SOCIAL SECURITY MANAGEMENT JOURNAL

https://e-journal.uum.edu.my/index.php/ssmj

How to cite this article:
Muhammad, F., Ishak, R., & Abd Aziz, F. S. (2026). Beyond the numbers: Accountants' roles in workplace health and safety in Malaysia. *Social Security Management Journal, 3*(2), 16-29. https://doi.org/10.32890/ssmj2026.3.3.2

BEYOND THE NUMBERS: ACCOUNTANTS' ROLES IN WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY IN MALAYSIA

[1]Faidzulaini Muhammad, [2]Rokiah Ishak & [3]Fadzli Shah Abd Aziz
[1,2]Tunku Intan Safinaz School of Accountancy, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia
[3]School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

[1]Corresponding author: faidzulaini@uum.edu.my

Received: 7/10/2026 Revised: 18/10/2026 Accepted: 20/11/2026 Published: 26/11/2026

ABSTRACT

Workplace health and safety in Malaysia is commonly treated as a technical and legal matter managed by safety practitioners, while the accounting function remains at the margins. However, the high number of occupational accidents reported to the Social Security Organisation (PERKESO), the expanded employer duties under the Occupational Safety and Health (Amendment) Act 2022, and the growing demand for sustainability information show that unsafe work carries significant financial, social and social security consequences. This conceptual paper examines how accountants can move beyond their traditional scorekeeping function to actively promote workplace health and safety in Malaysian companies. Using an integrative review of literature on accountants' roles, accounting for health and safety, and the Malaysian regulatory and social security setting, the paper draws on stakeholder, stewardship and institutional theories, complemented by the *Maqasid al-Shariah* principle of preserving life. The paper proposes the Accountant-Enabled Workplace Health and Safety (AEWHS) framework, which identifies five interrelated roles: cost revealer, investment advocate, performance integrator, assurance guardian and accountability communicator. The framework links regulatory, market, social security and ethical drivers to these roles and to organizational, social security and societal outcomes, and it is supported by five research propositions. The paper positions accountants as active partners in prevention rather than passive recorders of loss. It offers guidance for companies, professional accounting bodies, educators and policymakers, including PERKESO and the Department of Occupational Safety and Health, that seek to reduce the human and economic cost of workplace injuries.

Keywords: Accountants' role, management accounting, *Maqasid al-Shariah*, occupational safety and health, social security.

INTRODUCTION

Workplace health and safety is a cornerstone of decent work and social protection. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that around 2.78 million workers die every year from occupational accidents and work-related diseases, and that the resulting economic loss is equivalent to almost four per cent of global gross domestic product (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2019). Malaysia is not spared from this burden. Interim data released by the Social Security Organisation (PERKESO) show that 82,876 accident cases were reported in 2023, of which 44,422 were industrial accidents at the workplace and 38,454 were commuting accidents, while 1,060 cases were fatal, including 310 deaths arising from industrial accidents (Pertubuhan Keselamatan Sosial, 2024a). The manufacturing sector consistently records one of the highest shares of these accidents (Rozani & Amir, 2022). The financial consequences are considerable, as compensation paid by PERKESO for occupational injuries and diseases is reported to reach about RM1 billion every year (Berita RTM, 2026). Behind these figures are workers, families and communities whose wellbeing depends on safe and healthy work.

The regulatory environment has also changed in ways that bring health and safety closer to the core of corporate decision-making. The Occupational Safety and Health (Amendment) Act 2022, which came into force on 1 June 2024, extends the Act to all places of work, requires employers to conduct and implement risk assessments, mandates the appointment of an occupational safety and health coordinator in workplaces with five or more employees, and raises the maximum fine for breaches of general employer duties from RM50,000 to RM500,000 (Occupational Safety and Health (Amendment) Act 2022). At the same time, Bursa Malaysia has made health and safety one of the common sustainability matters that listed issuers must report on (Bursa Malaysia, 2022), while the National Sustainability Reporting Framework introduces reporting aligned with the standards of the International Sustainability Standards Board (Securities Commission Malaysia, 2024). Together, these developments turn workplace health and safety into a question of resources, risk, performance and reporting. These four areas have always been the natural territory of accountants.

Despite this, accountants in Malaysia are rarely seen as actors in workplace health and safety. The literature on the changing role of accountants has documented their movement from scorekeepers to business partners (Burns & Baldvinsdottir, 2005; Granlund & Lukka, 1998; Järvenpää, 2007), and a growing body of work has examined their involvement in sustainability (Che Kasim et al., 2024; Egan & Tweedie, 2018; Schaltegger & Zvezdov, 2015). However, most of this work focuses on environmental issues, while the social dimension, and workers' health and safety in particular, receives far less attention. Studies that do connect accounting with health and safety show that accounting can make the hidden cost of accidents visible (Jallon et al., 2011; Rikhardsson & Impgaard, 2004), but also that cost-cutting and narrow performance measures can contribute to serious safety failures (Hopkins, 2000; U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board, 2007).

