



ISSUE ANALYSIS AND DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

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FOREWORD

Issue Analysis/Drawing Conclusions¹ (IADC) is a tool that can be applied at two key stages within the performance audit process, aimed at optimising the way that the audit is defined (IA) and reported (DC). The IA and DC sessions are an obligation in the European Court Auditors and are part of the Enhanced Quality Control Review (EQCR) process.

The Court's Performance Audit Manual (PAM), at section 3.3.1, sets out the need to define audit questions and sub-questions in a pyramid structure, which is consistent with standard issue analysis practice. Guidance on how to develop a robust, well-structured set of audit questions is in the audit guideline, "Developing the audit objectives".

The aim of this document is to:

- set out, in broad terms, what IADC is all about;
- provide practical guidance on applying the concepts of Issue Analysis and Drawing Conclusions.

List of related documents

Performance Audit Manual (PAM)
Audit Guideline – Developing the audit objectives

Whom to contact

If you feel that the information provided in this document could be improved, please do not hesitate to communicate your suggestions: ECA-AMS.CONTACT@eca.europa.eu.

¹ In the UK NAO, drawing conclusions is known as dinner party (DP), but it is the same thing.

SECTION 1: WHAT IS IADC?

The audit questions

For performance audits, the audit objectives are set out in the form of audit questions that the audit intends to answer or conclude against. All evidence gathering and data evaluation commences with the audit questions and the audit ends when the auditor has enough reliable and relevant evidence to conclude on the audit objectives. When planning a performance audit, it is vital to ensure that the questions are the correct ones. Posing questions incorrectly or asking the wrong questions will inevitably lead to audits going in the wrong direction, while posing imprecise questions may provide no direction at all. Posing the right questions can save many hours (or days) of collecting and analysing a large amount of data that ultimately prove to be unusable.

Issue analysis takes place after initial preliminary study work has been carried out², but before the Audit Planning Memorandum (APM) is developed. The audit questions and sub-questions determine the scope of the audit, and the fieldwork that needs to be done. All audit work should be planned and undertaken with the sole aim of answering the overall audit question.

The audit conclusions

Drawing conclusions takes place when the fieldwork has concluded but before any report drafting has started; it is a method for arriving at the key messages to be included in the audit report, and the reporting structure for those messages.

IADC is ...

Both IA and DC are designed to lead to specific **outputs**: structured hierarchies of audit questions and of audit conclusions. While IADC has the potential for some “softer” benefits in terms of greater team ownership of the direction of the audit, auditors should not lose sight of the over-riding importance of achieving high quality outputs.

... more than meetings

The successful application of IADC is generally allied to an inclusive approach, with meetings at its heart. It is wrong to think, however, that IA and DC are no more than meetings. There is no point in investing time and effort into IA and DC meetings, if audit teams do not do justice to the preparatory work needed beforehand, and the consolidation work needed afterwards. Ultimately the success of IADC for an audit is measured by the quality of the outputs, not by the quality of a couple of meetings.

IA and DC are independent of each other: it is possible to do one without the other in a single audit. However, IA and DC are entirely complementary, sharing a number of theoretical and practical principles. There are therefore many advantages in applying both IA and DC to an audit.

² Depending on the preferences of the reporting member and Chamber concerned, issue analysis can be done before or after preparation of the preliminary study report. The key thing is that it is done before the APM is prepared.

SECTION 2: ISSUE ANALYSIS

Pyramid of questions

The overall *audit question* should be broken down into sub-questions, which are in turn broken down into sub-sub-questions. Usually, there are four such levels, from the audit question (Level 1) down to the detailed questions which are answered by carrying out *specific audit procedures* (Level 4); the latter form the basis for the *sources of evidence*, as set out in the APM's Evidence Collection Plan (ECP).

Breaking down each audit question will form a pyramid. This helps to impose a logical disciplined pattern on one's thinking and to ensure that all aspects of a question or sub-question are considered.

