Accelerating Library Performance through Information Audit-An Overview

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Abstract

Organizations face challenges in managing, controlling, protecting, and regulating information. Library professionals must guide users towards authentic sources and regulate services through governance and audit. Information audit is crucial in libraries, examining resources, flow, and management. It identifies essential tools and processes for successful audits. Audit reflects strengths and weaknesses in controlling information, improving service reliability and compliance..

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Introduction

An information audit combines "*Information"* and "*Audit"*. La Rosa (1991) defines it as a '*systematic method of exploring and analyzing where a library's various publics (users) are going strategically, and of determining the challenges and obstacles facing those publics*.

"Internal audit is an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve an organization's operation. It helps an organization accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes" (Institute of Internal Auditors,1999).

Present digital age is characterized by the exponential growth of information. Information can be our greatest asset, and simultaneously, it can also be a liability. Due to the growing amount of data in different formats at different organizations, information governance is becoming more critical. Managing information always requires a good structure. Compliance with regulatory and legal requirements and the exponential growth of information has created the need to go beyond essential control. Here emanates a demand for implementing adequately structured information governance. Information managers are responsible for the security and balance of information required and utilized by users. Lack of comprehensive and adequately organized information, especially those required to take strategic decisions, makes it difficult to identify the pitfalls and gaps. Such issues are often blocking the progress of research and development and hinders the growth of the organization as a whole. When organizing, validating, and legitimizing data assets within the library setup, such as non-traditional financial records, conducting information audits is crucial. This method clarifies who is responsible for what in an organization's data and its services and guarantees accuracy (Mane,2022).

A well-structured information audit supports training, research, acquisition of resources, upkeep and maintenance of existing data sources. It helps to evaluate risk elements and brings out timely improvements. This paper considers the purpose of information audit and its application in libraries and information centres. Libraries face several challenges while conducting a quality information audit. This paper also tries to identify such challenges and bring

out an overall picture of the benefits and outcomes of conducting an audit.

Objectives

The main objective of an information audit in Library/Information Centres is to ensure that resources are managed responsibly. It is very important to bring effective control over financial and material resources.
Following are some of the main objectives:

1. Investigate how information is generated, sought, processed, utilized, and disseminated.
2. To analyze the management of information flow?
3. To note the missing information and the areas where it is needed.
4. To appreciate the need and purpose of financial management in library and information centers
5. To study and assess the management, operational, and fiscal needs of the library
6. To compare existing policies with regulatory, legal, and organizational requirements
7. To study how efficiently ICT-related operations in libraries are proceeding.
8. To assess whether the academic community is satisfied with the overall library performance.

Significance of Information Audit

Information management is a broad concept about managing, processing, controlling, archiving and retrieving information across all dimensions of an organization. It provides a framework for compliance and governance to achieve consistency in information management **(Dong,2016).**A wide and strategic view about the volume of available information is missing in most organizations. Typically, these organizations initiate a variety of information that can be managed across its policies and platforms. They also face compliance issues that may fall under multiple business and regulatory requirements, not to mention jurisdiction. As the volume of information grows, the need for effective and consistent procedure for its control and management grow as well. Information management not only provides more efficient management of business records, but it also allows efficient knowledge sharing, and entrepreneurial adherence and opens up new avenues for finding resources (**Ayinde et.al,2017).**Italso monitors and manages the growing graph of information resources and other digital communications in the organization. It is thereby helping organizations control the growth of stagnant or outdated content. Information control or information management unifies refining information and its lifecycles within an organization. Thus, the visibility curve of the organization's information landscape increases considerably. It produces documentary evidence that can measure and manage various risk elements. When the content of a firm is managed and controlled properly, policies can be applied in a more consistent manner. Policy actions, such as approving a disposition or placing a legal hold, are recorded consistently. The organization's Governance, Risk, and Compliance (GRC) strategy will also benefit from this knowledge (Mansour Alosaimi, 2016).

