

Issues and Challenges of Managing Unclaimed Moneys in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The issue of unclaimed money within companies has emerged as a critical concern for financial regulators, stakeholders, and corporate entities both in Malaysia and globally. According to a report by the New Straits Times (2023), a total of RM11 billion of unclaimed money remained unclaimed in 2023 and this amount is increasing every year. Unclaimed money includes salaries, bonuses, commissions, and other payments made to employees; dividends and profits declared for distributions; insurance claims; tender deposits; and various creditors or debtors with a credit balance. In Malaysia, the management of unclaimed money has become increasingly complex, necessitating more stringent oversight in managing the funds. The Malaysian Accountant General's Department (ANM), who manages unclaimed money, had made some efforts to locate the rightful owners and return their unclaimed funds. The purpose of this research is to examine the existing frameworks in managing unclaimed money, highlighting the unique challenges faced in Malaysia while also drawing necessary recommendations to address the challenges. A semi-structured interview was conducted to collect primary data that includes a comprehensive review of regulatory policies, industry practices, and case studies. This study proposes a strategic roadmap in managing the unclaimed money. The findings suggest that a standardized approach, integrated with technological advancements and stricter regulatory oversight, can significantly improve the tracking and managing of unclaimed money. It is believed that the unclaimed money has the potential to benefit the owner, society, and the government for socio-economic and national development. This paper concludes with recommendations for policymakers and corporate entities in Malaysia and around the world to adopt more robust systems that ensure unclaimed money are appropriately managed and reported thereby, increasing the rate of refund of unclaimed money to the rightful claimants and their next of kin.

Keywords: Managing Unclaimed Moneys; Dissemination of Information; Accountability; Refunding of Fund

Received:
October 22,
2025

Revised:
November 23,
2025

Accepted:
November 26,
2025

**Online
Published:**
November 26,
2025

INTRODUCTION

Unclaimed money, encompassing dormant bank accounts, forgotten insurance payouts, and unclaimed inheritances, has become a growing concern both in Malaysia and around the world. Unclaimed money includes salaries, bonuses, commissions, and other payments made to employees; dividends and profits declared for distributions; insurance claims; tender deposits; and various creditors or debtors with a credit balance. According to a report, a total of RM11 billion of unclaimed money remained unclaimed in 2023 and this amount is increasing every year. The increasing amount of unclaimed funds, underscoring the challenge of managing dormant financial assets effectively and transparently (Harun & Sallehuddin, 2023). Globally, unclaimed money presents similar challenges, with the United States alone reporting over \$49 billion in unclaimed property waiting to be reclaimed by rightful owners (National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators, 2023). This accumulation of unclaimed assets is largely attributed to factors such as outdated records, lack of beneficiary knowledge, and individuals losing track of their finances over time.

In Malaysia, managing unclaimed money is not only a financial issue but a legal one. The management of unclaimed moneys is wholly under the duty and responsibility of the Accountant General who is appointed by the Finance Minister as Registrar of Unclaimed Moneys (Unclaimed Moneys Act 1965). The Accountant General's Department oversees unclaimed money as defined under the Unclaimed Moneys Act 1965, which outlines how long organizations must retain unclaimed money before transferring it to the government (Accountant General's Department, 2023). These laws are intended to protect the rightful owners while providing a structured approach to handling dormant funds. Globally, similar frameworks exist, such as the Uniform Unclaimed Property Act in the United States, which provides a legal basis for reclaiming unclaimed property through government-hosted databases and outreach initiatives (National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators, 2023).