The pyramid approach to grouping ideas underpins IADC. The existing audit Guideline referred to above helpfully sets out the main elements of the pyramid approach as they apply to IA – see the box below. The same principles apply when constructing a pyramid of assertion at the DC stage (more details are in the next section).

Principles of IA

- A logical structure of audit questions, from the main question down to lower level questions and hence audit procedures and evidence sources – see, for example, the chart on page 2 of the Guideline – developing the audit questions;
- The rules governing the question hierarchy: any group of sub-questions should number between 2 and 5, and should obey the MECE principles – that is, they should be mutually exclusive (with *no overlaps*), and collectively exhaustive (sufficient to answer the higher level question, with nothing omitted: *no gaps*) - pages 6-7 of the Guideline; and
- The advantages of using established logical principles - order, structure and class - to group questions in a logically-sound way - pages 7-10 of the Guideline.

The Guideline provides a number of examples, including a fully-developed one on page 13, the top two levels of which are:

L1: Is the Commission managing the devolution process successfully?

L2: Have delegations been well prepared for devolved management?

Have central services been well prepared for devolved management?

Does the Commission have effective procedures for monitoring performance of devolved management?

And so on, down to level four.

SECTION 3: DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

Same principles as issue analysis but based on evaluative statements

As stated above, at the drawing conclusions stage of an audit, the focus of a DC is not audit questions, but conclusions. For an IA, the pyramid of questions supports the overall audit question; for a DC, the pyramid of conclusions supports the overall conclusion of the audit. The raw material of the DC process is therefore assertions³, or evaluative statements, derived from the audit evidence. These are complete sentences which give the Court's considered opinion about something – a judgement or a conclusion. See the box below.

Audit findings result from comparing the evidence against a criterion and describe the impact and, when deficiencies are identified, the cause. These audit findings are the source information for the assertions developed at a DC.

Evaluative statements

- i. "The Commission's structure" – is not an assertion, but a label; it tells you what's inside (like the label on a pot of jam), but no more.
- ii. "The Commission's structure has 82 hierarchical levels" – is an assertion, but is not evaluative; it doesn't say whether having 82 levels is a good thing or a bad thing. (We might suspect, but the assertion doesn't spell it out for the reader.)
- iii. "The Commission's structure has too many levels in the hierarchy" – is an evaluative assertion; the Court is making a judgement about the situation ("too many") – but, perhaps, the statement in isolation is not that helpful to the reader.
- iv. "The Commission's structure is unnecessarily complex and hinders effective decision-making" – provides further information still, and explains what the consequence is of the flaws in Commission structure.

Number (iv) is the most helpful to the reader and is therefore perhaps the best. It is also, however, the longest; there is frequently a tension between clarity and length.