Information management is a rational approach to controlling or governing information about an organization. It is the governance of individual information, which leads to the overall development and improvement of the existing system.The primary purpose of this process is to manage information for the benefit of the entire organization through the exploration, filtering, and optimization of information resources. An essential prerequisite is an evidently visible congruence between the information requested by users and the organization's objectives. As a result, it is critical to establish the precise information required to enhance the attainment of corporate goals. Information managers or professionals should examine organizational structure, culture, and policies to achieve organizational goals. Information specialists within the business manage a wide range of information activities that must be well-coordinated and integrated. Formulating a corporate information policy,designing,evaluating, and integrating effective information systems and services, exploitation of the possibilities of IT for competitive advantage, and integrating internal and external data and information, etc. are all part of such activities.(Lateef, A., & Omotayo, F. O, 2019).The term "Information Management" refers to the processes by which a company determines how to collect, store, analyze, and ultimately get rid of the data it collects. It guarantees that the information's worth is accurately assessed and fully capitalized on. As organizations recognize the value and necessity of Information Management, diverse approaches to its implementation havealso emerged. Some Information centers utilize a discrete platform that centralizes business/transaction records into one repository while others seek an elucidation that can centrally manage

all business records of the organization.A well-executed information audit contributes to a better knowledge of information and how it may be used to spark creativity and innovation. An information audit assesses an organization's current information environment and identifies gaps, duplications, resource demands, and collaboration, and information-sharing opportunities.

Roles of the Library in Managing the Information Audit

In India, the majority of libraries have their staff to manage the information acquired from various sources. The information may be presented in various formats, such as books, internet content, audio/video recordings, printed or non-printed materials, etc. Now a days most libraries, irrespective of their nature are digitalizing their resources. Reference librarians are now expected to play the role of a curator, mentors, and problem solvers. His talent consists of his ability to complete these activities and match the information demands of the users with the information accessible in the library databases.The librarian's traditional job in today's information-intensive society has become obsolete. He should be able to identify the nature of information and assist users in utilizing it in an optimal way.As an information center, the library must meet the needs of its users in a timely, accurate, and relevant manner. The quality of auditing the information provided plays a crucial role in this regard. According to (Pickett, 2005)"*an audit is a systematic examination or review for a condition or situation and an inspection of the procedures and records".*In the context of libraries, librarians need to audit the information they received by its relevance and accuracy with the user requests before providing it. ASLIB defines information audit as "*A systematic examination of information resources, flow, and use with verification by reference to both people and existing documents, in order to establish the extent to which they are contributing to an organization's objectives."*

As a vibrant information center, the library needs to cater to the requirements proactively by providing the right and significant information. The library needs to satisfy the client's enthusiasm in a more customized and timely manner as the expansion of information is happening in a manner that provokes a situation of information detonation. Users, in course of time, will find it extremely confusing to choose the exact resources they need. Information audit in the library and information system will be useful to bring out improvement and change in the present procedure. Audit with a specific objective will ensure that the results will give a quality impact on the library operations. But to have a well-coordinated audit procedure to happen a quality administration framework is needed. Such a framework will ensure the execution of properly formulated procedures and conveys better-customized information services to the patrons. It also recognizes quality work procedures, better administrative involvement, and the gathering of quality resources to complete the procedure. In LIS centers, Library and Information Professionals oversee the use and protection of information. They are accountable for balancing the needs of information users with the necessity for information to be securely stored and utilized.Along with that, they need to deal with legal and regulatory compliance issues while managing that information LIS professionals are responsible for various vital activities, including the financial administration of the library, the budgeting process, and the mobilization of funds for LIS centers. Most LIS specialists believe that their role is to be experts in information organization and comprehend how information is arranged. They choose appropriate resources for their users, give annotations, and provide descriptions to aid in locating and gaining access to the stuff they select. They are responsible for educating individuals on navigating the extensive resource holdings available on the library's website and how the material is organized within the library, which is an integral part of their job.(Rebekah Kilzer, 2012)

Why Quality auditing as a tool for Quality improvement in LIS Centres?