The process of withdrawing funds from unclaimed money is more time-consuming than withdrawing from a bank. *Bahagian Wang Tidak Dituntut* (BWTD) or Unclaimed Moneys Division under the purview of the *Jabatan Akauntan Negara Malaysia* (JANM) or the Accountant General's Department who plays a crucial role in managing unclaimed money in Malaysia, has taken every effort to refund unclaimed money to the rightful recipients. They have disseminated information on unclaimed money through posters, monthly awareness briefings, exhibitions, and road shows besides available platforms of checking in eGUMIS system. Besides the challenges in refunding the unclaimed money, the BWTD also faces difficulty identifying and locating the true owner of the money. The reasons why the low rate of refunds at the rate 24% rate of return funds (The Star, Nov 2020) to the rightful owners are due to lack of awareness, lack of education, attitude of society, procrastination and unwillingness to cooperate among the legal heirs.

This article examines best practices in managing unclaimed money, emphasizing both legal frameworks and strategies that facilitate reconnection of these assets with rightful owners. By exploring a qualitative method of study by interviewing a group of informants from BWTD in Malaysia, this article aims to offer insight into creating effective and transparent systems that benefit both individuals and the economy as a whole.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Unclaimed money refers to dormant financial assets that have been abandoned or forgotten by their rightful owners for an extended period. These assets can take various forms, including

savings and checking accounts, uncashed checks, life insurance proceeds, and even stock dividends. In Malaysia, unclaimed money includes any funds that have remained inactive for over seven years, such as unused salaries, dividends, and deposits, as stipulated under the Unclaimed Moneys Act 1965 (Accountant General's Department, 2023). This issue is not unique to Malaysia; countries worldwide face similar situations where assets become legally unclaimed after a set period of inactivity. For example, in Australia, accounts are considered unclaimed after seven years of inactivity, at which point they are transferred to a government-held fund to await claimants (Australian Securities and Investments Commission, 2023).

The reasons behind unclaimed money accumulation are varied. In many cases, account holders may have moved to a new address without updating their information, leading to communication breakdowns between them and financial institutions. Additionally, some assets become unclaimed due to the lack of knowledge among family members about their loved ones' financial holdings after a death (Unclaimed Property Professionals Organization, 2023). A similar study by Drs Nasrul, Md Sharan & Zailan (2024) also found that the lack of knowledge and awareness resulted in failure to distinguish between his duties and entitlement over the deceased's estate. In Malaysia, migration from rural to urban areas has also contributed to this issue, as individuals may lose contact with their accounts or assets left behind ((Accountant General's Department, 2023)).

The management of unclaimed money in the Unclaimed Moneys Act 1965 (Act 370) by BWTD, JANM differs from unclaimed money of Tabung Haji, governed by Tabung Haji Act 1995. Although it is unclaimed public money, it has different ways of managing if it falls under different acts. Although there is no specific requirement by the Unclaimed Moneys Act 1965 for companies and firms to report the information on unclaimed money, the Registrar of Unclaimed Money has the right to perform audits on bank records and other related documents without fees and with written notice to the bank.

Unclaimed money presents challenges for both individuals and the institutions responsible for managing these assets. Without efficient tracking and outreach systems, financial institutions struggle to reconnect assets with their rightful owners, resulting in a cumulative build-up of unclaimed money that can strain administrative resources. At a societal level, this money represents a loss of economic productivity, as idle assets could otherwise circulate within the economy, benefiting both individuals and the public sector. Managing unclaimed assets effectively has thus become a priority, especially as digital and data-driven methods present new opportunities for tracking and notifying potential claimants (National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators, 2023). In the case of managing unclaimed moneys of a Muslim, the Fatwa Committee for the State of Selangor with the direction of His Royal Highness the Sultan has set out in the Schedule published pursuant to Subsection 48(6) of the Enactment, decided the rule pertaining to transfer the unclaimed moneys of Muslims to Baitulmal (Muzakarah Jawatankuasa Fatwa, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the management of unclaimed money, focusing on best practices, challenges, and potential solutions. A qualitative approach is appropriate for gaining deep insights into stakeholders' perspectives, processes, and systemic issues. This study applies multiple methods of data collection with a particular case study to discover how different variables affect one another. Single case study involves one single characteristic or single method of data gathering. Whereas multiple case study involves

collecting and analysing data from several cases with similar characteristics (Mohd Tobi, 2016).