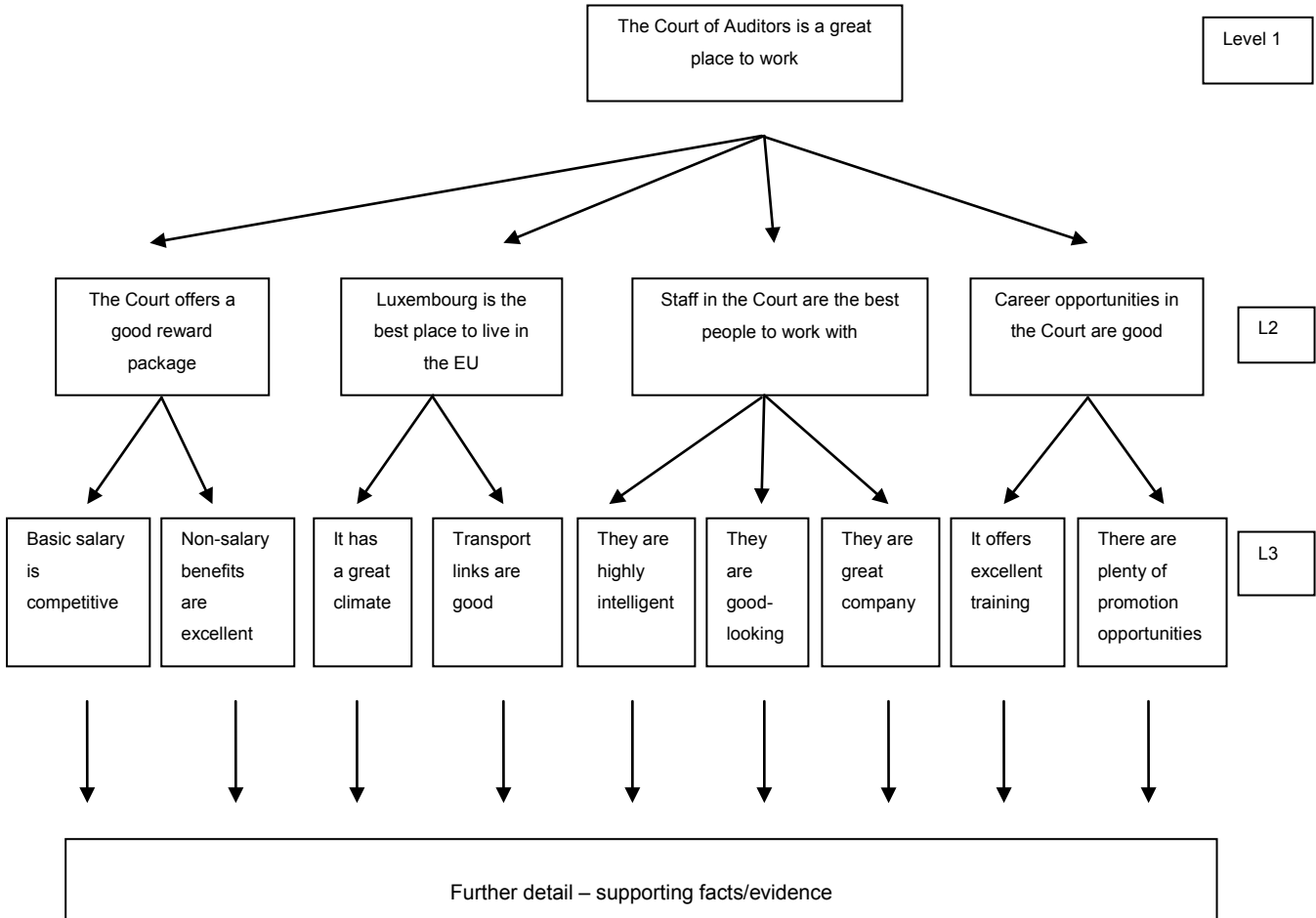
An example output

A simple example of an output - obviously fictitious - from a DC is shown below. At every level in the pyramid, the sub-assertions effectively provide the criteria for the assertion at the level above. For example, the highest level (L1) assertion about working at the Court is justified on the basis of the four criteria on which judgements are made at the next level down, L2: the quality of the reward package, Luxembourg as a place to live, colleagues and career progression. The last of these conclusions, about career progression, is justified in terms of two criteria, training and promotion opportunities - and so on.

³ An assertion is defined by the on-line version of the Oxford English Dictionary as "a confident and forceful statement".

Example of a DC pyramid

We examined whether the Court of Auditors was a good place to work. We concluded that:



Note that in this example, all the assertions point one way. In real life, audit evidence tends to be more mixed: typically we find that the Commission did some things well, and some things not so well. See also the caveat in the box on page 10.

In practice, it is often difficult to capture many levels of the hierarchy in a pyramid format (level 3 headings from real audits tend to be more complicated, with more words, than the example given here). A more common way of recording the output of a DC – the outline report – is using indents to show the hierarchy, as below.