According to the ISO Standard 11620 Performance Indicators for Libraries, quality means the *"Totality of features and characteristics of a product or services that bear on the library's ability to satisfy stated or implied needs".* Hence the quality assessment depends not only on the product or service as it is but also on the person or institution involved in the assessment process. Auditing services and resources is a method that can be used to show how LIS centers have improved in quality. Further, it is essential to audit the company's workforce's efficiency, output, and effect. There are several countries whose higher education systems include quality audits. The Quality Management System is tested in an audit for flaws and defects (QMS).To conduct an audit, evidence is systematically gathered

in a planned manner. Before presenting their findings and conclusions in the audit report, auditors must first compare this evidence with the criteria established by the quality system. The report's focus should be on both problem areas and successful strategies. Before an external audit, internal audits are used to make sure the quality management process is still functioning correctly. Improving library operations is the true aim of performing internal audits. Frequent internal audits will allow you to concentrate on each service provided by the library and how it might be enhanced. There is a strong tendency for internal auditors to be employees of the same company or organization being audited. As a result, they can examine the audited library from a user's perspective and have a fundamental knowledge of organizational culture. Therefore, internal audits typically provide more in-depth input, which aids in service enhancement.(Nuria Balague, 2014)The external audit typically focuses on the overall quality management system, so the comments are more general and include information about the parent institution's connection with its library. The quality manual reports and publishes all audit results. The reports are always utilized in subsequent audits to ensure that the library has followed the suggestions. One of the challenges of developing an audit program is ensuring that it embraces the company's culture as a tool for reviewing and enhancing quality instead of only serving as a vehicle for repetitive performance control.This is one of the most difficult challenges because, in order to have an effective quality system in general and audits in particular, obstacles such as administrative constraints, tradition, poor communication, a lack of a training programme, or a lack of vision about the organizational goals must be overcome. Libraries, as providers of information services to their user communities, must demonstrate accountability and values and support institutional strategies. Thus, academic libraries prioritizing quality may and should conduct quality audits to assure beneficial outcomes. This needs a comprehensive review of the Information Management System.

Consolidating audit reports is one of the most challenging aspects of a quality management system. A verbal audit entails examining or examining to verify. An audit is a systematic investigation or evaluation of a condition or situation and an inspection of methods and records.(Pickett, 2005).Even though many of the tasks and processes done in libraries are similar, each organization is different, and tasks are done in different ways. So, the audit's effectiveness is directly related to how well it considers how each library is different. For example, the library can focus on how to implement the quality system in its way. Information audits should be done in a collaborative and diplomatic way. The information received should meet the requirements of the corporate body. IA shouldidentify, catalog, and preferably categorize information properly. At all levels, we need to check for compliance by scrutinizing the various legal constraints. Legal constraints include information legislation, freedom of information, data protection legislation, privacy legislation, and information security standards.

