



# BSI Position Statement on Standardization within Knowledge Management

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## **Summary Position Statement**

- BSI to provide world class leadership in the understanding, practice and development of the field of Knowledge Management
- BSI seeks to demonstrate 'informed clarity'
- KM PAS 2001: A Guide to Good Practice - the foundations already laid
- Provision of a common KM Framework of Good Practice Analysis
- Too early to attempt to impose accreditation or certification at this stage
- 'Live' Published Documents as 'Guides to Good Practice' - towards KM standards, where appropriate
- Focus and speed achieved through industry expert led committee and workgroups
- Informative aide to decision making and strategy, avoiding a bland consensus
- Innovative Knowledge Partnership with Government Office of the e-Envoy

## Introduction

This document is the latest stage in a programme of work begun in 2001 by the British Standards Institution to provide world class leadership and assistance to help the UK and other partners to develop a strong and sustainable capacity in the understanding, practice and development of the field of Knowledge Management (KM).

### Purpose of the BSI KM programme

The purpose of the BSI on-going programme of work, including this document, is:

"To demonstrate the informed clarity that will allow business, government and other organisations to carry out assessments and make decisions through an impartial review of the differing aspects of Knowledge Management, coupled with an understanding of the context within which they may occur."

### The foundations already laid

This document builds on the foundations already laid by BSI since 2001 to provide unique world class leadership in understanding Knowledge Management, including:

- The publication in June 2001 of "*Knowledge Management PAS 2001: A Guide to Good Practice*" – the first such document of its kind to be produced by a global Standards Body - to provide a practical, hands-on introduction to KM;
- The subsequent creation of the BSI KMS/1 Committee, bringing together industry experts, thought leaders and proven active practitioners to lead the on-going BSI KM initiative;
- The agreement reached in 2002 with the UK Government's Office of the e-Envoy to develop a 'knowledge partnership' between Government and Standards Body to ensure the maximum possible degree of co-operation and mutual support between BSI and Government in developing a consistent approach to the understanding and harnessing of Knowledge Management.

### The reason and rationale for the BSI programme

The reason for the BSI programme – and its central purpose of demonstrating informed clarity – is simple. To overcome the current unnecessary and avoidable lack of clarity in the discussion, debate and understanding of KM.

From its beginnings, KM has grown and matured over the last decade, both in theory and in practice. Increasingly, KM has become recognised as a useful framework for analysis and as a genuinely useful organisational discipline, able to deliver real results in a wide variety of settings and in differing degrees of complexity.

Understandably, however, with this growing maturity and complexity have come challenges and a degree of confusion. The concurrent adoption and development of KM by a number of professional sectors and areas of industry, commerce, government and business, without an agreed reference framework of standards and commonly accepted definitions, has caused unnecessary and avoidable lack of clarity.

The BSI Knowledge Management Committee (KMS/1) considers that the time is now right for the provision of a common framework of contextually based understanding, with the aim of facilitating the easy communication and co-operation of KM-aware bodies and persons. As the KM discipline seeks to interact with, and draw in, ever more diverse disciplines in the pursuit of increasingly complex concepts, thus the issue of commonality becomes more critical.

However and perhaps as importantly, the provision of such understanding and interpretation of the key concepts within KM, produced in a readily accessible and intelligible form, would also allow a more rapid comprehension and utilisation of KM concepts and practices by those organisations that are comparatively inexperienced in this field.

### **The BSI approach**

The key debate at this juncture, as perceived by BSI, is whether KM as a discipline could benefit from formal standardization, considering both the field's maturity and general suitability for such an approach, or whether alternative methods of providing commonality and interchange of perspectives, concepts, tools and ideas should be employed.

The judgement of BSI is that, at this point in the development of Knowledge Management, it is too early to attempt to impose too rigid a framework or too narrow a view of this rapidly developing field.

That is why the BSI has decided to seek to demonstrate 'informed clarity'.

This will be achieved through the rapid provision of globally applicable documents and other resources that acknowledge and build upon, rather than constrain, the richness of the Knowledge Management discipline.

The methodology of standardization preferred in this area is the identification of agreed common approaches and understandings leading to a *KM Framework of Good Practice and Analysis*, itself comprised of Guides to individual topic areas.

