning predicts a drastic reduction in premiums from the 'red segment' which accounts for almost half of Azut's gross premium production proportion (Abidin et al., 2022). Therefore, the number of Azut's workers (permanent employees) has also been adjusted (from 265 to 142) so that the company's expenses also decrease

in line with the decline in production. Azut is prepared to lose half of production from its main distribution channel and business line (Husin et al., 2021).

The nature of the business of Brokers and PC agency lines mostly offers business with an 'all inclusive' style of accommodation which is a mix of good risks and bad risks between lines of business. This is because intermediaries are expected to be able to provide solutions for all of their customers, good or bad, in order to gain trust and continue to grow. This becomes an amplification of the threat if Azut implements the strategy by making subtle rejections in the Property and Motor Vehicle business line. The potential for loss of production in the 'red segment' which on paper is 49%, could be even worse because of the 'complete package' factor, the entire business from the distribution channel of Brokers and PC Agents can disappear entirely, not only in the Property and Vehicle Business Line Motor only, but other lines of business.

2022 is a year of change, where many adjustments to the new strategy were made, especially due to the drastic decline in manpower. This causes Azut to increase the use of technological resources efficiency. Moreover, the momentum for this change in strategy occurred in the Covid-19 pandemic situation which was still at large.

One important note throughout 2022 is that Brokers and PC Agents, which were expected to disappear because Azut did not want to pay 'marketing fees', turned out to remain. This was beyond expectations because Azut had adjusted its human resources not to focus on these two distribution channels. It is not only

business lines other than Property and Motor Vehicle that are still remain, part of the Property and Motor Vehicles business lines are also still remain.

Because Azut has provided very minimal 'marketing fee', intermediaries can no longer provide direct premium discounts if customers still choose Azut. In other words, Azut's price is becoming more expensive than its competitors. However, it turns out that some customers still choose Azut, so intermediaries continue to channel business to Azut. This can be said as an effect of Allianz brand strength and the quality of its service. It is difficult for customers and intermediaries to find replacement insurance companies outside of Azut, regardless of the price factor (Adam & Wahyuni, 2019).

Meanwhile outside the 'red segment', the company continues to develop adjustments and capacity building, especially in empowering LH Agents for cross-selling, and developing simple digital products that reach more to the retail segment. By the end of 2022, it turns out that Azut's production 'only' decreased by 11% compared to 2021. The company's total actual production achievement was 36.3% more than the target set at the beginning of 2022.

An important note here is that the PC Agents and Brokers Distribution Line which is expected to disappear (so the production target is 0), actually still makes a significant contribution, where PC Agents and Brokers respectively 'only' fell 21% and 45% from 2021 production. This is extraordinary, considering that in 2021 Azut will still pay 'marketing fee' according to market norms, and in 2022 Azut only incur a very minimum 'marketing fee'. This is further highlighted in the 2022 Financial Report.

Table 3. Azut 2022 Income Statement

Description	2022	2021	Difference
I. UNDERWRITING INCOME			
1. Gross Premium			
a. Direct Premium	650.555	729.336	-10,8%
b. Indirect Premium	14.741	25.867	-43,0%
2. Total Premium Income	665.296	755.203	-11,9%
c. Commission Paid	74.090	138.612	-46,5%
3. Total Gross Premium	591.206	616.591	-4,1%
4. Reinsurance Premium			
a. Reinsurance Premium Paid	391.246	516.681	-24,3%