Other sources of references from publication of books, dissertations papers, peer-reviewed journals, internet resources, and relevant periodicals were reviewed before conducting interviews with the informants. These sources were accessed through an e-journal portal which comprised Science Direct, Sage publication, Springer publication and Google Scholar.

In addition, The Unclaimed Moneys Act (Act 370) was also reviewed to find out any guideline required in managing the unclaimed moneys. This act was established in 1965, became effective on 1 June 1975 and last amended in 2002. The main purpose of the Act is to protect moneys of rightful owners (Jabatan Akauntan Negara Malaysia, 2022).

Later, the respondents from BWTD, JANM were contacted through WhatsApp, phone calls and emails to obtain permission for interview. The semi structured in-depth interview questions were ready to be used in the interview sessions as agreed by the respondents. The respondents comprised of six informants from various departments in the BWTD, JANM as shown in Table 1:

Table 1

List of informants from Bahagian Wang Tidak Dituntut, JANM

R1	Personal Assisstant of BWTD
R2	<i>Ketua Unit Tuntutan</i>
R3	<i>Ketua Unit Akaun</i>
R4	<i>Wakil Unit Tuntutan</i>
R5	<i>Ketua Unit Sekuriti</i>
R6	<i>Wakil dari Penguatkuasaan</i>

A semi-structured interview was conducted with the informants (see Table 1) to gain input on the management of unclaimed money. Participants are selected based on their expertise and involvement in managing unclaimed money. The qualitative data collected was analyzed using ATLAS.ti, a powerful tool for coding, organizing, and interpreting textual data. The research framework was designed and conducted following the research protocol that include the five phases of research processes as shown in Figure 1. The five phases are identification phase, review of literature and identification of issues and gaps, development phase, application phase and finally, refinement phase. Upon completion of the refinement phase, a report on the outcome of this study was prepared.

Figure 1
Five Phases in Research Processes



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To be effective in managing unclaimed money requires a structured and transparent approach. This is to ensure that dormant funds are accurately recorded, securely held, and ultimately returned to their rightful owners when possible. In Malaysia, a key best practice involves maintaining thorough and up-to-date records, as outlined in the Unclaimed Moneys Act 1965, which mandates that businesses and financial institutions report unclaimed assets and transfer them to the Accountant General's Department if they remain inactive for over seven years (Accountant General's Department, 2023). Regular audits, often carried out by Malaysia's financial regulatory authorities, help verify compliance with these requirements, ensuring that unclaimed assets are accurately tracked and recorded (Accountant General's Department, 2023).

Companies and firms with unclaimed funds are liable to report their unclaimed money that could be due from customers in the financial statement at a certain period before declaring and submitting the unclaimed money to the BWTD for further process. The overall processes in managing unclaimed money will be managed by the five units in BWTD; The Registrar Office, The Claims Unit, The Accounts Unit, The Securities Unit and The Enforcement Unit. Upon submission of unclaimed money to the unit in charge in BWTD, the following processes of managing unclaimed money will take place as explained by the informant R1 in the following encryption:

“...what we are doing at BWTD is an enforcement unit, carrying out an inspection, which earlier the enforcement unit went to the companies to carry out an inspection on the company's records and the account unit manages the handover, meaning that the handover of all receipts from these companies to BWTD who will manage and claims unit, Puan R2 will manage the unclaimed money refund. The Securities Unit is slightly different from the others... they are managing unclaimed securities before handed over to BWTD (shares). We receive this unclaimed money from companies established from the Companies Act 2016 and we also received from Boards such as EPF, LTAT, KWAP, COOPERATIVES, local authorities, district councils and firms that conduct business.”