### **What do we mean by 'demonstrating informed clarity'?**

By 'demonstrating informed clarity', BSI means working with acknowledged experts, thought leaders and practitioners to produce materials, guidance and other resources which will enable businesses, government and other organisations to make their own rational and informed assessments and decisions about the degree, the nature and the extent of any development of Knowledge Management they might consider appropriate and useful for their own distinct purposes and in their own particular circumstances.

## **BSI and KM standardization to date**

BSI first became formally involved in the process of KM standardization with the publication of Knowledge Management PAS 2001: A Guide to Good Practice, in June 2001. This document was co-authored by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) and then reviewed by a specially constituted panel of experts brought together by BSI for their broad range of knowledge and expertise in this area. The success of this document may be due to its status as the first real attempt to:

- Provide an objective overview of latest KM thinking from around the world
- Disseminate KM good practice to both UK and global audiences
- Provide case studies of KM interventions
- Present KM concepts in concise and plain English
- Provide details of alternative KM resources for users
- Stimulate a public debate upon KM good practice.

In addition to comments received from readers of this document, KM PAS 2001 was also reviewed by a number of post-publication seminars, the feedback from which indicated a great desire for other documents written in the same vein, some of which it was hoped would expand upon aspects of KM only touched upon in the original document. In response to this demand, BSI formed a Committee (KMS/1), with a mandate to produce further KM documents to build upon the success and influence of KM PAS 2001.

## **Vision of KM standardization**

The methodology of standardization preferred in this area is the identification of agreed common approaches and understandings leading to a *KM Framework of Good Practice and Analysis*, itself comprised of Guides to individual topic areas.

BSI seeks to fulfil the role of producer of this Framework by virtue of its undoubted integrity and mandate to act in the public interest. It is this unique position that allows BSI to impartially assess and provide guidance upon KM for the benefit of all stakeholders, thus creating documents that may be seen to be entirely free of commercial or other bias.

The Framework mentioned above will be primarily comprised of complementary 'Guides to Good Practice', containing guidance, recommendations and illustrative examples, coupled with a broad overview of the individual topic.

This methodology builds on that taken in the original BSI document KM PAS 2001, where the diversity of the KM discipline is recognised and explored. By identifying the different approaches available, together with their respective suitabilities and potential incompatibilities, KMS/1 seeks to avoid a bland consensus that would only serve to provide a very one-dimensional view of individual areas.

Furthermore, the group recognises that concentrating solely on basic economic measures and approaches is simply not up to the 'standardization task' posed by KM. Only by the consideration of all standpoints can a full appreciation of KM be properly brought together. Thus the diverse range of expertise and interests within the KMS/1 group brought together by BSI should ensure that the final product is a multi-faceted and comprehensive framework that is immediately applicable and valuable to all sectors.

Not only will many of the documents contain case studies where a KM intervention has succeeded in its aim, but will also include the attempts where failure has occurred. The overall intention is that these documents will be seen as tools for analysis, change and improvement within business, which was and is, after all, the original purpose of standardization. The distillation of such a broad swathe of knowledge into a single set of coherent documents can only serve to assist its users.

Whilst it is accepted that some of the concepts within KM will necessarily not be readily comprehensible to uninformed readers, the desire in the main is to produce highly generic and accessible publications. Of course, the need to balance accessibility with some level of informed critique will be of particular importance to particular groups, for example SMEs.

The committee will produce these Guides as Published Documents, rather than full British Standards. This will allow a strongly consensus-driven approach to be taken, which will still yield highly useable documents within a short time frame. As described in the Appendix to this document, as these PDs are both quickly produced and changed, so they can be thought of as 'live' documents. Indeed, one of the fundamental concepts behind the BSI approach is that of frequent revision of the documents, allowing for the inclusion of the rapidly evolving technologies and concepts that are such a feature of the KM discipline.

As KM further matures, it may well become desirable for some of the subject areas to become 'fully standardised', so the committee will regularly review the status of the documents and decide whether to 'upgrade' them as appropriate. However, at present it is not perceived that there is either the necessary consensus or will to justify such action.

More generally though, any attempt to proscribe the approach to KM that an organisation must take runs contrary to the beliefs of the BSI KMS/1 group. It is strongly felt that BSI's role in this area should be as an informative aide to decision making and strategy development, not as an enforcer or narrower of debate and choice. Only by allowing business to make choices, will the KM discipline continue to develop in such a dynamic fashion. Thus it is felt that the imposition of unnecessary strictures upon industry, such as accreditation or certification, are not applicable at this stage of the evolution of KM.

