
A PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO CONDUCTING KNOWLEDGE AUDITS

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An important component of any Knowledge Management strategy is the Knowledge Audit. A Knowledge Audit involves the collation of an inventory of knowledge resources or assets [1] in a given working environment. Such an audit can be carried out at various levels within an organisation, e.g. within a particular business process, a department, a function, or across an entire organisation. Commonly there are a number of ways of carrying out a Knowledge Audit, including for example survey, interviews, or business process and documentation analysis.

As with any audit activity, key to the Knowledge Audit is having a well-defined scope. A Knowledge Audit, for example, may seek to understand current knowledge resources; the nature of that knowledge in terms of its format, its location; and the individuals or communities within the organisation that hold that knowledge. In addressing these aspects the audit may act as the baseline, or reference point, from which subsequent Knowledge Management strategies may be employed for example, the setting up of 'Communities of Practice', or the development of IT based systems for disseminating knowledge).

This paper describes a workshop-based approach to carrying out a Knowledge Audit derived from experience of conducting a number of information audits within the Environmental, Health, Safety & Quality (EHS&Q) function within British Nuclear Group Sellafield Limited (BNGSL) in the UK. The approach, involving facilitation of teams of 'experts' has been developed over the past 2 and a half years. It has been applied in 2 main contexts to date; in records management and records identification; and in the context of an Intellectual Property (IP) assessment. This paper proposes that the same approach, tailored to the specific context at hand, can also be readily applied in the context of Knowledge Audits (see Figure 1).

The paper will describe the key characteristics of the workshop approach. The overall aim of the workshops are that they should be a practical means to engage experts in the technical or business process under scrutiny. Involvement of experts not only provides an obvious source of information but also better enables a sense of ownership of the future development of information management strategies. The workshops typically take place over 1 to 3 days, depending upon the scope and complexity of the process being assessed. Each workshop commences with the attendees being asked to describe their process (es) in a series of process steps. Mindful that process descriptions can themselves take a long period of time to produce the emphasis, bearing pragmatic concerns in mind, is to arrive at a level of description that will at least provide a shared 'vocabulary' for the remainder of the workshop. These outline descriptions (e.g. title, sequence) then form the framework against which to capture further attributes or features of the process. The further process step attributes are defined in advance of the workshop and are determined by the overall aim of the audit. For example in the case of the Records Identification audit, attributes of the process included such elements as input/output documents, document format, and responsible person. In the case of the IP Assessment attributes of a process step included items such as (information) resources, (information) products, format and stakeholders.

A purpose built (Microsoft Access) database was developed to capture the output from the workshop. The database input forms were then projected on a overhead screen during the

workshop. Use of a database had a number of advantages: it helped focus the discussions during the workshop; it reduced the amount of time spent writing up the output following the meeting; it provided a more flexible means of reporting the outputs; and finally it acted as a repository of information that can be maintained and updated as required into the future.

The paper concludes by summarising the overall benefits of the proposed approach based upon the actual benefits and successes experienced in the work carried out at BNGSL. In particular a discussion is presented on the pragmatic aspects of the approach and its application as part of an overall initiative or as a one-off approach to address specific IM or KM related issues as they arise in an organisation.

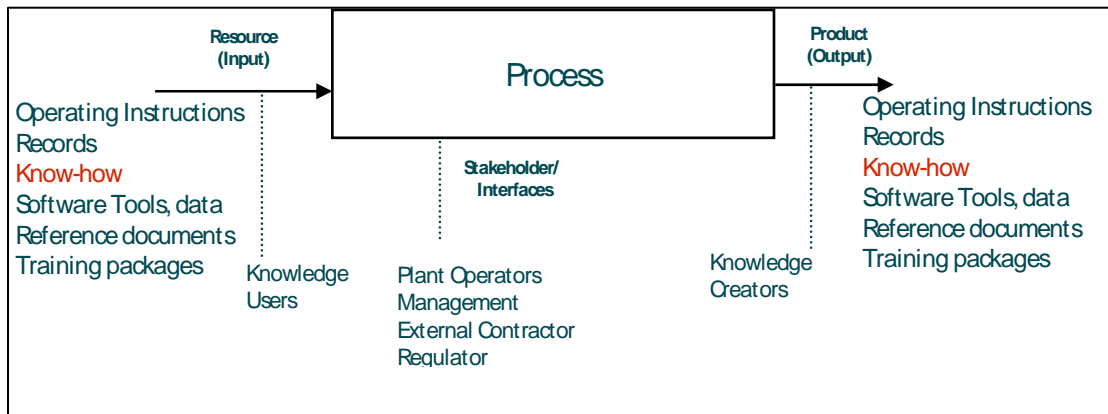


FIG 1. Knowledge Audit Model

REFERENCES

- [1] KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT: Better Practice Checklist. Practical Guides for effective use of new technologies in Government. Australian Government Information Management Office. Version 1, 2004.