Every department in BWTD has its own role in managing unclaimed money until it is refunded to the rightful owners. The Claim Unit plays a vital role within the BWTD in facilitating the retrieval and disbursement of unclaimed monies to their rightful owners, thereby promoting financial transparency and accountability in Malaysia. The Accounts Unit plays a crucial role in the effective and transparent management of unclaimed money within the BWTD to ensure safekeeping, accurate accounting, and proper handling of the funds until they are claimed by their rightful owners. The Securities Unit plays a crucial role in the management and administration of unclaimed money related to securities by ensuring safekeeping, proper accounting, and eventual transfer of unclaimed moneys to the rightful claimants. The Enforcement Unit plays a crucial role in upholding the integrity and transparency of the unclaimed money system in Malaysia by monitoring compliance, investigating potential violations, imposing penalties for non-compliance, and raising public awareness about rights and obligations related to unclaimed money.

Managing Unclaimed money with eGUMIS

BWTD as the custody of unclaimed money holds the responsibility of collecting unclaimed money from the liable companies and firms all over Malaysia. The amount collected and due from the liable companies and firms will be managed and reported by BWTD following the Unclaimed Moneys Act 1965. Besides that, BWTD is accountable to the claimants, potential claimants, and their heirs or other stakeholders. They are also competent and independent in managing and reporting unclaimed money. Although there are situations where information on unclaimed money should be treated confidentially by BWTD nevertheless, it should be disseminated and reported transparently in the parliament, eGUMIS, the mass media for the benefits of the claimants, potential claimants and their heirs and other stakeholders.

Effective management of unclaimed money in Malaysia involves transparent processes, technological solutions, and accessible resources that streamline the reconnection of funds with rightful owners. A key initiative in this effort is the implementation of the Electronic Government Unclaimed Money Information System, or eGUMIS, launched by Malaysia's Accountant General's Department. eGUMIS provides Malaysians with a centralized online platform to check and claim unclaimed funds quickly and easily. By allowing users to search for unclaimed money records online, eGUMIS has transformed the process, making it far more convenient and accessible for the public (Accountant General's Department, 2023).

As mentioned by R1, one of the informants:

“...we will account for them in the trust account, and if the amount exceeds 15 years, it will go to the unified revenue account, if it has gone to the revenue account, it has been removed from the unified trust account. Only here claims can still be made even though

they have transferred to the revenue account. So, we will make that payment from two accounts, one unified trust account, and the other unified revenue account. Our review can be checked in the government gazette at PNB or, at JANM counters nationwide, and also at the eGumis portal...”(R1)

The eGUMIS system exemplifies how technology can improve transparency and efficiency in managing dormant assets. Before eGUMIS, individuals had to physically visit government offices or contact multiple institutions to locate unclaimed funds. Now, with eGUMIS, users can verify their unclaimed money status by simply entering their identification details online, reducing the time and effort required. This proactive measure not only simplifies the claims process but also reduces the administrative burden on government offices handling unclaimed money (Accountant General’s Department, 2023). Furthermore, eGUMIS aligns with Malaysia's broader push toward digitalization, supporting a more modern, data-driven approach to public service.

An informant (R5), revealed that:

“Our first data (available in eGumis) is 1978, so we call it the submission year is in 1978. In the financial system, it means that the submission year is in 1977. Therefore, the first submission that we received was in 1977.” (R5)

In addition to eGUMIS, best practices for managing unclaimed money in Malaysia involve regulatory measures under the Unclaimed Moneys Act 1965. This legislation requires financial institutions to report inactive accounts and other dormant assets, ensuring that unclaimed funds are accounted for and transferred to the Accountant General’s Department if they remain unclaimed for more than seven years (Accountant General’s Department, 2023). Lack of staff to organize exhibitions and awareness briefings to the community all over Malaysia is another challenge faced by BWTD in their effort to refund the unclaimed money to its rightful owners.