This paper responds to that gap. Its objectives are threefold: first, to explain why workplace health and safety should be treated as an accounting concern in the Malaysian context; second, to identify the specific roles that accountants can play in promoting safe and healthy work; and third, to propose a conceptual framework and a set of propositions to guide future empirical research. The paper contributes to the literature in three ways. It extends the debate on accountants' roles into the field of workplace health and safety, it connects corporate accounting practice to the prevention objectives of Malaysia's social security system, and it integrates mainstream theories with the *Maqasid al-Shariah* principle of preserving life, which is relevant to a Muslim-majority society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

From Scorekeepers to Business Partners: The Evolving Role of Accountants

Accounting has long been understood as more than a neutral technical practice. Burchell et al. (1980) showed that accounting shapes what organizations see, value and act upon. Traditionally, accountants were associated with the scorekeeping role of recording transactions, preparing statements and controlling costs. From the late 1990s, studies observed a shift towards a business orientation, in which management accountants became more involved in strategy, planning and operational decisions (Granlund & Lukka, 1998). Burns and Baldvinsdottir (2005) described the emergence of hybrid accountants who combine financial expertise with knowledge of operations, while Järvenpää (2007) showed how organizations deliberately reshaped their accounting culture to create business partners. The International Federation of Accountants (IFAC, 2011) later argued that professional accountants in business should act as creators, enablers, preservers and reporters of sustainable value. This evolution suggests that the profession already has the mandate and the skills to engage with non-financial issues that affect long-term organizational value.

The extension of the accountant's role into sustainability has attracted growing attention. Schaltegger and Zvezdov (2015) found that accountants were only partially involved in sustainability accounting practice and mainly acted as gatekeepers of information between sustainability managers and top management. Egan and Tweedie (2018), in a case study of an Australian company, reported that accountants engaged readily with the cost-efficiency aspects of a sustainability initiative but struggled with broader and more creative sustainability improvements. Bebbington and Unerman (2018) argued for an enabling role for accounting research in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, while Hopwood (2009) called for greater attention to how accounting is implicated in environmental and sustainability concerns. In Malaysia, Che Kasim et al. (2024) found that accountants view their decisional role as the most important in sustainability accounting and reporting, and recommended that their roles be extended with the necessary sustainability expertise. However, this stream of research remains largely focused on environmental issues such as carbon, energy and waste. The health and safety of the workforce, which is the most direct way in which business activity affects human life, remains largely outside the accountant's field of vision.

Workplace Health and Safety as an Accounting Concern

A substantial body of research shows that occupational injuries and illnesses impose large economic costs. Leigh (2011) estimated that the cost of occupational injury and illness in the United States was at least as large as the cost of cancer, and that workers' compensation covered less than a quarter of these costs. Takala et al. (2014) produced global estimates of the burden of work-related injury and illness, noting that national economic cost estimates average around four per cent of gross domestic product, while Tompa et al. (2021) developed a framework for estimating the societal burden of work injuries and diseases in five European Union countries and found that indirect productivity costs formed the largest component. Importantly, a large part of these costs is not visible in conventional accounting records. Rikhardsson and Impgaard (2004), using an activity-based analysis of 27 accidents in nine Danish companies, found that about one third of the costs of occupational accidents were hidden from management view in corporate accounting systems. Jallon et al. (2011) developed a model for calculating the indirect costs of accidents at the workplace level, recognising that such costs are not captured in insurance or compensation records. Accounting does not only fail to reveal the costs of unsafe work. It can also contribute to unsafe work. Reason (1997) argued that major organizational accidents result from latent conditions created by decisions

taken far from the point of operation, including decisions on budgets, staffing and maintenance. Hopkins (2000), in his analysis of the Esso Longford gas plant explosion, showed how organizational decisions, including the withdrawal of engineering expertise from the site and reliance on lost-time injury statistics as the main measure of safety, contributed to the disaster. The U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board (2007), in its report on the BP Texas City refinery explosion, identified cost-cutting and production pressures as contributing factors. Research on the role of accounting in work health and safety governance in Australia further highlighted weaknesses in how health and safety performance is measured and reported, and the need to integrate health and safety considerations into business decisions such as resource allocation and procurement (O'Neill et al., 2013; O'Neill & Wolfe, 2017). These studies suggest that the question is not whether accounting affects workplace health and safety, but whether it does so in a positive or a negative direction.

Accounting also shapes how health and safety performance is measured and communicated. Performance measurement systems such as the balanced scorecard (Kaplan & Norton, 1992) and its sustainability extension (Figge et al., 2002) provide structures through which non-financial goals, including employee wellbeing, can be integrated into strategy. In external reporting, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI, 2018) standard on occupational health and safety and the ISO 45001 management system standard (International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2018) offer guidance on what organizations should measure and disclose. Yet studies of corporate reports show that companies tend to describe their management approach but report little beyond conventional injury rates (Evangelinos et al., 2018), and that occupational safety receives far more attention than health and well-being at work (Koskela, 2014). Fan et al. (2014), in a review of 128 studies, also identified considerable scope for further research on occupational health and safety from a management perspective. The quality of health and safety information therefore depends heavily on the measurement and reporting skills that accountants possess.