## **Wider KM standardization**

On the back of the considerable interest built up in KM within the European community, a CEN/ISSS KM Workshop has recently been started. As the approach of this group seems to be highly complementary to that taken by KMS/1, BSI is already taking a leading role in the activities of this forum and is seeking to positively engage with attempts to frame a 'European vision' of KM.

Looking further ahead, as KM matures it is inevitable that attempts will be made to produce either/both full European or full International KM standards. BSI supports the principles behind obtaining as broad a consensus as possible by the utilisation of the CEN and ISO arenas. However, the KMS/1 committee believes that at this time it is pre-emptive to assume that KM, either as a discipline or as a profession, is mature enough to benefit from traditional standardization activity, particularly with regards the formulation of Specifications and Methods. Furthermore, the production process for full standards will simply not deliver the documents that the KM discipline requires right now.

When the time is ripe for this activity, BSI will seek to engage as fully as possible with KM standardization originating through either CEN or ISO.

## **UK Government and BSI KM standardization**

The British Standards Institution has recently been invited to enter into a 'knowledge partnership' with a team in the UK Government's Office of the e-Envoy currently developing a government wide Knowledge Management Policy Framework. The timetable of BSI's emerging work on a position statement on knowledge management and the Government's KM Policy Framework are closely aligned, so early in 2002 the OeE team and BSI agreed to support each other's work through reciprocal membership on the BSI KMS/1 Committee and the OeE's LEARN (Levering External Advice and Relations) advisory board. This will ensure the maximum possible degree of co-operation and mutual support between BSI and Government in developing a consistent approach to the understanding and harnessing of KM.

## **Planned BSI KM publications**

Derived from the approach set out in this document, the work items described below have been deemed as the primary objectives for BSI's KM group in 2002, as it is felt that they will lay down the common ground that will form the basis for the desired KM Framework.

### **Phase 1: 2002**

#### **PD 7500 KM Glossary of terminology**

A glossary providing both definitions and explanations of the terms used within the Knowledge Management (KM) discipline. This document will be prepared as a companion guide to existing and planned BSI KM documents, including the provision of explicit references to these documents where appropriate.

In the manner of a concordance, there will also be inclusion of references to other non-BSI sources of information, in order to provide the reader with as broad a view of the subject as possible.

Time-scale for publication: July 2002

#### **PD 7501 Culture: Guide to Good Practice**

A framework document for an effective response to Culture within a KM intervention incorporating:

- The pursuit of an organisation's objectives, and gap analysis conducted through applying a KM lens to those objectives
- Taking the existing culture into account in formulation of KM strategy and implementation, including mapping and matching
- How to change culture in the KM context – including limitations
- An understanding of the complexity, intercultural and sub-cultural issues together with the significance of trust, values and self-worth

Prepared by the distillation of good practice from the various disciplines that impact upon this area, involving liaison with government, academics, consultants and practitioners. It is envisaged that this will be an introductory document in a potential series of three that together will provide a thorough insight into cultural issues within KM.

Time-scale for publication: Q4 2002

#### **PD 7502 Measurements in KM**

There is a very great interest, and much confusion, amongst organisations embarking on KM initiatives, about how to measure the benefits and effectiveness of KM. Some argue that standard measurements can be developed and applied, and some argue that the real benefits of KM cannot be measured. PAS 2001 introduces the topic of KM measurements.

Several pioneering organisations have been measuring their effectiveness in developing and applying their collective knowledge assets, intellectual capital and KM processes. Several accounting bodies and practices are actively discussing the 're-inventing of the auditor in a

knowledge based economy'. Several academic papers have been published in this area. Several KM consulting methodologies contain KM metrics and measurements appear as critical components in most KM frameworks today. Standards bodies are investigating the advantages and disadvantages of standardised KM measurements.

Organisations that are considering and implementing KM initiatives today are looking for the Return on Investment (ROI), looking for better ways to assess where they are, and looking for ways to measure their progress and effectiveness in successfully implementing KM (KM maturity models). Because there are different views and approaches on KM measurements, differing perspectives (organisational reporting, auditing, implementation effectiveness, financial measures, KM technology measures), there is much confusion.

What is now needed is a specific Published document (PD) to provide more informed clarity and to act as a Guide to Good Practice on KM Measurements. In order to provide this assistance, KMS/1 intends to produce a concise document, geared to enable action, with reference to PAS 2001 for associated issues.

