

# Knowledge Audits

## Introduction

Taking a systematic and strategic approach to knowledge and learning can help to integrate the diverse activities of an organisation, and facilitate more productive processes of knowledge sharing and dialogue between internal and external stakeholders. Successful initiatives integrate information technology, human resources and information management in a coherent manner to strengthen institutional memory and cohesion, and to reduce unnecessary duplication of work, thereby increasing efficiency and effectiveness.

A well developed knowledge and learning strategy for development and humanitarian organisations will identify ways to improve how current and historical knowledge is used both within the organisation and outside it. The goal of such a strategy would be to make the work of the organisation more 'joined up', better coordinated and more coherent as a whole.

One potential approach to developing this strategy is to apply a systematic **Knowledge Audit** methodology, as developed by ODI. This methodology was arrived at through a theoretical and case-based investigation of the utilisation of knowledge in diverse policy processes. It has also been used to assess knowledge and learning strategies across a range of international agencies, including multilaterals, government agencies and NGOs (Ramalingam, 2005). The methodology provides a structure for gathering data, synthesising the findings, and making recommendations about the best way forward for knowledge and learning initiatives. It ensures recommendations are well grounded in broader structural, operational and policy factors affecting an organisation.

## Detailed description of the process

Ideally, the strategy development would be in four distinct phases. The first stage would involve in-depth research and analysis of current institutional policies and practices, utilising interviews, workshops and focus groups. Specific questions to be explored would fall into the following categories:

### Knowledge

- What are the core tasks and processes carried out by different groups and divisions within the organisation?
- What constitutes useful, applicable knowledge for the execution of these tasks and processes?
- How is this knowledge generated, identified, shared, stored and applied in core operations?
- How might improved generation, sharing, storing and application of knowledge be monitored?

### Relationships and processes

- What existing and planned systems and processes can support the knowledge sharing and learning strategy, and how should they be deployed?
- What existing and planned organisational initiatives might influence and support the generation, sharing, storing and application of knowledge?
- What is the nature of key relationships within the organisation? How formal/informal are these relationships? How do they impact upon issues of knowledge and learning?

### Organisational contexts

- How can human resources, information technology, information management and other support functions be better integrated to support the knowledge and learning 'vision'?
- How might existing institutional structures support the KM strategy?
- How might leadership and governance support the KM strategy?

- What are the perceived costs and benefits of improved knowledge and learning?

### External factors

- How does organisational knowledge and learning translate across the boundaries of the secretariat to include member states, dispute panels and the appellate bodies, other international agencies, civil society, and so on? (Specifically, how does the principle of 'horizontal coordination' work in practice and how can it be strengthened?)
- How might the political, economic, and cultural contexts in which the WTO secretariat operates impact upon the development and implementation of an effective knowledge and learning strategy?

**Stage 1:** These questions should be explored through a combination of approaches including face-to-face and telephone interviews; workshops and focus groups; electronic consultations and discussion groups.

**Stage 2:** Use the framework to generate recommendations as to how knowledge and learning tools can be incorporated to improve efficiency and effectiveness across the organisation in question. Research based on the questions posed previously should be used to develop a coherent set of ideas for application across all the different divisions and functions of the organisation.

**Stage 3:** This stage focuses on iterating the strategic conclusions, with recommendations being presented to stakeholders and refined as necessary.

**Stage 4:** Implementation of the strategy should be undertaken on a selected basis with a number of divisions or teams, accompanied by careful monitoring. Following this, there should be another cycle of refinement and rollout across the rest of the organisation.

### Sources and further reading

- Ramalingam, B. (2005) *Implementing Knowledge Strategies: From Policy to Practice in Development Agencies*, ODI Working Paper 244, London: ODI.
- More information on conducting knowledge audits can be found on the NHS Toolkit: [www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge\\_management/km2/getting\\_started.asp](http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge_management/km2/getting_started.asp).