Description	2022	2021	Difference
b. Reinsurance Commission	68.940	103.060	-33,1%
5. Total Reinsurance Premium	322.306	413.621	-22,1%
6. Net Premium	268.900	202.970	32,5%
7. Decrease (Increase) of Premium Reserve, and <i>Catastrophic Reserve</i>			
a. Decrease (Increase) in Premium Reserve	-	-	
b. Decrease (Increase) in Unearned Premium Reserve	(20.221)	57.889	-134,9%
c. Decrease (Increase) in Catastrophic Risk Reserve	-	-	
8. Total Decrease (Increase) in Reserve	(20.221)	57.889	-134,9%
9. Total Net Premium Income	248.679	260.859	-4,7%
10. Net Other Underwriting Income	-	-	
11. Underwriting Income	248.679	260.859	-4,7%
II. UNDERWRITING EXPENSES			
12. Claim Expenses			
a. Gross Claim	234.154	394.658	-40,7%
b. Reinsurance Recoveries	110.221	249.403	-55,8%
c. Increase (Decrease) in Claim Reserve	10.879	(42.638)	-125,5%
13. Total Net Claim Expenses	134.812	102.616	31,4%
14. Net Other Underwriting Expenses	18.223	28.791	-36,7%
15. Total Underwriting Expenses	153.035	131.407	16,5%
16. UNDERWRITING RESULT	95.645	129.452	-26,1%
17. Investment Yield	57.013	71.804	-20,6%
18. Operating Expenses			
a. Marketing Expenses	2.589	17.437	-85,2%
b. General and Administration Expenses:			
- Employee and Management Expenses	69.888	112.192	-37,7%
- Learning and Development Expenses	2.935	2.131	37,7%
- Other General & Administration Expenses	74.173	93.189	-20,4%
c. Personal Accident Estimation Related Cost	-	-	
19. Total Operating Expense	149.584	224.949	-33,5%
20. INCOME (LOSS) INSURANCE BUSINESS	3.073	(23.693)	-113,0%
21. Other Income (Expenses)	1.469	(1.583)	-192,8%
22. Income (Loss) Before Tax	4.542	(25.276)	-118,0%
23. Taxes	(2)	(1.772)	-99,9%
24. Income (Loss) After Tax	4.540	(27.048)	-116,8%

There are some important notes that can be seen in the comparison of the 2022 & 2021 Financial Statements above. First, in line with the retrenchment strategy, premium income decreased by 11.9% or around 78 billion. Then due to the decline in business, especially Property line, the use of Reinsurance also decreased, resulting in an increase in Net Premiums of 32.5%. However, the reserve for unearned premiums is quite large in 2022, compared to 2021 which received the previous year portion,

causing Net Premium Income and Underwriting Income to fall by 4.7%, or around 12 billion. This is a condition that must be accepted.

Then along with the production shrinking, Gross Claims and Reinsurance Recoveries also actually decreased, but there was an increase in Claim Reserves, compared to 2021 which received the release of claim reserves, so that Net Claim Expenses increased 31.4%. This made Underwriting Results fall 26.1%, or around 33 billion.

Investment Yield happen to drop 20.6% giving further handicap to 2022 (Purnamawati, 2019).

With the retrenchment, Operating Expenses dropped significantly, especially in Marketing Expenses with the new strategic policy on 'marketing fees' limitation. Employee and Management Expenses also dropped dramatically with a decrease in the number of permanent employees. Other General and Administrative Expenses also went down with the company's efficiency. All of this made Total Operating Expenses decrease by 33.5%, or around 75 billion. Finally, the success of the retrenchment strategy was seen, in which a slight decrease in the topline, swallowing up some challenges in reserves, but was able to save a lot of operating expenses so that the profit after tax on the bottom-line turned from a loss of 27 billion to a profit of 4.5 billion (Azmi et al., 2020).

In first quarter (Q1) of 2023, initially, it was estimated that the PC Agents and Brokers channel could start to experience a decline in production. This is due to the strong demand for reviving 'marketing fees' throughout 2022 which Azut did not entertain, and there are expectations that this policy will change in 2023.

However, Azut still did not changed the policy, and from the production growth indicator it is still visible that Azut's strategy not to pay 'marketing fee' is still really worth keeping (Msinga et al., 2018).

Azut's production in the first quarter of 2023 rose 20.2% compared to first quarter of 2022. The company's total actual production achievement is more than 8.5% of the target set at the beginning of 2023. There are only a few drops/shortages in the PC Agents distribution line. However, Brokers channel rose 26.6% compared to last year, even 17.3% exceeding the conservative target set at the beginning of the year. The Q1 2023 data is the last piece of data that this study able to get before submitting this journal. But the researcher think it has sufficiently portrayed the entire story: the previous state (until 2021), the change (2022), the result (end of 2022), and the beginning of the next episode post previous year success (Q1 2023). And it is safe to say that Azut beat the game (Kor, 2020).