Information audit process

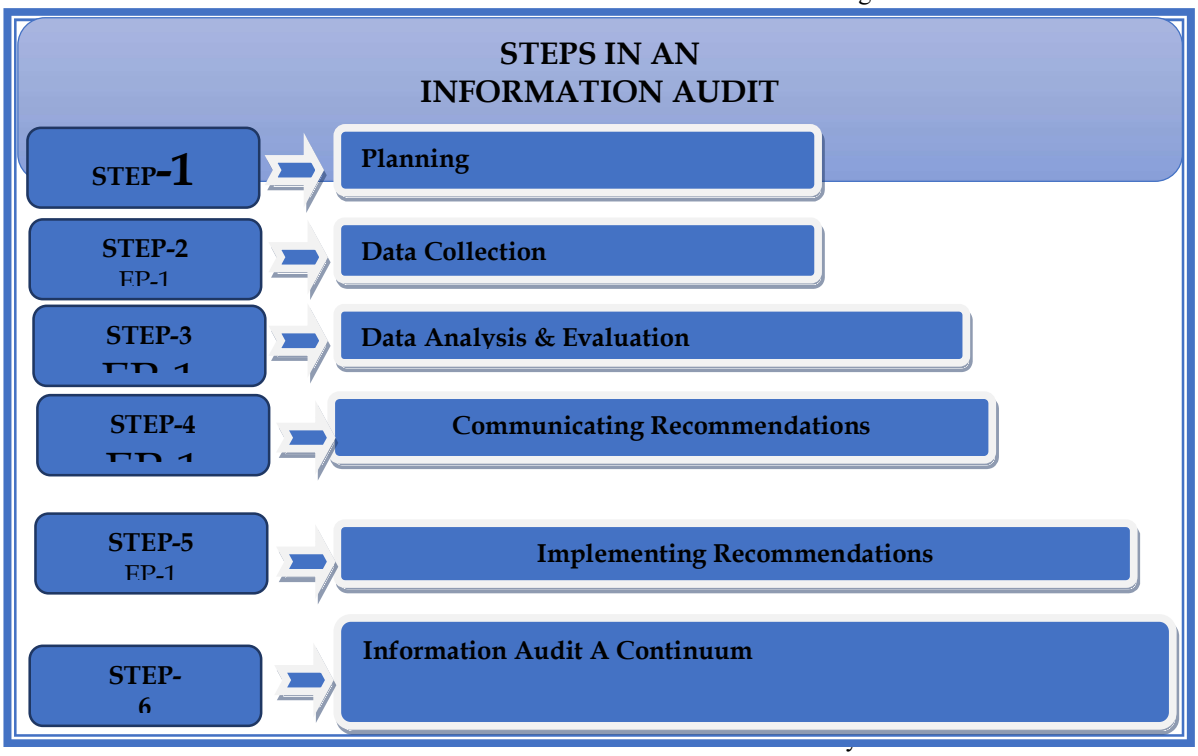
There is no set guidelines or rules about the methods to be followed in an information audit process. According to the organizational structure, nature, and state of affairs,a suitable model is to be selected to conduct the audit. A thorough understanding of the functions of the organization is a prerequisite to carrying out the objective. Organizational structure, the flow of information, channels of communication, interpersonal relationships, political and communication issues, etc. are to be taken into consideration while planning for the audit. The model suggested by Henczel (2001) could be taken as a basic skeletal model upon which the information audit can be planned. Audits of the library's information should be undertaken by individuals with similar backgrounds so that the auditing process is more efficient and produces quality output. This is also essential to ensure that the audit results will positively influence the library's operations. To conduct a quality audit in libraries, an exceptional Quality Management System is necessary.

In order to define roles and responsibilities, this system must outline criteria for evaluating policy and goal quality. It is also about figuring out how things will get done, what tools and personnel will be needed, and outlining what kinds of products and services will be offered. The system must fix mechanisms for supervision, control, prevention, correction, and ongoing improvement. Altogether the intention is to promote a quality culture among the staff by complying with the standards prescribed. The QMS shall determine risks as a basis of planning and apply risk-based thinking to find new opportunities for development. The importance of quality is now well acknowledged. It helps adapt to the ever-shifting demands of a consumer base. They should adhere to the ISO 9001 standards used by most libraries

throughout the world for the past few years to conduct audits effectively. ISO standards have been widely adopted and proven in organizations, which could bring many benefits and deserved credit to our collection. In brief, to foster a quality culture, the audit activity must center on the institution's clearly articulated aim and mission, strong leadership and management, and genuine commitment. Setting a specific and well-defined goal before the audit activity can help the library management process advance and improve.

An overall **step-by-step procedure** in an information audit is conveyed using the below-given diagram. As shown in it, the information audit process is a continuum that is repeated over and again to bring out timely improvements in the system.

Figure 1 illustrates the steps in an Information Audit



Steps involved in Information Audit

The most important prerequisite for a successful audit is having the necessary records readily available. This requires an effective accounting system. These records are needed to answer important questions such as:

- ✓ Is the library handling its resources cost-effectively and efficiently?
- ✓ Is the library operating in compliance with theprescribed rules, regulations and laws?
- ✓ Is the library meeting its fiscal objectives?

Necessary steps to be taken before Information Audit are:

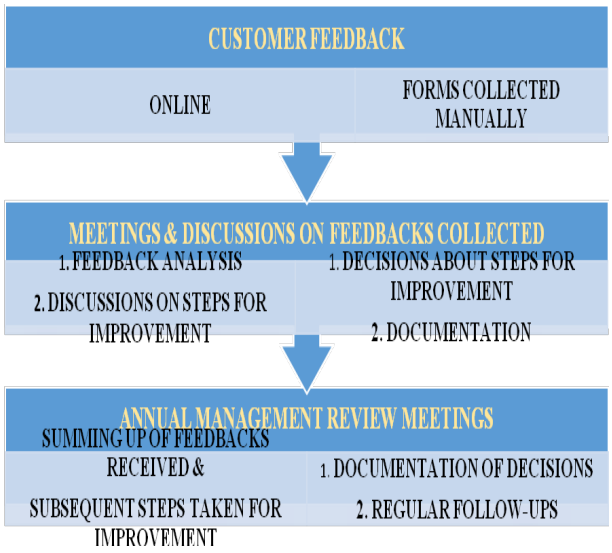
Determine what information is presently available in LIS centres

(a) Determine the LIS centres' actual and potential drains, sources, defects, and limits. This may include administrative considerations that impact how LIS centres operate.