An outline report

Overall conclusion: The Court of Auditors is a great place to work (Level 1)

1. The Court offers a good reward package (L2)
 - 1.1 The basic salary is competitive (L3)
 - 1.2 Non-salary benefits are excellent (L3)
2. Luxembourg is the best place to live in the EU (L2)
 - 2.1 It has a great climate (L3 etc.)
 - 2.2 Transport links are good
3. Staff in the Court are the best people to work with
 - 3.1 They are highly intelligent
 - 3.2 They are good-looking
 - 3.3 They are great company
4. Career opportunities in the Court are good
 - 4.1 It offers excellent training
 - 4.2 There are plenty of promotion opportunities

In the example, at the topmost level in the pyramid the assertions are evaluative statements, as described above. At lower levels in the pyramid, they will tend to take the form of more simple statements of fact. For example, the assertion that “Luxembourg has a good climate”(!) is a judgement; underpinning that conclusion should be hard, factual evidence collected by the auditor – comparative data on average temperature, rainfall and hours of sunshine, for example. The focus of the DC process is converting factual evidence into judgements and conclusions – typically about how well the Commission did something.

What to include

There are no strict rules about what should be included in an outline report. In terms of the number of levels to be included, the three levels shown in the example represent a minimum; in practice it is generally helpful to go down at least one more level – to provide evidence, for example, for the assertion that staff in the Court is good-looking (point 3.2).

How low do you need to go?

It is perfectly acceptable to develop more levels in the hierarchy in some places than others, depending on the nature of the subject matter. In the example, for instance, perhaps it is very easy to justify the assertion at 2.2 (that transport links are good), with only one further level of argumentation. But the assertion at 3.3 (that Court staff are great company) may need a greater degree of justification, and may benefit from more than one further level of evidence. As a rough principle, as soon as you get down to a level where the assertions are relatively uncontroversial statements of fact - that do not need any further supporting evidence - you can stop.

One of the advantages of the outline report is that the high level assertions developed through the DC process can subsequently be used as headings within the full report. In the example above, the overall heading for the first part of the observations would be “The Court offers a good reward package”, with the first sub-heading in that part being “Basic salary is competitive”, and so on. “Speaking headings” of this sort are well established in the Court, and are very helpful signposts for the reader in understanding the argument the Court is advancing: they enable the reader to understand what the Court is saying merely from looking at the report’s contents page. In addition, the overall, level 1, conclusion, and the level 2 conclusions/headings, provide a very convenient starting point for drafting the press release.

Depending on its audience, an outline report might also include some introductory material – but only the minimum needed for the non-expert reader to understand the observations to come. One way of doing this, set out in the Guideline (at page 6) in the context of issue analysis, is to present the “Situation–Complication–Question. An outline report might also include suggested recommendations, as these should flow naturally from the main conclusions identified through the DC process.

Why it’s important

An outline report is a very important document in the life of an audit. It sets the template for the ultimate product, the published report. For that reason, audit teams need to ensure that the outline report is not rushed, but is supported by the audit evidence, represents the most important conclusions arising from the audit, and presents those conclusions in a logically-convincing structure.

Matters of structure

One of the primary aims of a DC is to determine the best structure for the report. It follows that, while the audit questions set out in the audit planning document (Audit planning Memorandum or APMs) **might** provide a good structure for the final report, **they need not do so**. Having, say, four questions to be answered in an APM does not automatically mean that the observations section of the final report need have four parts, dealing with each question.

The main reason why audit teams should be prepared to use an alternative reporting structure is that audit questions and reports are different things, serving different purposes. Audit questions are formulated at the start of the audit on necessarily limited information. When the audit has been carried out, audit teams have much fuller knowledge of the subject matter. What seemed like an important question at the outset, once investigated, may not result in compelling findings. Conversely, when reviewing the evidence collected, auditors may take the view that a particular issue warrants a higher profile in the final report. And while audit questions will be very familiar to the audit team – and even to the Commission – they are unknown to the wider readership of our reports. See also the box below.

