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The Hitchhiker's Guide to Intellectual Capital

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To explore the meaning and context of numbers from an intellectual capital (IC) perspective to help break free from the domination of what I term the “accountingisation” of IC.

Approach: This paper offers a personal and reflective narrative about numbers and IC by first examining the different meanings and contexts of the number 42. This is followed by two empirical sections examining the meaning and context of a common IC measure of *employee turnover*.

Findings: I argue the way in which employee turnover, and thus any IC element, is measured is problematic from an accounting perspective because each organisation is unique and operates in a different context; thus the comparability of the number from one organisation to another and from one period to another is nearly impossible.

Originality: This paper takes a thought provoking journey into the use and meaning of numbers, how numbers are applied to IC and the implication this will have for the future of IC from practice, education and research perspectives.

Keywords: Intellectual capital; numbers; meaning and context; accountingisation.