Transparency and Accountability in Managing Unclaimed Money

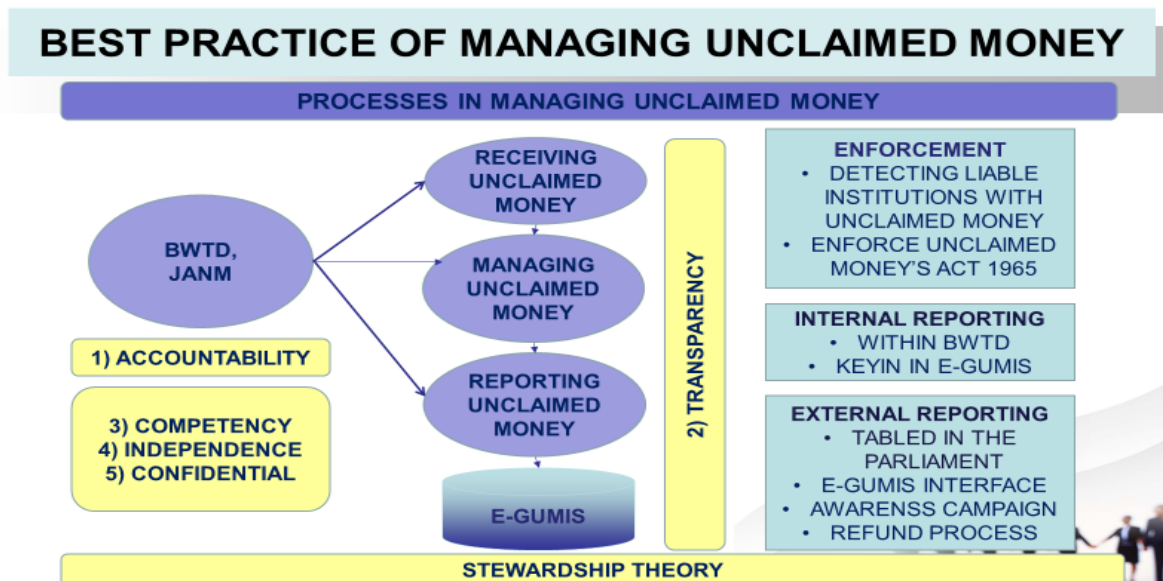
Transparency and accountability also play a significant role in effective management of unclaimed money. In Malaysia, authorities are encouraged to conduct regular public awareness campaigns, informing citizens about the procedures for claiming unclaimed money and how to avoid asset dormancy in the first place (Accountant General’s Department, 2023). Similar efforts are observed worldwide; for instance, Japan’s Ministry of Finance periodically publishes unclaimed fund data and coordinates with banks to increase public awareness, thereby encouraging individuals to update their records and check for unclaimed assets (Ministry of Finance Japan, 2023). Transparency initiatives not only increase the chances of reconnecting funds with rightful owners but also foster public trust in financial institutions. A lack of transparency and perceived self-serving behaviors by institutions managing unclaimed funds can erode public trust, undermining the principles of stewardship. The following statement by one of the informants indicates that transparency and accountability of BWTD in managing unclaimed money;

“...even after 15 years in the trust account, it will move to the proceeds, however, the rightful owner or their heirs can still claim it. It's still possible. The money is there. That billion-dollar right belongs to the owner, not the government.” (R6)

Another best practice is ensuring that regulatory bodies have the resources and technological infrastructure needed for efficient unclaimed money management. Countries such as Canada and New Zealand are leveraging digital platforms and automated reminders to reach out to account holders before their funds become legally dormant, reducing the likelihood of unclaimed funds (Canada Revenue Agency, 2023; Department of Internal Affairs, New Zealand, 2023). These proactive measures demonstrate how countries can utilize technology to improve tracking and reconnect dormant assets with their rightful owners.

By adopting these best practices, Malaysia and other countries are working to address the challenges posed by unclaimed money, creating frameworks that are not only legally compliant but also geared toward reuniting funds with their rightful owners. These efforts help ensure that unclaimed assets are managed responsibly and transparently, benefiting both individuals and the wider economy. This study proposes stewardship theory to best describe the process of managing unclaimed money to the rightful claimants, potential claimants and their heirs and other stakeholders as illustrated in Figure 2. This effort creates a robust framework for managing unclaimed money and reflects Malaysia’s commitment to modernizing public access to information.