The questions in the planning phase and the report

Auditors carry out the audit to answer the APM questions. The DC process, which takes place after the audit work is complete, is only concerned with how best to present the results of the audit in the published report, determining the structure of the report according to the most effective, compelling way of conveying the messages to the reader. If the report adopts a different structure from the one the auditee is familiar with, in the interests of “no surprises”⁴, the auditee should be informed in advance. One option – which has been used successfully by some audit teams – is to discuss the outline report with the auditee; any feedback received can then be taken into account, as appropriate, when drafting the full report.

⁴ “No surprises approach” in the Court of Auditors means a continuous dialogue and mutual understanding between auditors and auditee personnel. This is essential in order to gain acceptance for the conclusions and recommendations in the audit report.

Benefits of the DC approach

There are a number of potential benefits from using the DC approach, leading to an outline report.

- It is designed to help audit teams crystallise the most important conclusions from an audit and to structure the audit report around them. This approach should help audit reports achieve more impact – in line with one of the Court’s two main priority goals of its strategy for 2009-2012 (see also the box below);

The dinner party concept

In the UK NAO, the DC is termed the “dinner party”. The idea is that you are talking – at a dinner party, or it could be in the local pub – to someone you don’t know very well. They ask about your work, and you tell them you have just finished an audit of XYZ. “How interesting”, they say, “what did you find?” At this point, if you are to hold their attention, you do not say: “well, the relevant EU regulation was ABC, and the methodology we adopted was to carry out six on-the-spot audit visits to member states, supplemented by a questionnaire to project promoters” and so on. You do not have time to say that much, so you must say the most important thing about the audit: the overall conclusion – the level 1 conclusion (“The Court is a great place to work”). If, then, your companion still appears to be interested, he/she may ask, “why did you conclude that?” In response, you can then give your supporting, level 2 conclusions (this was because of the reward package, colleagues, climate etc.) Again, in the (slightly unlikely) event that you are questioned about one of these level 2 assertions, you will have the supporting justification to hand. If the logic underpinning your pyramid is sound, your new friend will have no difficulty in agreeing with your argument.

The drawing conclusions/dinner party approach replicates – and derives its impact from – the thinking that takes place in the sort of conversation outlined above. Traditional reporting techniques often use a “funnel principle”, starting with a wide range of points and narrowing down to a key message. A DC turns this on its head, starting with the overall message and opening out to develop the supporting messages. This is also how journalists – who are in the business of maximising impact – operate; the overall heading gives the key message of an article, expanded on in the first paragraph, and gradually including more detail as the article goes on. We are not journalists, of course, but we can learn from how journalists present their material.

- It provides a framework for ensuring that the main internal stakeholders in an audit are involved in the process of forming the conclusions and structuring the report. This should help to avoid the dispiriting process whereby a report is redrafted a number of times, with decreasing levels of involvement and ownership on the part of the auditors who actually carried out the audit work.
- The outline report, as well as providing the speaking headings for the full report, is a short, easy-to-read document. As a result, if any changes need to be made to either the messages in or the structure of the outline report, it is relatively easy to do so – unlike amending a full, 40-page report.
- The initial drafting process itself, often something that team leaders and others can struggle with, is potentially made easier. The outline report provides the messages and a ready-made structure, which then “only” needs to be developed into a full report.

SECTION 4: THE IA AND DC PROCESS(ES)

Experience has shown that audit teams are likely to achieve better quality outputs – a question hierarchy from an IA, and an outline report from a DC – if they adopt an open, inclusive approach, involving a wide range of stakeholders. One auditor sitting in his/her office and attempting to come up with a good question hierarchy or outline report, and then submitting it to their manager for review and so on, is not necessarily the best way to make progress. Discussing possibilities provides an opportunity for creative dialectic about question structures and conclusions - and having key stakeholders involved helps to secure their buy-in to the final product.