The Malaysian Regulatory and Social Security Context

Malaysia's approach to workplace health and safety rests on the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994, which is based on the principle of self-regulation, in which those who create risks are responsible for managing them. The 2022 amendment strengthens this principle by extending coverage to all places of work, introducing mandatory risk assessment and the appointment of safety and health coordinators, and increasing penalties substantially (Occupational Safety and Health (Amendment) Act 2022). Alongside this, the Employees' Social Security Act 1969 establishes the employment injury scheme administered by PERKESO, which is funded by employer contributions and provides medical, disability, dependants' and rehabilitation benefits to injured workers and their families. Every preventable accident becomes a claim on a collective fund, and every improvement in prevention protects both workers and the long-term sustainability of the scheme. PERKESO's prevention programmes, including its Vision Zero campaign and targeted enforcement operations with high-accident employers, reflect this recognition that prevention is more effective and less costly than compensation (Pertubuhan Keselamatan Sosial, 2024b).

The capital market has added a further layer of expectation. The Malaysian Code on Corporate Governance places responsibility on boards for the governance of sustainability, including material social matters (Securities Commission Malaysia, 2021). Bursa Malaysia's enhanced sustainability reporting requirements list health and safety as a common sustainability matter, with indicators such as the number of work-related fatalities, the lost time incident rate and the number of employees trained on health and safety standards (Bursa Malaysia, 2022). The National Sustainability Reporting Framework phases in reporting based on the International Financial Reporting Standards sustainability disclosure standards for listed issuers and large non-listed companies (Securities Commission Malaysia, 2024). Health and safety data must therefore

be collected, controlled and reported with a reliability comparable to financial information, which is precisely where accountants have recognized expertise.

Research Gap

The review reveals three related gaps. First, research on the evolving role of accountants has focused on strategy, technology and environmental sustainability, with limited attention to workplace health and safety as a domain of accounting practice. Second, research on accounting for health and safety is concentrated in Western and particularly Australian and European settings, and it has not been connected to social security systems such as Malaysia's employment injury scheme, where the costs of unsafe work are partly shared by society. Third, existing studies rarely offer an integrated framework that explains which roles accountants can play, why they should play them, and what outcomes these roles may produce. In Malaysia, studies on occupational safety tend to examine accident patterns, legal compliance or disclosure levels, while the internal accounting processes that shape safety decisions remain largely unexplored. This paper addresses these gaps by developing a conceptual framework grounded in established theory and in the specific features of the Malaysian regulatory and social security environment.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This paper draws on four complementary theoretical lenses. Each lens explains a different aspect of why accountants should, and how they can, contribute to workplace health and safety.

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory holds that organizations are responsible to all groups that affect or are affected by the achievement of their objectives, and not only to shareholders (Freeman, 1984). Employees are among the most directly affected stakeholders, as they bear the physical and psychological risks of work. Gray et al. (1996) extended this view into accounting by arguing that organizations owe an account of their social and environmental impacts to those affected by them. From this perspective, accountants have a duty to produce information that allows employees, regulators, PERKESO and investors to assess how well a company protects its workforce. Accounting that ignores injuries and their costs gives an incomplete account of performance.

Stewardship Theory

Stewardship theory proposes that managers and professionals can act as stewards whose interests are aligned with the long-term welfare of the organization and its stakeholders, rather than as self-interested agents (Davis et al., 1997). Accountants, as custodians of organizational resources and information, are well placed to act as stewards of the human resources on which value creation depends. In this view, protecting workers is not merely a cost to be minimised but part of responsible stewardship. The theory explains why accountants may voluntarily extend their role into health and safety when they identify with the organization's purpose and with the wellbeing of its people.

Institutional Theory

Institutional theory explains how organizations adopt practices in response to coercive, mimetic and normative pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In Malaysia, coercive pressure arises from the amended occupational safety law, Bursa Malaysia's listing requirements and the governance code. Mimetic pressure

arises as companies follow industry leaders in sustainability reporting, while normative pressure comes from professional bodies, education and professional standards. Burns and Baldvinsdottir (2005) showed that changes in accountants' roles occur through the interplay of such institutional pressures and day-to-day practice. Institutional theory therefore helps to explain both the drivers that may pull accountants into health and safety work and the possibility that companies may respond symbolically, through minimum compliance, rather than substantively.

Maqasid al-Shariah and the Preservation of Life

The *Maqasid al-Shariah*, or the higher objectives of Islamic law, include the preservation of faith, life, intellect, lineage and wealth (Auda, 2008; Chapra, 2008). The preservation of life, known as *hifz al-nafs*, places the protection of human life and health at the centre of ethical economic activity. Chapra (2008) argued that genuine development must enrich human life rather than treat people merely as factors of production. Haniffa and Hudaib (2007) further showed that accountability in an Islamic framework extends to God and to society, and not only to providers of capital. In Malaysia, where a large proportion of listed companies are classified as *Shariah*-compliant, this perspective provides a strong ethical basis for accountants to treat the safety and health of workers as a matter of moral accountability. It complements the secular theories above by explaining why protecting life should take priority over short-term financial savings.