(b) Identify and locate explicit and tacit knowledge in the LIS centres.

(c) Create an information map of the company and determine the flow of knowledge inside it. The information

(e) Feedback forms needs to be collected annually from customers to know their requirements and assessment about the system. Such forms are integral part of a system which values customer satisfaction.



(1) Identify what information is missing in the targeted area
   (a) Perform a gap analysis to determine what information is missing to achieving the desired goals.
   (b) Determine who needs the missing information.

(2) Provide recommendations of the information audit to the authority for bringing out further improvements in the information management activities of LIS centers***(Jay Liebowitz 2000)***

We must remember that an audit allows the LIS professionals to review how the organization's accounts are kept. As such, an audit is an important tool for management accountability.

Challenges before LIS professionals to conduct Information Audit

An audit should be able to look at how well and efficiently TQM works in the library as a whole. A good audit plan is essential for the audit to go well at each level. Such a plan is like a strong foundation to carry out an effective audit. Some of the major obstacles to establishing a strong internal auditing program are given below:

- Lack of proper training programs, a deficit of specialized staff, and weak organizational practices in the system
- Lack of motivation among staff and low incentives given
- Along with a proper plan a well-maintained document system is also necessary for carrying out the audit efficiently.
- Identification of risk elements is another challenge faced by both the auditee and auditors.
- A good audit must ensure to tailor all the risk elements that hinder the growth opportunities.
- Library or information centers need to organize the information sources properly. Otherwise, the auditors will find it difficult to carry out the proceedings smoothly.
- The lack of coordination and proper communication is another factor that blocks the smooth conduct of information audits.
- A proper acquisition policy and weeding out policy are also very relevant in the context of an audit. Libraries need to maintain well-defined procedures for such important areas.
- Completion of reviews and the entire audit process within the scheduled time frame is another major challenge. Timely documentation helps the audit procedures to be conducted within the time frame. It helps to avoid unnecessary questions and misunderstandings that may delay the audit.
- Issuing the audit report after completing proper reviews is very essential to carry out the improvements or corrective actions suggested. Here also good documentation is required to improve subsequent audits.

Proper documentation of the audit results helps to give a better understanding of the limitations of the information system. It helps to formulate solid plans for the progress of research, the information needed for carrying out the improvements suggested, and what's ahead in their plan of action. Moreover, with the availability of a cohesive set of working papers and the subsequent audits, less likely would suggest redoing work already performed in the field or making follow-up requests to organizations.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Further research in library science should focus on thoroughly investigating and comparing different information audit models that may be applied to libraries and information centers. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the efficacy of

various models in various organizational circumstances would offer significant insights for professionals. Furthermore, it is imperative to examine the incorporation of cutting-edge technologies, such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data analytics, into the information audit procedure to improve effectiveness and precision. Investigating the potential utilization of these technologies to optimize the transmission of information and enhance decision-making procedures in libraries may be a promising opportunity.

Ensuring user satisfaction is a vital component of library services, and additional research might concentrate on comprehending the influence of information audits on user satisfaction. Gathering user feedback to assess preferences and expectations would enhance the adoption of a user-centric strategy in library management. Furthermore, it is necessary to analyze risk management in the information audit process thoroughly. To maintain the long-term sustainability of information services, it is essential to study strategies for recognizing, assessing, and managing risks that could impede the growth of libraries.

Exploring information management strategies in libraries globally is another potential route to consider. Conducting comparative research across various countries and regions could reveal the impact of cultural and regulatory disparities on information audit procedures. Moreover, it is essential to consider the influence of training programs on information professionals working in libraries. Evaluating the impact of enhanced expertise and understanding on the efficiency of information audits and the overall performance of libraries is crucial for ongoing professional growth.

