

Conducting a Knowledge Audit in the context of Knowledge Management in Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

"The knowledge audit is a systematic and scientific examination and evaluation of the explicit and tacit knowledge resources in the company. The Knowledge Audit investigates and analyses the current knowledge-environment and culminates, in a diagnostic and prognostic report on the current corporate 'knowledge health'. The report provides evidence as to whether corporate knowledge value potential is being maximized. In this respect the Knowledge Audit measures the risk and opportunities faced by the organization with respect to corporate knowledge."

Introduction

A knowledge audit can help the individual or organization to determine if it "knows what it knows" and "knows what it doesn't know". Unlike a financial audit, which checks performance against a standard, a knowledge audit is more of a qualitative evaluation. It is essentially a sound investigation into an individual's or organization's knowledge 'health' and can help to identify gaps or deficiencies, which need attention and strengths, which can be built upon.

Concept of Knowledge Audit

For the individual, a knowledge audit can be used to:

- Assist development of a personal development plan, especially education and training requirements
- Evaluate gaps in knowledge before starting a new role e.g. after promotion

A knowledge audit also known as k-audit or knowledge management (KM) assessment provides sound investigation into an organization's knowledge health. The main purpose of a knowledge audit is to help the audited unit determine what it knows, who knows what, what it does not know, what it needs to know and how it should improve the management of its current knowledge wealth. A knowledge audit can also be performed as an initiative for Organizational Knowledge Management.

According to Debenham and Clark ("The Knowledge Audit", 2004), knowledge audit is a planning document which provides a structural overview of an organization's knowledge in a designated section or target area. Audit document gives a qualitative and quantitative view of the individual chunks of knowledge stored in repositories. Knowledge repositories could be electronic (databases), paper based (files) or individuals (experts).

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Conducting a Knowledge Audit

Conduct a knowledge audit

Knowledge audits involve collating an inventory of available knowledge assets and resources in order to examine the gap between the ideal or desired knowledge environment and the existing knowledge environment. Gaps may impede innovation, block opportunities for knowledge improvement or hamper technology implementations. Knowledge audits can be conducted through a variety of means, including surveys, process maps, structured interviews and analysing competencies.

Particular questions that a knowledge audit could ask include:

- What knowledge does the organisation need to acquire or develop?
- Where are knowledge flows impeded?
- How can knowledge be better shared and organised?
- What knowledge resources are currently in use?
- What are the current and future benchmarks for knowledge use?

What are the benefits?

- It helps the organization identify knowledge needed to support overall organizational goals and individual and team activities.
- It gives tangible evidence of the extent to which knowledge is being effectively managed and indicates where improvements are needed.
- It can provide a map of what knowledge exists in the organisation and where it exists, revealing gaps, duplication and unused pockets.
- It can provide a map of knowledge and communication flows and networks, revealing both examples of good practice and blockages and barriers to good practice.

- It can provide an inventory of knowledge assets, making them more visible and therefore more measurable and accountable, and giving a clearer understanding of the contribution of knowledge to organisational performance.
- It provides vital information for the development of effective knowledge management programmes and initiatives.

How do we go about it?

There is a wide variety of approaches to conducting a knowledge audit, with varying levels of coverage and detail. Select the approach which is most suitable for your purpose e.g. an initial survey over a couple of weeks may be based on questionnaires and interviews but a more detailed survey may require several weeks of knowledge mapping. As a general rule, most knowledge audits will involve:

1. Identifying Knowledge Needs

The first step in most knowledge audits involves clarifying what knowledge the organisation and the people and teams within it need in order to meet their goals and objectives.. Common approaches taken to collating this information include questionnaire-based surveys, interviews and facilitated group discussions, or a combination of these. In an environment which is well supported by technology, consider designing a web-enabled questionnaire. Looking at knowledge flows within a defined business process also helps identify what is working and what needs attention.

In asking people about knowledge needs, it is important to provide a point of focus, as 'knowledge' can be seen as quite conceptual and difficult to articulate. To get around this, and to ensure concentrate on vital knowledge, invite people to think about their goals and objectives, and the core processes, activities and decisions that they perform in the course of their day-to-day work. You might ask them to also consider their

main problems and challenges, and how might faster access to better knowledge help them in that regard.

2. Drawing up a Knowledge Inventory

A knowledge inventory is a stock-take to identify and locate knowledge assets or resources throughout the organisation. It involves counting and categorising the organisation's explicit and tacit knowledge. In the case of explicit knowledge, this will include:

- What knowledge do we have – numbers, types and categories of documents, databases, libraries, intranet websites, links and subscriptions to external resources etc?

Where is the knowledge – locations in the organisation and various systems?

Organisation and access – how are knowledge resources organised, how easy is it for people to find and access them?

Purpose, relevance and 'quality' – why do these resources exist, how relevant and appropriate are they for that purpose, are they of good 'quality' e.g. up-to-date, reliable, evidence-based etc?