The IA or DC session

In practice, audit teams may designate a single meeting as “the IA session” or its DC equivalent, when they discuss the audit with these wider stakeholders. Audit teams should consider the following factors:

- How long to allow? Half a day – 2.5-3.5 hours – should enable the team to make good progress. But see also the penultimate bullet point below; teams should not expect the entire process to be completed in a single session.
- Who to invite? We recommend that invitees should always include the audit team, including the Head of Unit; the Director or a representative; and the Reporting Member, or a representative (i.e. from the Member’s office). Audit teams might also consider inviting any others who, they think, might be able to make valuable contributions.
- How to run the meeting? These kinds of meetings run best if they are facilitated by someone who does not have a stake in the audit, but who has a very thorough understanding of IADC principles and sufficient experience to help the meeting achieve its goals. Appendix 2 gives some suggestions as to how to facilitate an IA or DC meeting.

Do not worry too much about precise wording

Sometimes sessions can get stuck in discussions of how to phrase a particular question or conclusion. In these situations, it may be best to run with crude wording formulations, which can then be polished after the meeting. The key is to ensure that there is agreement as to the meaning, or principle, even if session participants are struggling to locate exactly the best way of saying something.

- When to hold the session? This is ultimately a matter of judgement, particularly for the issue analysis. As a principle, the issue analysis should take place when the audit team knows enough about the subject matter to have an informed discussion of the possible audit questions. The drawing conclusions session should be held when the bulk of the fieldwork has been completed. While it is important to take account of the auditee’s replies before drafting the report, to avoid unnecessary delay audit teams need not wait until *all* replies from the auditee before embarking on a drawing conclusions process.
- What should be the output of a meeting? Be realistic as to how much can be achieved in a single IA or DC meeting. Consensus on the overall question/conclusion, and the level beneath that – i.e. levels 1 and 2 – would generally be a good conclusion. Sometimes meetings do not achieve that much, perhaps because discussions concentrate on attempting to resolve difficult, knotty issues. This need not, though, represent failure: one of the main points of IADC is that difficult issues are tackled sooner in the process than later. But it may point to the need to reconvene that particular meeting.

- How to prepare for the meeting? Again, there are no strict rules here. For IAs (to echo the point made above about timing), the key is to ensure that participants in the meeting have enough knowledge to contribute effectively. By the time the audit has progressed to a DC, the audit team will have amassed considerable material, far more than could be assimilated by someone who had not been closely involved with the audit. The trick, again, is to present sufficient, summarised information in such a way that enables those attending the meeting to participate effectively, without overwhelming them with information. Summaries of key audit observations are likely to be suitable.

Prepare and consolidate

In some ways, the most important element of a successful IA or DC process is the hard work done in the audit team before and after the main, set-piece meeting. Audit teams should not assume that arranging a meeting is all they have to do in order to come to a good question hierarchy or outline report. There is no magical process of alchemy by which holding a meeting solves all the normal difficulties of an audit. The success of the IADC process depends to a large part on the quality of the work done before and after the relevant sessions.

Before a session, therefore, the audit team should have thought hard about what they see as the potential avenues for questioning (IA), or possible conclusions (DC). In preparation for a DC, for example, the audit team might find it useful to sit down together and come up with the 10 or 20 most important conclusions – based on the most significant audit findings, without worrying about any structural issues – which they feel should figure in the final report. The meeting can then be used as an opportunity for all those participating in the DC – such as representatives of the Reporting Member and Directorate (or the Reporting Member and Director themselves, perhaps) – to challenge the suggestions put forward by the audit team. Similarly, it is almost impossible for a single meeting to conclude with a fully-developed question hierarchy or conclusion hierarchy. The onus will then be on the audit team to develop the conclusions reached in the meeting further – to prepare a full question/conclusion hierarchy, with all necessary levels present. Teams should check that the fully-developed hierarchy corresponds to the expectations of the session participants, particularly if changes have been made.

Be flexible

Just because something is written on a flipchart and agreed at an IADC meeting, it should not be regarded as being set in stone and not possible to change. On occasions, such meetings can be subject to mild forms of “groupthink”; particularly in DC meetings, those attending can become attracted to a plausible type of conclusion, but one which is not actually supported by the audit evidence. One of the main objectives of post-DC work in developing a full outline report is to guard against this risk. This is why outline reports should be developed down to levels in the pyramid which are more fact-based, than opinion-based.