RESEARCH APPROACH

This paper adopts a conceptual research design. Conceptual papers aim to develop new understanding by linking existing theories, concepts and evidence, rather than by collecting primary data. The paper is based on an integrative review of literature drawn from three areas: research on the changing roles of accountants, research on accounting for occupational health and safety, and research on sustainability accounting and reporting. Relevant studies were identified through searches of major academic databases and Google Scholar using combinations of terms such as accountants' role, management accounting, health and safety accounting, cost of occupational accidents, and sustainability reporting. Sources were selected purposively based on their relevance, their theoretical contribution and their recognition in the field, with a balance between foundational works and recent studies.

In addition, the paper examines key Malaysian documents, namely the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994 and its 2022 amendment, the Employees' Social Security Act 1969, the Malaysian Code on Corporate Governance, Bursa Malaysia's sustainability reporting guidance, the National Sustainability Reporting Framework, and official statements by PERKESO. The literature and documents were analysed thematically to identify the accounting functions that influence health and safety outcomes, and these themes were interpreted through the four theoretical lenses to build the framework. Consistent with the conceptual nature of the study, the framework is presented as a foundation for future empirical testing rather than as a measurement instrument, and its operationalization is left to subsequent research.

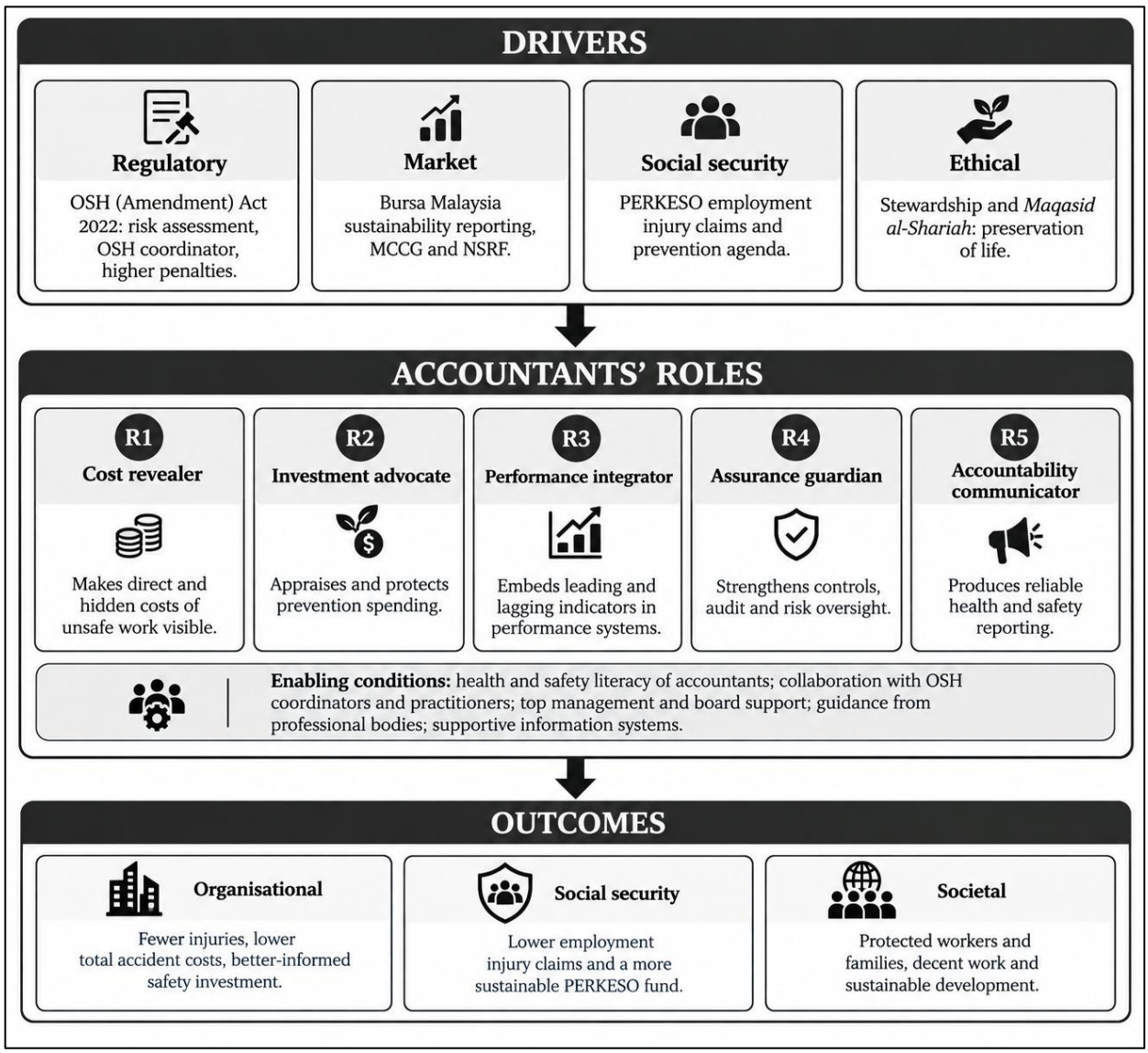
THE ACCOUNTANT-ENABLED WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY FRAMEWORK