Time-scale for publication: Q4 2002

### **PD 7503 KM in Construction**

A translation document specifically relating the content of KM PAS 2001 to the Construction Industry, providing both support for action, in addition to accelerating uptake of KM within this industry.

Time-scale for publication: Q3 2002

### **Phase 2: 2003 and beyond**

Confirmed documents post-2002 include Parts 2 & 3 of the Culture Guide. Details of other documents will be forthcoming at a later stage.

## **Appendix 1: BSI as a National Standards Body**

The British Standards Institution (BSI) has been in existence since 1901, when, upon formation for the purpose of standardizing railway gauges throughout London, it became the world's first National Standards Body. Since that time BSI has become heavily involved with many sectors of business, with the aim of producing highly useable documents, reflecting state of the art practice. BSI's back catalogue of publications stands at approximately 32 000 individual documents.

The British Standards Institution (BSI) is now the world's leading standards and quality services organization. Formed in 1901 and incorporated under Royal Charter in 1929, BSI is the oldest national standards-making body in the world. Independent of government, industry and trade associations BSI is a non-profit distributing organization. BSI is globally recognised as an independent and impartial body serving both the private and public sectors. BSI works with manufacturing and service industries, businesses and governments, to facilitate the production of British, European and international standards. Today BSI has a turnover approaching £170 million a year, employs 3,400 people and has operations in over 90 countries including the US, Pacific Rim and China.

BSI is incorporated under Royal Charter, and is recognised by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the UK government as being the UK National Standards Body. These documents require BSI to act in the public interest, free from commercial or other bias. This impartiality is clearly reflected in the content of the standards that BSI produces. Furthermore, the process by which BSI generates such content is open and transparent, as BSI must seek to obtain representation from all relevant stakeholder groups on the Committee responsible for generating a British Standard (BS) in order to achieve as broad a consensus as practicable. For lower consensus documents (as described in Section 2.1) similar rules apply.

Besides being the National Standards Body, BSI is the UK Member of both the European Committee for Standardization (CEN) and the International Organisation for Standardization (ISO). The MoU states that:

"BSI will in all its work on the preparation of national, European and international standards take fully into account the public interest...and will use all reasonable endeavours to promote such activities in European and international standards organisations."

Additionally, the BSI has long recognised the role of standards in promoting and facilitating the free movement of goods and services in line with World Trade Organisation (WTO) requirements, and has therefore accepted the WTO Code of Good Practice for the Preparation, Adoption and Application of Standards.

### **Levels of standardization**

Before the debate regarding standardization can be properly understood, it is of critical importance for there to be a common understanding of not only what is meant by this term, but also of which forms standardization can take. This section of the document is intended to provide an overview of the basic types employed by BSI. However, a general definition of standardization is as follows.

**Standardization:** The activity of establishing, with regard to actual or potential problems, provisions for common and repeated use, aimed at the achievement of the optimum degree of order in a given context. In particular, the activity consists of the processes of formulating,

issuing and implementing standards – not just facilitation of production. Important benefits of standardization are improvement of the suitability of products, processes and services for their intended purposes, together with the prevention of barriers to trade and facilitation of technological co-operation – a clear enabler of innovation.