From interviews with Azut's Board of Directors, the researcher scribed a simplified SWOT matrix analysis.

Table 4. Azut SWOT

		Positive	Negative
Internal	<u>Strength</u> brand & financial strength		<u>Weakness</u> inflexible compliance/governance
External	<u>Opportunity</u> digital retail segment		<u>Threat</u> commission war in Property & MV Line

Table 5. Azut SWOT Matrix Analysis Recommendation

External / Internal	Opportunity	Threat
	<p><u>S-O Strategy</u> Azut's brand & financial strength must be utilized to support the development of One Allianz Agency to tap into the digital retail segment.</p>	<p><u>S-T Strategy</u> Azut's brand & financial strength must be able to hold the bargaining position in the commission war.</p>
<p><u>W-O Strategy</u> Azut's profound governance that tends to be inflexible must be utilized to create a secure and compliant procedure for digital retail business.</p>	<p><u>W-T Strategy</u> Azut's inflexibility must be minimized or localized only in respect of facing the commission war.</p>	

Discussion

Compared to some studies that also examine defensive retrenchment strategy, this study result aligns with most of the findings that retrenchment has positive effect on the firm value and performance.

It significantly reduced the expense of the company by limiting the 'marketing fee' and executing delicate employee retrenchment with finesse, which then turnaround the profitability and setup the course going forward with a strong market positioning and bargaining power (Slobodianiuk & Tolkacheva, 2018).

This is a retrenchment that is conducted by following the change in market positioning strategy, which resulted in a surplus, whereby the negative effect on the top-line production is minimum while the positive effect on the bottom-line profitability is maximum (Septina, 2022)

It also aligned with SWOT analysis of the company, especially in the S-T and W-T Strategy whereby the threat of commission war is being consciously responded by retrenchment strategy. The strength is being utilized to hold the bargaining position in the commission war and the inflexibility weakness is tried to be localized to the commission war area as well.

Conclusion

This is a case of a company trapped in saturated market and suffered unhealthy condition for years, then took a bold different maneuver against the odds, then win. As the title of the journal "envisioning the well-being of Indonesian General Insurance", reflecting the retrenchment strategy of Azut is probably one way among many other ways in General Insurance world to reach well-being state. But it is a start, and as far as the researcher aware of, is the first academically documented case in the topic. The end state would be all Indonesian General Insurance players could reach sustainable profitability with each of their own unique ways. The idea is to not just follow the market, but to discover unique competitive advantage, then believe and capitalize on it. Do what's strategically necessary, where it doesn't have to look 'positive' by being aggressive or competitive. Sometimes defensive or conservative is

also a pathway to eventually reach sustainable profitability, depending on the contextual circumstances.

This research would have been more perfect if using the SPACE matrix as its analysis tool. Because the matrix will analyze the Strategic Position and Action Evaluation which can determine more precise whether the position taken by the company should be aggressive, conservative, defensive, or competitive. If the results show defensiveness, it justifies the company's retrenchment strategy. However, time and resource constraints have forced researcher to choose more practical analytical tools to provide timely recommendation for the company.

This research can be a trigger for further research on the soundness of business practices in the general insurance industry. But there has to be access to the company's expense data where the extra commissions are usually posted as 'marketing expenses'. This data not always publicly available and some categorized it as sensitive and confidential.

Apart from the major issues directly related to this research, there are a lot of side research on General Insurance strategies that can be dived deeper such as comparisons in practice with neighbouring countries and/or global insurance parent countries that are already in an advanced order, their marketing strategies, market competition in each distribution channel, each business line, price sensitivity and consumer literacy level, reinsurance market, collaboration with other financial services industries (especially bank, financing companies), regulatory compliance (regarding tariffs, sustainability, corporate governance, product development/management, customer protection, personal data protection, etc) in the legal discipline, digitalization efficiency, professional workforce in the human resources discipline, the upcoming IFRS 17 implementation in accounting discipline, and many others.

Researcher realize that the size of the insurance industry, moreover specifically to general insurance, is still very small compared to banking. Therefore, correlates with the number of academic studies that studies it. However, with blue oceans analogy, the area that can be

researched in Indonesian General Insurance is still very vast, while the research conducted is still very minimal.

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