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## **A short summary of the key principles and organisation of ISO 30401 - Knowledge management systems**

### **Introduction**

This report was generated with the support of Google Gemini in response to a comment at the KM COP meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> July about baselining our discussion on agreed definitions and principles without reinventing the wheel. Nigel Jones picked up the action and he would be grateful if it could be checked by a reader against an original copy of the ISO.

ISO 30401:2018 "Knowledge management systems – Requirements" is an international standard that provides a framework for organisations to establish, implement, maintain, review, and improve an effective management system for knowledge management (KM). It's designed to help organisations of all types and sizes to leverage their knowledge assets to enhance performance and achieve their objectives.

### **Key Definitions**

- **Knowledge:** ISO 30401 defines knowledge as a "human or organisational asset enabling effective decisions and action in context." It emphasises that knowledge can be individual, collective, or organisational, and it's acquired through learning or experience. Importantly, it distinguishes knowledge from information by highlighting its contextual and actionable nature.
- **Knowledge Management (KM):** The standard views KM as a discipline focused on the ways organisations create and use knowledge. It's about optimising the identification, creation, analysis, representation, distribution, and application of knowledge to create organisational value.
- **Knowledge Management System (KMS):** This is the "part of a management system with regard to knowledge." It encompasses the organisation's KM culture, structure, governance and leadership, roles and responsibilities, planning, technology, processes, and operation. It's not just about technology; it's a holistic management system.
- **Organisational Culture:** The values, beliefs, and practices that influence the conduct and behaviour of people and organisations. A supportive knowledge management culture is a crucial element of the KMS.

## Key Principles of ISO 30401

The standard doesn't prescribe *how* an organisation manages knowledge, but rather outlines core principles and requirements for doing so effectively. These principles, often embedded throughout the standard's clauses, include:

1. **Value Creation:** Knowledge management should be purposeful and directly contribute to the organisation's strategic objectives and the creation of value. Knowledge is a key source of value.
2. **Focus on Goals:** KM activities should be aligned with the organisation's goals, strategies, and specific needs. There is no one-size-fits-all KM solution.
3. **Human Centricity:** Knowledge is fundamentally created by people. Effective KM recognises the human element, including individual learning, collaboration, and the importance of tacit knowledge.
4. **Contextual Adaptation:** KM must be adapted to the specific context, culture, and operational environment of each organisation.
5. **Shared Understanding:** KM should foster interaction among people, using content, processes, and techniques to build shared understanding and collective knowledge.
6. **Environment Focus:** Instead of directly "managing knowledge," KM focuses on managing the working environment to foster the knowledge lifecycle (creation, acquisition, sharing, application, retention, and decommissioning).
7. **Culture as Critical:** A supportive knowledge-sharing culture is paramount for successful KM. It encourages openness, collaboration, and learning.
8. **Iterative Approach:** KM implementation should be iterative, allowing for continuous learning, feedback, and improvement.

## Structure of ISO 30401

ISO 30401 follows the common "High-Level Structure" (HLS) for ISO management system standards, making it compatible with other standards like ISO 9001 (Quality Management<sup>1</sup>) or ISO 27001 (Information Security Management). This structure ensures consistency and facilitates integrated management systems. The main clauses are:

1. **Scope:** Defines the standard's applicability and what it covers.
2. **Normative references:** Lists other standards essential for its application.
3. **Terms and definitions:** Provides key vocabulary.
4. **Context of the organisation:**
  - Understanding the organisation and its context (internal and external issues relevant to KM).

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<sup>1</sup> Also pointed out at the 28<sup>th</sup> July KM COP meeting, ISO 9001:2015 on quality management, specifically [Clause 7.1.6 Organizational Knowledge](#), mandates organisations to identify, maintain, and make available the knowledge necessary to achieve conformity of products and services and enhance their quality management system. This can act as a lever for advocacy around adoption of MK systems.

- Understanding the needs and expectations of interested parties (stakeholders).
  - Determining the scope of the knowledge management system.
  - Establishing, implementing, maintaining, and continually improving the KMS.
  - **Knowledge management culture:** Emphasises the importance of fostering a supportive culture.
5. **Leadership:**
- Leadership and commitment (top management's role in promoting KM).
  - Knowledge management policy (establishing a policy aligned with objectives).
  - Organisational roles, responsibilities, and authorities.
6. **Planning:**
- Actions to address risks and opportunities related to KM.
  - Knowledge management objectives and planning to achieve them.
7. **Support:**
- Resources (human, financial, infrastructure, environment).
  - Competence (ensuring people have the necessary skills).
  - Awareness (making people aware of the KM policy and their contribution).
  - Communication (establishing internal and external communication processes).
  - Documented information (requirements for maintaining and retaining documented information related to KM).
8. **Operation:**
- Operational planning and control.
  - **Knowledge development:** How knowledge is created and acquired.
  - **Knowledge conveyance and transformation:** How knowledge is shared and applied (e.g., through interaction, representation, combination, internalisation).
  - **Knowledge management enablers:** Human capital, processes, technology, governance, and culture.
9. **Performance evaluation:**
- Monitoring, measurement, analysis, and evaluation of KM performance.
  - Internal audit.
  - Management review.
10. **Improvement:**
- Nonconformity and corrective action.
  - Continual improvement of the KMS.

In essence, ISO 30401 aims to provide a robust, auditable framework for organisations to strategically manage their most valuable asset: knowledge. It moves beyond simply managing information to ensuring that knowledge is effectively identified, created, shared, and applied to achieve organisational goals and foster continuous learning.