Building on the review and the theoretical foundation, this paper proposes the Accountant-Enabled Workplace Health and Safety (AEWHS) framework, presented in Figure 1. The framework has four components. The first component consists of the drivers that create the need for accountants' involvement, namely regulatory, market, social security and ethical drivers. The second component consists of five interrelated roles through which accountants can promote safe and healthy work. The third component consists of enabling conditions that determine whether these roles are performed effectively. The fourth

component consists of the expected outcomes at the organisational, social security and societal levels. The central idea of the framework is that accountants influence health and safety through the everyday tools of their profession, including costing, budgeting, performance measurement, internal control and reporting. When these tools are designed with health and safety in mind, they become instruments of prevention. When they are not, they may silently work against it.

Figure 1

The Accountant-Enabled Workplace Health and Safety (AEWHS) Framework



Note. Developed by the authors based on the literature and Malaysian regulatory documents reviewed. OSH = occupational safety and health; MCCG = Malaysian Code on Corporate Governance; NSRF = National Sustainability Reporting Framework.

The five roles are summarized in Table 1 and discussed in the subsections that follow. Each role is linked to familiar accounting tools, so that the framework builds on existing professional competence rather than requiring accountants to become safety engineers. Each discussion ends with a research proposition that can be tested in future empirical studies.

Table 1

Roles of Accountants in Promoting Workplace Health and Safety

Role	Core accounting function	Illustrative tools and practices	Expected health and safety contribution
Cost revealer	Cost measurement and analysis	Activity-based costing of accidents; tracking of direct and indirect costs; analysis of PERKESO contributions and claims experience	Shows the true financial burden of unsafe work and builds the business case for prevention
Investment advocate	Budgeting and capital investment appraisal	Cost-benefit analysis of prevention; inclusion of avoided accident costs in project appraisal; ring-fencing of safety budgets	Ensures adequate and stable resources for prevention and resists cost-cutting that raises risk
Performance integrator	Performance measurement and management control	Balanced and sustainability scorecards; leading and lagging indicators; review of incentive schemes	Aligns managerial attention and rewards with safe behavior and avoids incentives for under-reporting
Assurance guardian	Internal control, internal audit and risk management	Health and safety risk in enterprise risk management; internal audit of safety data and controls; reporting to audit and risk committees	Improves the reliability of safety information and the quality of board-level oversight
Accountability communicator	Corporate reporting	Bursa Malaysia common sustainability matters; GRI 403; NSRF-aligned disclosure; integrated reporting	Provides credible information to employees, investors, regulators and PERKESO

Note. Developed by the authors. GRI = Global Reporting Initiative; NSRF = National Sustainability Reporting Framework.

Role 1: Accountants as Cost Revealers

The first role concerns making the full cost of unsafe work visible. As Rikhardsson and Impgaard (2004) and Jallon et al. (2011) demonstrated, part of the cost of occupational accidents is not visible in conventional records, including costs such as supervisors' time, production delays, overtime to cover absent workers, damage to equipment, investigation and administrative work. Because these costs are not traced to their cause, decision-makers tend to underestimate the financial benefit of prevention. Accountants can apply activity-based costing and cost analysis to trace these costs to accidents and near misses, and they can combine internal data with information on the company's PERKESO contributions and claims experience. Consistent with stakeholder theory, it also produces a more complete account of how the organization's activities affect its workers.

Proposition 1: The more accountants in Malaysian companies measure and report the direct and indirect costs of occupational accidents, the greater the managerial support for health and safety prevention.

Role 2: Accountants as Investment Advocates

The second role concerns how resources for health and safety are allocated and protected. Budgeting and capital investment decisions often treat safety spending as a discretionary cost that can be reduced when financial targets are under pressure. The Texas City disaster shows how dangerous such reductions can be (U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board, 2007). Accountants can change this pattern by including avoided accident costs, potential penalties under the amended law, and effects on social security

contributions and productivity in cost-benefit analyses of prevention projects. O'Neill and Wolfe (2017) emphasised that health and safety considerations should be integrated into business decisions, which means that safety is considered in every resource decision and not only in the safety department's budget. This role reflects stewardship theory, as it treats the protection of workers as part of responsible resource management.

Proposition 2: Companies in which accountants include health and safety considerations in budgeting and investment appraisal allocate more stable resources to prevention.

Role 3: Accountants as Performance Integrators

The third role concerns the design of performance measurement and control systems. What is measured and rewarded shapes what managers pay attention to. If performance systems reward only output and cost reduction, they may encourage managers to cut corners on safety. If they reward only low injury rates, they may encourage the under-reporting of incidents, as the Longford case illustrates (Hopkins, 2000). Accountants, as designers of management control systems, can integrate a balanced set of health and safety indicators into scorecards, combining lagging indicators, such as the lost time incident rate, with leading indicators, such as the completion of risk assessments, training coverage, safety inspections and the closure of corrective actions (Figge et al., 2002; Kaplan & Norton, 1992; O'Neill et al., 2013). They can also review incentive schemes to ensure that they do not create pressure to hide incidents.