Usage – are they actually being used, by whom, how often, what for?

- In the case of tacit knowledge, the inventory will focus on people and look at:
 - Who we have – numbers and categories of people
 - Where they are – locations in departments, teams and buildings
 - What they know – academic and professional qualifications, core knowledge and experience
 - What they are learning – on the job training, learning and development

3. Analysing Knowledge Flows

While an inventory of knowledge assets shows what knowledge resources your organisation has, an analysis of knowledge flows looks at how that knowledge moves around the organisation – from where it is to where it is needed. In other words, how do people find the knowledge they need, how do they share the knowledge they have? Again, the knowledge flow analysis looks at both explicit and tacit knowledge, and at people, processes and systems:

- The focus in this stage is on *people*: their attitudes towards, habits and behaviours concerning, and skills in, knowledge sharing and use. This will usually require a combination of questionnaire-based surveys followed up with individual interviews and facilitated group discussions. Social Network Analysis can be a useful technique for identifying who are central hubs in the informal networks present in the organisation.
- In terms of *processes*, look at how people go about their daily work activities and how knowledge seeking, sharing and use are (or are not) part of those activities. In most organisations, there will be pockets of good knowledge management practice (though they may not be called knowledge management). Look at what policies and practices currently affect the flows and usage of information and knowledge; for example, are there existing policies on things like information handling, records management, web publishing? Are there other wider policies and practices that, while not directly related to knowledge management, act as enablers or barriers to good knowledge practice?
- On the *systems* side, some assessment is needed of key capabilities that will be used in any recommended actions or solutions. This includes the technical infrastructure:

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information technology systems, content management, accessibility and ease of use, and current actual levels of use. In short, to what extent do your systems effectively facilitate knowledge flows, and help to connect people with the information and other people they need?

4. Creating a Knowledge Map

A knowledge map is a visual representation of an organisation's knowledge. There are two common approaches:

- The first simply maps knowledge resources and assets, showing what knowledge exists in the organisation and where it can be found

The second also includes knowledge flows, showing how that knowledge moves around the organisation from where it is to where it is needed

The second approach provides the most complete picture for the knowledge auditor. However, the first is also useful, and in some organisations is made available to all staff to help people locate the knowledge they need.

Audits for Individuals

A typical audit for an individual will include:

- What are my personal knowledge needs?
- Where are my knowledge assets stored and can I find them when I want to?
- What gaps exist in my knowledge?
- How current is my knowledge. Does this need updating?
- What methods do I use to acquire new knowledge?

Types of knowledge audit measures

Both qualitative and quantitative measures must be used for knowledge audits. According to Becerra Fernandez (2004) organizations mature with KM should use quantitative measures as

compared to organizations that have just started working in KM.

When to perform knowledge audit

- Knowledge audits can be performed periodically for an entire organization or a sub-unit.
- At the start of a KM project.
- After a KM project is implemented

What are knowledge audit steps?

- Identify target area for your knowledge audit. Your target area could be a sub-unit, several departments or even your entire organization.
- Identify existing knowledge in your target area. Determine potential sinks, sources, flows, constraints in your target area. Determine environmental factors that could affect your target area. Identify knowledge repositories in your target area, both containing tacit (experts) and explicit (databases) knowledge. Develop a knowledge map of your target area.
- Identify missing knowledge in your target area. Perform a Gap Analysis to find what knowledge is missing in the target area.
- Find who needs the missing knowledge.
- Analyze collected data.
- Provide recommendations from the knowledge audit to the management.

Impacts of knowledge audit

- Impacts on Employees
 - o Supports employee learning
 - o Increases job satisfaction
- Impacts on Processes
 - o Increases effectiveness
 - o Increases efficiency

- o Increases degree of innovation
- o Supports value-added products

Our Knowledge Audit service identifies the core information and knowledge needs and uses in an organization. It identifies gaps, duplications, flows, and how they contribute to institutions goals.

Conclusion

To conclude I would like to say that Knowledge Management is not managing or organizing books or journals, searching the Internet for clients or arranging the circulation of materials. However, each of the activities can in some way be part of the Knowledge Management spectrum and process. Knowledge Management is about enhancing the use of organizational knowledge through sound practices of Knowledge Management and Organizational learning. Thus Knowledge Management is a combination of Information Management, Communication and Human Resources.

Information Audit or Knowledge Audit: If you decide to commission a knowledge audit from external consultants, be aware that the quality and

depth of work that comes under the general banner of 'knowledge auditing' varies quite a bit. Many vendors use the term 'knowledge audit' to describe what is in fact an information audit- which will only look at explicit knowledge. Auditing tacit knowledge is probably where the greater challenge lies, and is hence the area in which expert help is likely to be most valuable. Knowledge audit provides vital information for the development of effective knowledge management programmes and initiatives.

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