Future research could explore how libraries can ensure compliance with evolving legal and regulatory standards in information management and mitigate legal risks. It is also relevant to investigate cooperative methods and the exchange of information among libraries. Gaining insight into the possible advantages of a networked approach to information management could result in improved service quality and more efficient use of resources. Conducting longitudinal studies to monitor the effects of information audits on library performance would provide significant insights into the efficacy of audit recommendations.

Furthermore, examining case studies of libraries that have effectively executed information audits can offer practical insights and exemplary methods for others in the same profession. Examining the characteristics that lead to success and the difficulties encountered during the implementation process would enhance our understanding of how information audits facilitate ongoing enhancements in library and information science. Collectively, these research topics contribute to the continuous growth and improvement of library information management strategies.

Limitations:

- While addressing risk, organizations must be able to proactively meet the legal and administrative requirements regarding their records and procedures. It may add to the challenge that these requirements are constantly evolving. The organization must be responsive to such changes in a positive manner. Otherwise, requirements like information retention, need-to-know practices, etc will be affected adversely. A company unable to adhere to any of these requirements could face potential risks in the form of penalties, fines, or other legal impositions or damage to the business.
- Auditing of LIS centers, based on user logs of databases may not provide sufficient information to determine whether the databases are actually relevant or useful. Information audit conducted by non-subject experts could be ineffective in generating the desired results. Such auditors may not be able to suggest improvements and corrective actions beneficial to the information center. The audit results in such cases will fail to give a quality impact on the library process.
- A quality administrative framework is very much essential to aggregate, architect, direct and regulate legitimate and timely information services to patrons. Such a mastermind authority only could ensure the execution of a well-defined and quality information audit in libraries and information centers.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the information audit process plays a vital role in enhancing library performance, making it an essential and indispensable step for libraries and information centers in the constantly changing realm

of information management. As organizations face the complexities of handling and sharing large amounts of information, an information audit becomes a valuable tool for improving library services' quality, effectiveness, and dependability. As discussed in this overview, the objectives of an information audit highlight its importance in examining the complete range of information generation, processing, utilization, and dissemination. Through the analysis of information flow, identification of gaps, and evaluation of user satisfaction, libraries can optimize their operations, align them with organizational objectives, and cater to the changing needs of users in a rapidly evolving information landscape. The significance of information management, as emphasized, cannot be emphasized enough. It establishes a structure for compliance and governance, guaranteeing uniformity in information management. Efficient management of information enhances business record keeping and promotes knowledge sharing, adherence to entrepreneurial principles, and the exploration of new resources. The importance of managing information effectively in an organization cannot be overstated. Organizations can achieve greater visibility and improve their governance, risk, and compliance strategies by unifying and refining information lifecycles.

The contributions of libraries in overseeing information audits are crucial for promoting responsible resource management. As libraries adapt to the digital age, librarians have transformed into curators, mentors, and problem solvers. They now play a crucial role in meeting user demands efficiently and precisely. According to ASLIB, an information audit involves a thorough analysis of resources, their flow, and usage to ensure they align with organizational goals. Nevertheless, this transformation poses certain difficulties. Libraries and information professionals encounter challenges that impede the smooth implementation of information audits, including inadequate training, lack of motivation, and coordination issues. Thorough documentation becomes essential in addressing these challenges, establishing a basis for effectively coordinated audit procedures. The ever-changing legal and administrative requirements and the need for subject expertise highlight the importance of information audits. This emphasizes the need for a robust administrative framework to ensure quality. It is highly recommended to conduct additional research on various information audit models, incorporate advanced technologies, and prioritize a user-centric approach to library management. Highlighting risk management and examining strategies for global information management are suggested areas for future research.

Ultimately, enhancing library performance through information audit is not merely a procedural task, but rather a crucial strategic necessity. It improves the quality of information, aligns library processes with standards, and strives for continual improvement to ensure customer satisfaction. As organizations aim to achieve global information governance, the information audit serves as a guiding light, leading libraries towards effective and efficient information management, ultimately contributing to the growth and improvement of library and information science.

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