Proposition 3: The integration of leading and lagging health and safety indicators into management control systems is positively associated with health and safety performance in Malaysian companies.

Role 4: Accountants as Assurance Guardians

The fourth role concerns internal control, internal audit and risk governance. Health and safety risk is an enterprise risk with legal, financial, operational and reputational consequences, and the amended law now exposes employers to much higher penalties. Accountants and internal auditors can ensure that health and safety risks are included in enterprise risk management, that controls over safety-critical processes such as procurement, maintenance and contractor management are tested, and that health and safety data are accurate and complete. They can also support audit and risk committees by providing reliable information for board oversight, as expected under the Malaysian Code on Corporate Governance (Securities Commission Malaysia, 2021). Reason (1997) emphasised that latent organizational weaknesses are often found far from the point of operation, and internal audit is one of the few functions with a mandate to examine these weaknesses across the organization.

Proposition 4: The involvement of accountants and internal auditors in health and safety risk management strengthens board-level oversight of workplace health and safety.

Role 5: Accountants as Accountability Communicators

The fifth role concerns the external reporting of health and safety performance. Bursa Malaysia's requirements and the National Sustainability Reporting Framework mean that health and safety information is increasingly read by investors, regulators and other stakeholders (Bursa Malaysia, 2022; Securities Commission Malaysia, 2024). However, studies show that such reporting is often selective and focused on outcomes rather than on prevention efforts (Evangelinos et al., 2018; Koskela, 2014). Accountants can apply the principles of financial reporting, including completeness, consistency,

comparability and verifiability, to health and safety disclosures, and they can link these disclosures to recognised frameworks such as GRI 403 (GRI, 2018). Credible reporting helps employees, investors, PERKESO and the Department of Occupational Safety and Health understand where risks and prevention needs lie. From the perspective of *Maqasid al-Shariah*, transparent reporting is also an expression of accountability for the preservation of life.

Proposition 5: The involvement of accountants in preparing health and safety disclosures improves the quality and credibility of these disclosures.

Enabling Conditions and Expected Outcomes

The five roles will not emerge automatically. Their performance depends on the health and safety literacy of accountants, collaboration with occupational safety and health coordinators who hold technical knowledge, support from top management and the board, organizational incentives and structures that encourage accountants' involvement (Schaltegger & Zvezdov, 2015), guidance from professional bodies, and information systems that capture health and safety data alongside financial data. When these conditions are present, the framework expects three levels of outcomes. At the organizational level, companies should experience fewer injuries, lower total accident costs and better-informed investment in prevention. At the social security level, fewer workplace injuries should reduce claims on PERKESO's employment injury scheme and support the sustainability of the fund. At the societal level, the outcomes include protected workers and families and progress towards decent work and sustainable development.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical Implications

This paper makes several theoretical contributions. First, it extends research on the changing role of accountants beyond strategy and environmental sustainability into workplace health and safety, an area that has received little attention despite its direct effect on human life. Second, it moves the debate from whether accounting affects health and safety to how specific accounting functions can be shaped to support prevention. Third, it connects corporate accounting with the social security system by showing how accounting decisions inside companies influence the costs borne by PERKESO and, ultimately, by society. Fourth, it combines stakeholder, stewardship and institutional theories with the *Maqasid al-Shariah* principle of preserving life, showing that secular and Islamic perspectives point in the same direction. This integration is particularly relevant in Malaysia, where religious values shape expectations of business conduct.

Practical Implications

The framework has implications for several groups. For companies, it suggests that health and safety should not be confined to the safety department, and that finance and accounting functions should be involved in assessing accident costs, appraising prevention investment and reviewing performance measures. For accountants and professional bodies, such as the Malaysian Institute of Accountants, the framework points to the need for continuing professional development on health and safety accounting and for practical guidance on measuring and reporting health and safety performance. For PERKESO, the Department of Occupational Safety and Health and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, the framework suggests that the accounting profession can be an ally in prevention. Joint programs that help companies calculate the true cost of accidents could complement enforcement. For universities,

the framework supports the inclusion of health and safety topics in management accounting, auditing and sustainability reporting courses.

To guide the next stage of research, Table 2 outlines a future research agenda derived from the framework.

