

SENIOR FELLOWS AND FRIENDS

Alert. Relaxed. Collegial.



Recap of 1/30/25 conversation with Patricia L. Eng, P.E., on ISO 30401 - Knowledge Management

Dear Senior Fellows and Friends,

There are some world class experts in this network, every one of whom will engage in sincere conversation in our forum for the common good. The thing I love most about them is that they choose (or they chose long ago) to be fully present and not get hung up on their own importance. C.S. Lewis's statement that "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less" characterized everyone who showed up on Thursday night. That made for an absorbing, enjoyable event.

Patricia Eng, who thought this might be a really dry conversation but came anyway, may have been a little surprised that it was not dry at all. As she talked through a handful of [slides](#) she brought along, fielding questions as she went, we began making connections with our own professional experiences in public health, student financial aid, and the Coast Guard. That led to stories that made us all just a little smarter by the end.

"ISO" stands for "International Organization for Standardization." It's a non-governmental, consensus-based organization that has been operating since 1946. The vast majority of countries have chosen to be full members – as the world map on slide 8 shows – perhaps because, according to ISO, ISO standards provide a formula that describes the best way of doing something, are consensus based, and are internationally agreed by experts.

The process (“long, convoluted, inclusive”) for developing a new standard is explained in the slides. Adoption of a new standard is slow until competition kicks in after the first few organizations adopt it.

The three most “famous” ISO standards are:

- ISO 9001: Quality Management Systems
- ISO 27001: Information Security Management
- ISO 45000: Occupational Health and Safety

A standard for AI is in process, and ISO’s web site includes a press release issued in Davos last month about a joint initiative of ISO, IEC and ITU, to take place December 2-3 in Seoul, to answer the call to action for an AI summit outlined in the UN’s recently published report, “Governing AI for Humanity.”

Patricia is the first certified auditor of ISO 30401 Knowledge Management Systems, the standard issued in 2018, which promotes and enables value creation through knowledge. She is also certified in ISO 9001 Quality Management Systems and says the two are inextricably linked. She is the only person who is certifying other auditors of ISO 30401 yet.

Note the inclusion of Leadership on slide 11. Patricia’s comment was, “Stuff gets lost when companies change heads.” Many of us have experienced the awful reality of that statement, which could apply to any organization. Patricia illustrated the huge cost of not establishing reliable knowledge management by relating historical examples from Cadbury and NASA:

- Cadbury, when huge batches of licorice had to be thrown out repeatedly because it wouldn’t harden. Hard-won proprietary knowledge involving a microorganism and heat was lost.
- NASA, when the “recipe” for the reentry capsule heat shield that worked so well during the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo missions was lost between the end of Apollo and the beginning of Artemis.

[Her bio](#) describes the breadth and scale of inspection and evaluation work she did before creating and managing the Knowledge Management Program at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which saved almost 60 million dollars in operational costs in its first two years. (Although the latter was out of scope for this session and did not come up, Patricia tells the story during a [conversation](#) on boundary spanning we recorded in 2021.)

Patricia took pains to explain that an organization does not have to do things the same way any other organization is doing them in order to be certified; in fact, that might not even make sense. A huge organization or a tiny one seeking ISO certification can show that its processes satisfy the requirements defined by

international consensus. ISO defines what, not how. “You don’t have to adopt the standards, but if you do, your peers will know that you meet those requirements.”

In addition to serving as a program health check, one of the things that doing ISO accomplishes is that it makes the organization think about what it values. That reminded our former Coast Guard innovator of the Baldrige Award, his experience with which led him to see similarities.

Participant affiliations

ASPA National Capital Area Chapter
KM/HR Systems Auditors
U.S. Department of Education, Retired
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission

People joined from the DC/MD/VA Metro Area, New York City, and Colorado Springs, CO.

Each time, we begin with a round of introductions to warm up the space. Afterward, participants are sent a “Who was in the room” message to facilitate ongoing connection. Please consider joining us in the future.

Sincerely,
Kitty Wooley

