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Auditing Practices Group

Guidance on:

Organizational Knowledge

Knowledge is a resource needed for the organization to support the quality management system processes and to ensure conformity of products and services. It is addressed in an explicit way for the first time in the 2015 edition of 9001. In the past ISO 9001 addressed knowledge partially by including requirements on documentation. However, tacit or shared knowledge, or knowledge from experience, was not addressed explicitly. For those types of knowledge document control is not sufficient to make it available and useable.

Organizational Knowledge is the specific knowledge of the organization, coming either from its collective experience or from the individual experience of its persons. In an explicit or implicit way this knowledge is, or can be, used to attain the organization's objectives.

Organizational knowledge in the persons of the organization, may be recorded in documented information, imbedded in the processes, products and services of the organization, etc. Examples include documented information regarding a process, product or service specifications, work instructions, experience of people related to processes and operations, knowledge of the technologies and infrastructures relevant for the organization, etc. Auditors must be aware that having documented information may not necessarily mean that the organization's knowledge is appropriately determined.

Many organizations have already initiated systematic approaches to knowledge management and have mature approaches, while others will be taking their first steps or just beginning to consider this issue. Auditors should bear in mind that ISO 9001 has a PDCA approach to management, through which organizations go from a starting point and then develop and improve their practices. These different situations should be addressed appropriately during an audit.

Auditors need also to be aware that needs for knowledge and knowledge management vary considerably according to an organization's context, the sector it operates in, the competitiveness of its markets, etc. While some organizations operate at the so called frontiers of knowledge, where they are in

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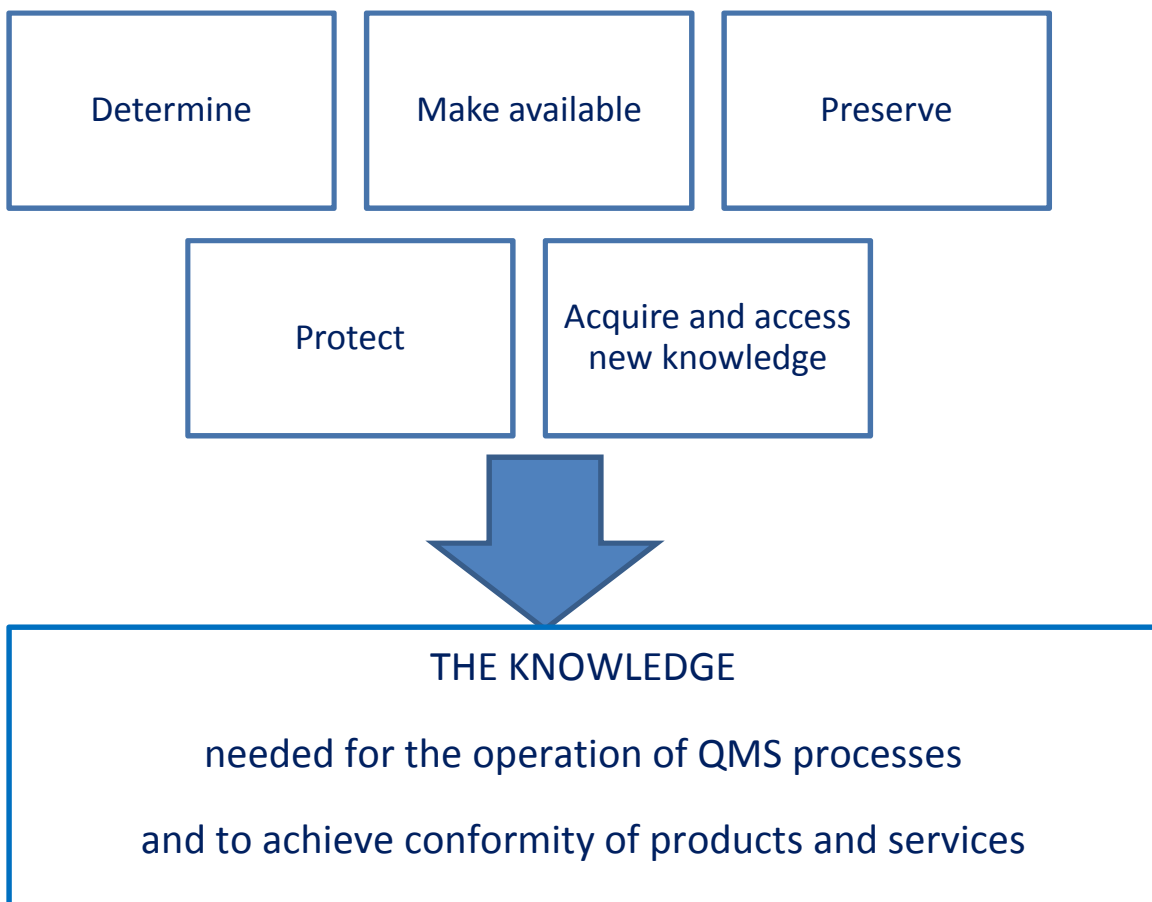
competition for knowledge with other organizations, others operate in relatively stable environments.

Finally audits should also keep in mind that the knowledge needed to operate processes and achieve conformity of products and services, also includes the knowledge related to quality management and quality activities.

There is a strong link between organizational knowledge and competence of people, the latter being the ability to apply knowledge.

Auditors should also look at how the organization determines and makes available the knowledge needed in changing situations and for new products and services.

The requirements for organizational knowledge in the context of a QMS can be summarized in the following picture:



Auditors need to evaluate if the organizations considers internal and external sources, such as:

- learning from failures, near miss situations and successes;
- gathering knowledge from customers, suppliers and partners;

- capturing knowledge (tacit and explicit) that exists within the organization, e.g. through mentoring, succession planning;
 - benchmarking against competitors;
 - sharing organizational knowledge with relevant interested parties to ensure sustainability of the organization;
 - updating the necessary organizational knowledge based on the result of improvements.
 - Knowledge coming from conferences, attending to fairs, networking seminars, or other external events.
 - etc.
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For further information on the ISO 9001 Auditing Practices Group, please refer to the paper: *Introduction to the ISO 9001 Auditing Practices Group*

Feedback from users will be used by the *ISO 9001 Auditing Practices Group* to determine whether additional guidance documents should be developed, or if these current ones should be revised.

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