Table 2
Proposed Agenda for Future Research

Research theme	Illustrative research questions	Possible approaches
Current practice	To what extent are Malaysian accountants involved in health and safety decisions? Which of the five roles are most and least developed?	Survey of accountants; interviews with finance and safety managers
Cost of accidents	What are the hidden costs of occupational accidents in Malaysian manufacturing companies, and how do they compare with PERKESO compensation?	Case studies; activity-based cost analysis
Performance and incentives	How do performance measurement and incentive systems influence the reporting and prevention of incidents?	Field studies; mixed methods
Governance and assurance	Does internal audit and risk committee involvement improve health and safety outcomes?	Panel data analysis of listed companies
Values and ethics	Does religiosity or a *Maqasid al-Shariah* orientation shape accountants' commitment to protecting workers?	Survey research; comparison of *Shariah*-compliant and other companies
Social security linkage	How do company-level prevention practices relate to employment injury claims at the sector level?	Collaboration with PERKESO using secondary data

Note. Developed by the authors.

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to explain why workplace health and safety should be regarded as an accounting concern in Malaysia, to identify the roles that accountants can play, and to propose a framework for future research. The paper argues that accountants already shape health and safety outcomes, often without realising it, through the way they measure costs, allocate resources, design performance systems, control risks and prepare reports. The proposed AEWHS framework identifies five roles through which these everyday practices can be directed towards prevention: cost revealer, investment advocate, performance integrator, assurance guardian and accountability communicator. In this sense, the title of the paper captures its central message. The real contribution of accountants to health and safety lies beyond the numbers they record, in the decisions those numbers inform.

The paper has limitations that also point to opportunities. As a conceptual study, its framework and propositions have not yet been tested empirically, and their validity must be established through future surveys, case studies and archival research, as outlined in Table 2. The framework is developed with listed companies in mind, and its application to small and medium enterprises, which often lack dedicated accounting and safety functions, requires further examination. As Malaysia strengthens its occupational safety laws and sustainability reporting requirements, the accounting profession has both the opportunity and the responsibility to help ensure that every worker returns home safely.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

REFERENCES

Auda, J. (2008). *Maqasid al-Shariah as philosophy of Islamic law: A systems approach*. International Institute of Islamic Thought.

Bebbington, J., & Unerman, J. (2018). Achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: An enabling role for accounting research. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, 31*(1), 2–24. https://doi.org/10.1108/AAAJ-05-2017-2929

Berita RTM. (2026, April 28). *Kira-kira RM1 bilion pampasan kemalangan pekerjaan dibayar setiap tahun*. Radio Televisyen Malaysia. https://berita.rtm.gov.my/?p=626095

Burchell, S., Clubb, C., Hopwood, A., Hughes, J., & Nahapiet, J. (1980). The roles of accounting in organizations and society. *Accounting, Organizations and Society, 5*(1), 5–27. https://doi.org/10.1016/0361-3682(80)90017-3

Burns, J., & Baldvinsdottir, G. (2005). An institutional perspective of accountants' new roles: The interplay of contradictions and praxis. *European Accounting Review, 14*(4), 725–757. https://doi.org/10.1080/09638180500194171

Bursa Malaysia. (2022). *Sustainability reporting guide* (3rd ed.). Bursa Malaysia Berhad.

Chapra, M. U. (2008). *The Islamic vision of development in the light of maqasid al-Shariah*. International Institute of Islamic Thought.

Che Kasim, C. F., Yusoff, H., & Mohd Fahmi, F. (2024). Accountants' roles in sustainability accounting and reporting: The preliminary findings. *Corporate Governance and Organizational Behavior Review, 8*(2), 50–59. https://doi.org/10.22495/cgobrv8i2p5

Davis, J. H., Schoorman, F. D., & Donaldson, L. (1997). Toward a stewardship theory of management. *Academy of Management Review, 22*(1), 20–47. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1997.9707180258

DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review, 48*(2), 147–160. https://doi.org/10.2307/2095101

Egan, M., & Tweedie, D. (2018). A "green" accountant is difficult to find: Can accountants contribute to sustainability management initiatives? *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, 31*(6), 1749–1773. https://doi.org/10.1108/AAAJ-03-2017-2891

Employees' Social Security Act 1969 (Act 4) (Malaysia).

Evangelinos, K., Fotiadis, S., Skouloudis, A., Khan, N., Konstandakopoulou, F., Nikolaou, I., & Lundy, S. (2018). Occupational health and safety disclosures in sustainability reports: An overview of trends among corporate leaders. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management, 25*(5), 961–970. https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.1512

Fan, D., Lo, C. K. Y., Ching, V., & Kan, C. W. (2014). Occupational health and safety issues in operations management: A systematic and citation network analysis review. *International Journal of Production Economics, 158*, 334–344. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijpe.2014.07.025

Figge, F., Hahn, T., Schaltegger, S., & Wagner, M. (2002). The sustainability balanced scorecard: Linking sustainability management to business strategy. *Business Strategy and the Environment, 11*(5), 269–284. https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.339

Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. Pitman.

Global Reporting Initiative. (2018). *GRI 403: Occupational health and safety 2018*. GRI.

Granlund, M., & Lukka, K. (1998). Towards increasing business orientation: Finnish management accountants in a changing cultural context. *Management Accounting Research, 9*(2), 185–211. https://doi.org/10.1006/mare.1998.0076

Gray, R., Owen, D., & Adams, C. (1996). *Accounting and accountability: Changes and challenges in corporate social and environmental reporting*. Prentice Hall.