Figure 2
Processes in Managing Unclaimed Money



Challenges in Managing Unclaimed Money

Managing unclaimed money involves a range of challenges related to outdated records, technological limitations, privacy concerns, and legal complexities, affecting both Malaysia and the global landscape. In Malaysia, the volume of unclaimed money has been rising steadily, with unclaimed assets reported to have surpassed RM10 billion in recent years (Accountant General’s Department, 2023). This increase reflects the challenges faced by Malaysian institutions in maintaining accurate and current contact information for account holders. For instance, as people relocate or pass away, their financial assets often become disconnected from them or their families due to the lack of updated records. As a result, billions of Ringgit in unclaimed funds continue to accumulate, reflecting a significant economic inefficiency (Accountant General’s Department, 2023). As indicated by one of the informants:

“...the most difficult one for us is to make the public understand the procedure for claiming. For securities, it's stocks, his stocks fall into two categories, securities in the name of the Minister of Finance and securities in the name of the National Trustee of Malaysia. For securities, we don't advertise to the public, if he has that securities certificate, he can come to claim if he is no longer in the previous deposit.”

Technological limitations present another barrier to managing unclaimed money effectively, particularly in connecting rural populations with digital platforms like eGUMIS. According to a 2022 survey by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), approximately 25% of the Malaysian rural population still lacks consistent internet access, and an estimated 15% of the total population has limited digital literacy, especially among older age groups (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2022). These statistics reveal that, despite the availability of online tools, a substantial portion of Malaysians face accessibility challenges, reducing the effectiveness of platforms like eGUMIS in reaching potential claimants. Similarly, in the United States, an estimated \$49 billion in unclaimed property remains with the government, in part due to the lack of a single national platform, causing inefficiencies across state databases (National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators, 2023).

Privacy concerns are also a central challenge in managing unclaimed money, as strict regulations on personal data can limit institutions' ability to reach potential beneficiaries. In Malaysia, eGUMIS must comply with the Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA) 2010, which imposes restrictions on data sharing, adding complexity to outreach efforts (Accountant General's Department, 2023). The outreach program by BWTD as explained by one of the informants:

Regarding outreach, we have examples like in the government's aspiration guide. In every state, we have our booth, and this year, we did a tour called "Madani Amanah Insani," that's the tagline. We chose rural areas to inform the villagers and others. Our reception is always high every time when we go out..." (R1)

Although BWTD has introduced eGumis as a platform for the public to check information on unclaimed money, some of them are unaware of the existence of this platform. And yet, some are illiterate to use eGumis.

“Claims can be done on the eGumis portal, JANM counter, and can be sent by registered mail. We encourage registered mail because it's easy to track. If regular mail is lost, we are not responsible. So, this is the form, this is the procedure for claiming. (R1)”

Globally, other countries have implemented similar centralized online platforms. For example, the United States has the National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators (NAUPA) database, while Australia uses MoneySmart, managed by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) (National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators, 2023; the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, 2023). These platforms increase public awareness of unclaimed assets and make the process of reconnecting with dormant funds simpler. Malaysia's adoption of eGUMIS places the country on par with these international standards, promoting transparency and accessibility in unclaimed money management.