SECTION 5: FINAL REMARKS

IADC is about applying structured, rigorous, logical thinking at two key stages of a performance audit. It can be hard work: the nature of our audits means that the subject matter is often messy and rarely fits naturally into the neat, precise pyramids, obeying all the rules that we are looking for. For example, we may find that there is an unexpected overlap between a conclusion down one “arm” of the pyramid at level 3, and a separate arm at level 2. Strictly speaking, this should not be allowable. The advice, however, is that audit teams should be realistic about what is achievable. Tighter question and conclusion pyramids should lead to better and more focused audits, and more convincing reports respectively. But IADC – and the associated outputs – is the means to an end, not an end in itself. If the audit team is 80-90% satisfied with the outcome, and the output is reasonably compliant with the IADC rules of logic, then that is probably good enough to proceed.

Judgement is needed

As auditors, we aim to make our audit work and conclusions as logical and objective as possible. IADC can help with this, but it does not serve to eliminate the need for subjective judgement. For example, look at the example DC pyramid from earlier in this document (about working at the Court). Do the four level 2 assertions convince you that the Court is indeed a great place to work? Perhaps you would argue that the argument as presented fails to make any reference to another important factor: job satisfaction (and that therefore the L2 assertions as a group are not “collectively exhaustive”). With the essential assumption that we have collected evidence on the topic, should a statement about job satisfaction be a fifth level 2 assertion? Or perhaps job satisfaction – relating to the quality of work – is part of the reward package offered by the Court, and should therefore be a further level 3 point under the first level 2 conclusion, which perhaps should therefore have its wording tweaked. And so on.

There is no right or wrong. As already indicated, the discussion here is about criteria – what will we use to judge whether working at the Court is good – and therefore illustrates the importance not just of audit teams coming to collective agreement, but also the need to agree proposed criteria with the Commission.

A final couple of caveats: this guideline presents the application of IADC to a single performance audit. It is not a tool to help identify suitable topics for audit in the first place, nor whether a proposed audit is practicable. And while determining the sub-questions should help the audit team identify the audit work that needs to be done, IADC in itself does not specify the methodology – exactly how the questions are to be answered.

Appendix 1

Checklist for audit teams

Issue analysis

- a) Make sure that you have done sufficient work to proceed with an issue analysis – factual knowledge of the area audited, programme logic model, previous audit reports, views of internal stakeholders, Commission, academics and other experts, risk analysis etc. (Since the output of an IA is a question hierarchy, it must precede the planning document.
- b) Arrange IA meeting: suitable meeting room; invite team members, representative of the Directorate, representative of the reporting member, facilitator
- c) Prepare materials for meeting participants, and distribute at least two days before the IA meeting. There is nothing wrong with proposing an overall audit question, and supporting sub-questions; the most important thing is to remain open-minded if your proposals are challenged.
- d) Participate constructively in the meeting!
- e) After the meeting, send round to participants the key conclusions of the meeting (likely to be the top layers of the question hierarchy, plus any other relevant material), to confirm their agreement.
- f) Continue to develop the full question hierarchy; once done (see box), circulate for comment/agreement to key internal stakeholders, and revise as necessary. If necessary, be prepared to hold further IA sessions, with some or all of the original participants.
- g) Incorporate in draft audit planning document.

Question hierarchy

Are the questions closed (ie answerable “yes” or “no”)?

Does each group of sub-questions obey the MECE principles (mutually exclusive, collectively exhaustive)s? One test of this is to ask: if the answer to all the sub-questions is “yes”, must the answer to the higher level question also be “yes”? If that is not the case – if the answer to the higher level question might be “no”, then the logic is flawed.

Can you see patterns in the groups of sub-question (for example, a business model such as time/cost/quality, or a process, such as plan/ implement/monitor/evaluate)? If you can, are there any gaps? (The sub-questions, in effect, define the criteria to be used in judging the higher level question to which they relate.)