Haniffa, R., & Hudaib, M. (2007). Exploring the ethical identity of Islamic banks via communication in annual reports. *Journal of Business Ethics, 76*(1), 97–116. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-006-9272-5

Hopkins, A. (2000). *Lessons from Longford: The Esso gas plant explosion*. CCH Australia.

Hopwood, A. G. (2009). Accounting and the environment. *Accounting, Organizations and Society, 34*(3–4), 433–439. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aos.2009.03.002

International Federation of Accountants. (2011). *Competent and versatile: How professional accountants in business drive sustainable organizational success*. https://www.ifac.org/system/files/publications/files/Competent-and-Versatile-full-length.pdf

International Labour Organization. (2019). *Safety and health at the heart of the future of work: Building on 100 years of experience*. International Labour Office.

International Organization for Standardization. (2018). *Occupational health and safety management systems: Requirements with guidance for use* (ISO Standard No. 45001:2018). ISO.

Jallon, R., Imbeau, D., & De Marcellis-Warin, N. (2011). Development of an indirect-cost calculation model suitable for workplace use. *Journal of Safety Research, 42*(3), 149–164. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsr.2011.05.006

Järvenpää, M. (2007). Making business partners: A case study on how management accounting culture was changed. *European Accounting Review, 16*(1), 99–142. https://doi.org/10.1080/09638180701265903

Kaplan, R. S., & Norton, D. P. (1992). The balanced scorecard: Measures that drive performance. *Harvard Business Review, 70*(1), 71–79.

Koskela, M. (2014). Occupational health and safety in corporate social responsibility reports. *Safety Science, 68*, 294–308. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssci.2014.04.011

Leigh, J. P. (2011). Economic burden of occupational injury and illness in the United States. *The Milbank Quarterly, 89*(4), 728–772. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0009.2011.00648.x

Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994 (Act 514) (Malaysia).

Occupational Safety and Health (Amendment) Act 2022 (Act A1648) (Malaysia).

O'Neill, S., Martinov-Bennie, N., & Cheung, A. (2013). *Issues in the measurement and reporting of work health and safety performance*. Safe Work Australia, CPA Australia, & Safety Institute of Australia. https://safeworkaustralia.gov.au/resources-and-publications/reports/issues-measurement-and-reporting-work-health-and-safety-performance

O'Neill, S., & Wolfe, K. (2017). *Measuring and reporting on work health & safety*. Safe Work Australia. https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/system/files/documents/1802/measuring-and-reporting-on-work-health-and-safety.pdf

Pertubuhan Keselamatan Sosial. (2024a, January 29). *PERKESO peruntuk RM4 juta lancar inisiatif pencegahan kemalangan* [Press release]. https://www.perkeso.gov.my/images/kenyataan_media/2024/290124%20-%20PENYERAHAN%20GERAN%20&%20GARIS%20PANDUAN%20KEPADA%20INSTITUSI.pdf

Pertubuhan Keselamatan Sosial. (2024b, February 28). *6,000 majikan dengan rekod kemalangan tertinggi dipantau* [Press release]. https://www.perkeso.gov.my/images/kenyataan_media/2024/290224%20-%20RALAT%20SIARAN%20MEDIA%20OPS%20CEGAH%202024%20-280224.pdf

Reason, J. (1997). *Managing the risks of organizational accidents*. Ashgate.

Rikhardsson, P. M., & Impgaard, M. (2004). Corporate cost of occupational accidents: An activity-based analysis. *Accident Analysis & Prevention, 36*(2), 173–182. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0001-4575(02)00147-1

Rozani, N. N., & Amir, A. (2022). Analysis of machine-related occupational accidents in the Malaysia manufacturing industry. *Journal of Occupational Safety and Health, 19*(2), 47–68.

Schaltegger, S., & Zvezdov, D. (2015). Gatekeepers of sustainability information: Exploring the roles of accountants. *Journal of Accounting & Organizational Change, 11*(3), 333–361. https://doi.org/10.1108/JAOC-10-2013-0083

Securities Commission Malaysia. (2021). *Malaysian code on corporate governance*. https://www.sc.com.my

Securities Commission Malaysia. (2024). *National sustainability reporting framework*. https://www.sc.com.my

Takala, J., Hämäläinen, P., Saarela, K. L., Loke, Y. Y., Manickam, K., Tan, W. J., Heng, P., Tjong, C., Lim, G. K., Lim, S., & Gan, S. L. (2014). Global estimates of the burden of injury and illness at work in 2012. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene, 11*(5), 326–337. https://doi.org/10.1080/15459624.2013.863131

Tompa, E., Mofidi, A., van den Heuvel, S., van Bree, T., Michaelsen, F., Jung, Y., Porsch, L., & van Emmerik, M. (2021). Economic burden of work injuries and diseases: A framework and application in five European Union countries. *BMC Public Health, 21*, Article 49. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-10050-7

U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board. (2007). *Investigation report: Refinery explosion and fire, BP Texas City, Texas, March 23, 2005* (Report No. 2005-04-I-TX).