By adopting digital platforms like eGUMIS, along with other best practices such as regular audits, public awareness campaigns, and legal compliance, Malaysia is making significant

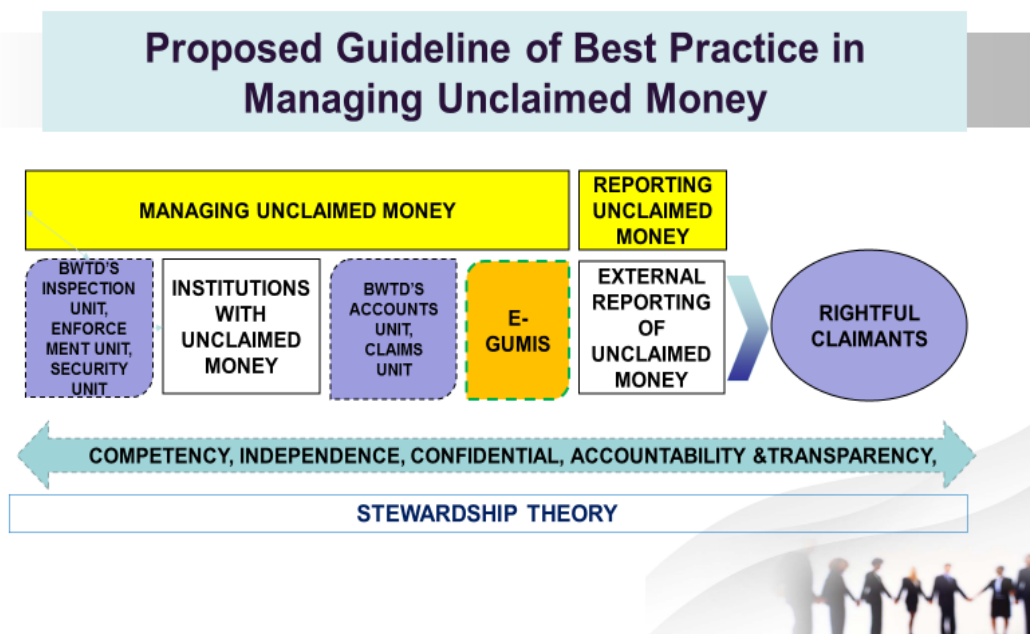
strides in ensuring that unclaimed assets are managed responsibly and returned to their rightful owners when possible. These practices help build trust with the public, demonstrating a commitment to transparency and responsible financial management that benefits both individuals and the broader economy. These challenges point to a broader need for improvements in data management systems, increased digital accessibility, and streamlined legal frameworks, not only in Malaysia but worldwide. Addressing these barriers will require coordinated efforts from financial institutions, legal bodies, and government agencies to implement solutions that enhance accessibility, reduce administrative burdens, and protect the privacy of individuals involved. By tackling these issues effectively, unclaimed money can better serve its rightful purpose, reconnecting funds with individuals and benefiting the economy as a whole.

Integrating Stewardship Theory into Managing Unclaimed Money

The Stewardship theory posits that managers, when empowered and aligned with organizational goals, act as stewards, prioritizing the organization's interests and long-term sustainability over personal gains. Stewardship theory is grounded in the belief that managers act as stewards who prioritize the interests of the organization and its stakeholders above their personal gains (Davis, Schoorman, & Donaldson, 1997). In the context of unclaimed money, this theory highlights the ethical and fiduciary responsibilities of stakeholders in managing these funds for the public good.

Whereby, the Stewardship theory emphasizes that managers and policy makers act in alignment with beneficiaries' interests. By integrating the stewardship theory into managing unclaimed money could lead to best practices of managing unclaimed money by BWTD to safeguard assets of the owner of the unclaimed money. Institutions holding unclaimed money should view their role as stewards, ensuring ethical management of these funds. This involves minimizing bureaucratic hurdles and maintaining clear communication with stakeholders. This study proposed a Guideline of Best Practice in Managing Unclaimed Money integrated into the Stewardship Theory as illustrated in Figure 3 overleaf:

Figure 3
A Proposed Guideline of Best Practice in Managing Unclaimed Money



BWTD upholds accountability and transparency to safeguard unclaimable moneys of the rightful claimant as opposed to the Stewardship Theory.