Is the link to the risk analysis clear? Risks of a given likelihood/impact should be reflected somewhere in the question hierarchy – or you should have a good reason why not. (It is not compulsory for high risk areas to have a corresponding audit question. For example, a programme might have a number of high risks associated with it but, for perfectly valid reasons, such as practicality, an audit might focus on only a limited number of these areas.)

Have you gone down as low as you need to – ie at the lowest level are the questions capable of being turned into audit tasks?

Drawing conclusions

- h) Start thinking about DC as you approach the end of the examination phase.
- i) Arrange DC meeting: suitable meeting room; invite team members, representative of the Directorate, representative of the reporting member, facilitator
- j) Prepare materials for meeting participants and distribute at least two days before the DC meeting. Material should enable meeting participants to understand the main audit findings, without being swamped by paper. Audit teams might also propose suggested key conclusions – and even a suggested report structure. As with the IA, the most important thing is to remain open-minded if your proposals are challenged.
- k) Participate constructively in the meeting!
- l) After the meeting, send to participants the key conclusions of the meeting (likely to be the top layers of the conclusion hierarchy, plus any other relevant material), to confirm their agreement.

- m) Continue to develop the full conclusion hierarchy (see box); once done, circulate for comment/agreement to key internal stakeholders, and revise as necessary. If necessary, be prepared to hold further DC sessions, with some or all of the original participants.
- n) Consider discussing with the auditee.
- o) Draft the full report by expanding the outline report.

Outline report

Is the overall conclusion clearly stated, and evaluative? Does it answer the original audit question? If not, does it need to change, or the audit question?

Are all sub-conclusions evaluative?

Does each group of sub-conclusions obey the MECE principles? Again, to test this, ask yourself whether the higher level conclusion inevitably follows from the sub-conclusions.

Look for patterns – and so potential gaps – in the groups of sub-conclusions

Have you gone down as many levels as you need to – ie are the assertions firmly rooted in audit findings?

Appendix 2

Facilitating IA and DC meetings

(* This material is gratefully based from guidance produced by the Wales Audit Office, which has considerable experience in applying IADC.)

Prepare thoroughly for the meeting

- a. Make sure the audit team has prepared sufficient materials to allow people present at the meeting to understand the basic situation and complication. The materials should be sent to people attending at least two days before the meeting.
- b. Get a list of names of people attending, with their role in the project. Try to make sure numbers are manageable, ideally no more than eight people.
- c. Discuss any special sensitivities with the audit team.
- d. The meeting room should encourage, not deter, constructive debate. If possible, the desks/table should be put together arranged so that people can sit around them in something like a circle. The room should also have sufficient materials – whiteboard or flip-chart, pens etc.

Remember the basics of facilitation

- e. Introduce yourself. Ask group members to introduce themselves briefly in relation to the project. Keep a seating plan to help you remember names and/or ask people to complete a prop up name card.
- f. Explain that your role in this meeting is not to contribute information but (in the case of an IA meeting) either to help the group agree a clear and logically structured pyramid of closed questions, or (in the case of a DC meeting) to agree a pyramid of assertive headings. You should:
 - remind the group about the IADC technique when needed;
 - move the discussion along in a constructive way;
 - help everyone contribute;
 - capture the ideas that are emerging on a flip chart;
 - stand back from the content and suggest a structure/ordering principle or pattern where needed; and
 - sum up the progress made and clarify the next steps.
- g. A number of potential problems could arise during meetings:
 - if one participant tries to dominate the session, invite each person to speak in turn;
 - if cliques form, suggest taking a break and changing seating positions upon returning from the break;
 - avoid personal confrontation and allow the group to police itself; ask 'Do others in the group agree?';
 - respect someone's right to be quiet, but give them a chance to share their ideas, perhaps speak to them one-to-one during a break; and
 - use differences of opinion as a way of bringing out ideas and testing logic.