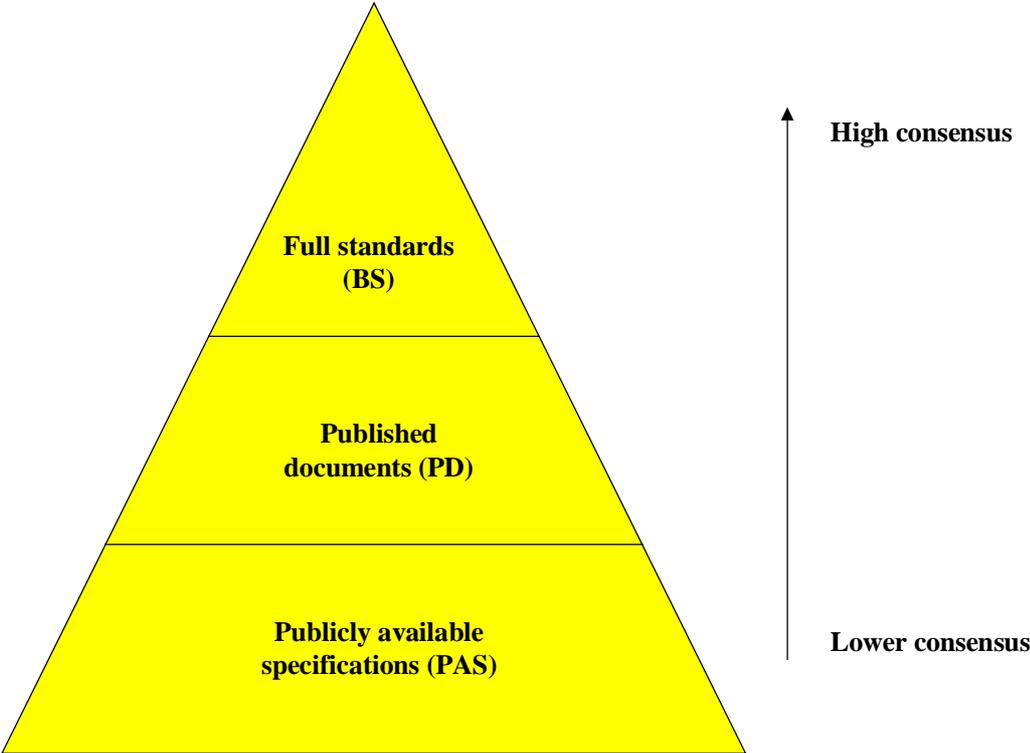


Figure 1.

As can be seen from Figure 1, within British Standards there are effectively three levels of standardization that can be applied according to the requirements of the industry at that specific point in time. As an area grows in maturity it is generally the case that the documents produced will tend to move up the pyramid, reflecting the greater consensus within the industry and public.

It is important to note that, unless directly referenced in legislation all Standards (and other documents mentioned here) are voluntary documents.

**British Standards (BS)**

These documents are produced by a Committee, which is constituted of relevant stakeholders and interested parties. Before a BS can be published, a Draft for Public Comment must be issued and the drafting Committee must consider the comments submitted. Consensus must be achieved before agreement to publish is reached. Nationally, BS is equivalent in standing to CEN or ISO standards. Although formal (full consensus) standards offer great value to established industries, disciplines and technologies, other standards solutions are more appropriate to more rapidly evolving areas of business and technology.

**Published documents (PD):**

PDs share similarities with standards in that they are produced by a broadly constituted Committee and may be presented as Drafts for Public Comment before publication. The onus to find public consensus is less constrained than for a BS, but the drafting Committee must be in broad agreement with the content of the document. In standardization terms, a PD may be thought to be roughly the equivalent of an ISO Technical Specification. However, for an emerging area such as KM, a PD is most likely to be a Guide to Good Practice, or other non-prescriptive document. PDs are quick to produce and can be easily updated to reflect latest thinking within an industry.

**Publicly available specifications (PAS):**

The aim of producing a PAS is to provide a robust and practical document at a speed appropriate to the needs of an industry and/or technology and its customers. Whilst a defined delivery timetable is the essence of the PAS process, it is important that it does not prejudice the requirement for proper consultation with the interested parties, however, this does not imply the need for the full public enquiry that is required for a British Standard.

A PAS will be withdrawn when its content is subsequently covered by the scope of a published British Standard. A PAS may be thought of as roughly equivalent to a CEN Workshop Agreement.

**BSI stakeholders**

- Government
  - Central government
  - Public sector – to include local government, agencies, health services
- Business
  - Manufacturing industry
  - Services sector
  - SMEs
- Academia and education providers
- Professions and not for profit
- Vendors
- Other key players
- Society and general public

## **Appendix 2: Constitution of KMS/1**

Mr Ron Young, Knowledge Associates – Chairman

Mr Neill Allan, Partners in Performance

Mr Mark Field, The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals

Mrs Margaret Haines, Department of Health

Mr Chris Hancock, Office of E-Envoy

Professor Clive Holtham, City University Business School

Mrs Anne Jubert, European Commission

Mr Dominic Kelleher, PwC

Mr Simon Levene, PwC

Mr Joe McCrea, JBMC

Mr Nigel Oxbrow, TFPL

Mr Tony Sheehan, Arup

Mr Dave Snowden, IBM Cynefin Centre for Organisational Complexity

Mr Toby Farmer, BSI – Programme Manager