Managing Unclaimed Money and the Way Forward

Stewardship theory supports the idea that when stakeholders feel valued and informed, they are more likely to cooperate in complying with the procedures set by BWTD in claiming their unclaimed money. A way forward, the policy for recording unclaimed money and refund it to the rightful owners and their heirs should consider:

1. Design policies that embed accountability measures, ensuring funds are managed as a public trust.
2. Promote collaboration between governments, financial institutions, and the public to align efforts toward ethical fund management.
3. Training and equipping fund managers with the tools and knowledge to act as responsible stewards can reduce systemic inefficiencies and improve outcomes.

In managing unclaimed money, this theory is particularly relevant as the funds are held in trust for the rightful owners or the public. The pillars of Stewardship theory of transparency and accountability are crucial to BWTD while managing the unclaimed money.

Unclaimed money often involves public funds or resources that impact trust in financial institutions and governance frameworks. Stewardship theory's emphasizes on aligning actions with stakeholder welfare justifies its use. By fostering transparency and accountability, managers can build public confidence, ensuring the funds are managed for societal benefit (Hernandez, 2012). This trust is critical for reducing disputes and increasing collaboration between stakeholders, such as governments, financial institutions, and other beneficiaries.

Stewardship theory also argues that managers focus on long-term organizational and societal benefits rather than short-term profits (Van Slyke, 2007). Where, in managing unclaimed money, this perspective encourages institutions to invest funds in initiatives that promote social welfare, such as public infrastructure, public defense or for education, while awaiting claims. This aligns with the idea that unclaimed funds, when managed responsibly, can serve broader economic goals, such as reducing inequality or improving public services.

However, unclaimed money management often faces challenges like conflicts of interest, lack of oversight, and inefficiencies. Integration of the Stewardship theory proposed in this study could provide a framework for addressing these challenges. Stewardship theory supports the design of policies that empower managers while maintaining accountability. Eventually, the Governments and regulators can embed stewardship principles in laws governing unclaimed money to encourage ethical management and resource utilization (Cornforth, 2004). The effort could be implemented by focusing on collaboration and shared values between the BWTD, stakeholders, such as governments, financial institutions, and other beneficiaries. On the other hand, stewardship theory promotes a cooperative environment for effective governance in the BTWD, an institution that holds and accounts for unclaimed money.

CONCLUSION

By framing the management of unclaimed money through the lens of Stewardship Theory, stakeholders can better align their actions with ethical standards and public trust. This approach

not only addresses existing challenges but also ensures that unclaimed funds contribute to societal and economic well-being.

The management of unclaimed money is a complex yet critical endeavor, requiring ethical governance, accountability, and strategic foresight. By applying stewardship theory as a guiding framework, institutions and policymakers can transform this challenge into an opportunity to enhance public trust, promote transparency, and generate societal value.

Stewardship theory underscores the importance of aligning organizational actions with the long-term interests of all stakeholders. This approach encourages managers to act as responsible stewards, ensuring unclaimed money is safeguarded, ethically utilized, and ultimately returned to its rightful owners. The theory also highlights the value of trust-based relationships, where transparency and collaboration mitigate conflicts of interest and foster cooperation between regulators, financial institutions, and the public.

Furthermore, adopting stewardship principles provides a pathway to address systemic challenges in managing unclaimed money. It shifts the focus from compliance-driven oversight to proactive governance, emphasizing empowerment, ethical behavior, and shared responsibility. By investing in capacity building and embedding stewardship values into policies, institutions can leverage unclaimed money as a resource for societal development while honoring their fiduciary obligations.

In conclusion, stewardship theory offers a robust foundation for reimagining the management of unclaimed money, emphasizing ethical stewardship, accountability, and sustainable outcomes. It is believed that with this theory, stakeholders can ensure unclaimed money serves as a catalyst for societal and economic well-being, reinforcing trust in financial systems and governance structures in Malaysia. Future study may explore other relevant theories, for instance legitimate theory aligning with practices of managing unclaimed moneys.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to acknowledge Universiti Islam Selangor for providing a grant for this study with grant reference no: 2022-P-GPIK-GPS-002.

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