

Greyscale

Keith G Jeffery

*Science and Technology Facilities Council
Rutherford Appleton Laboratory (United Kingdom)*

Anne Asserson

University of Bergen (Norway)

Abstract

This paper addresses the place of grey not only in the landscape of information, but also of knowledge, wealth creation and improvement of the quality of life. It builds on work by the authors published in previous GL conferences.

The very notion of grey is linked conceptually with dull and dismal. It refers to a concept between recognised states. It is also linked with age and distinction, even the magical (Gandalf the Grey). The hypothesis is that grey objects exhibit all these properties, and they can be used to advantage.

Typically Grey literature consists of technical research documentation (although many different kinds of material have been classified as grey). This – by its nature – tends to be dull. The material is usually not peer-reviewed as is white literature. Yet it is not usually the unstructured, unauthorised output from a single source; it may well be commercial in confidence and certainly is likely to contain IP (intellectual property) of value to the organisation. It is between states i.e. between 'an idea' and 'white'. Some grey literature has age and distinction, although this usually is neither recognised nor appreciated widely until it becomes white – analogously to the final step in the human ageing process. Finally some grey literature is indeed magical in providing an organisation with a wealth of knowledge for problem solving, strategy inspiration or know-how.

This paper attempts to demonstrate that grey is the very foundation of the knowledge base both for internal use of an individual organisation (where it may well remain grey) and of world knowledge (where it is transformed to white). The information landscape (which when applied becomes the knowledge landscape) has exposed uplands (white) and hidden valleys (grey).

The dynamics of the landscape concern the way in which an idea, concept or knowledge is generated and transformed: from grey to grey (internal discussion within an organisation with improvement), from grey to white (publication, public relations for an organisation, improved evaluation scores for an organisation), from grey to product or service (wealth creation or improvement in the quality of life within an organisation), from white to product or service (wealth creation or improvement in the quality of life by knowledge or technology transfer).

The prerequisites for these dynamics to work are (1) excellent metadata (to improve discovery and control usage), (2) an institutional document repository of grey, (3) an institutional CRIS for the contextual research information, (4) linkage between the document repository and the CRIS of an institution and thence (in a controlled manner with formal descriptive and restrictive metadata) to other institutions, (5) an e-research repository of research datasets and software, (6) linkage between the e-research repository and the CRIS of an institution and thence (in a controlled manner with formal descriptive and restrictive metadata) to other institutions, (7) an institutional policy to mandate deposition of the material with appropriate metadata.

From foundation to dynamics, grey is the key ingredient for the knowledge society.

BACKGROUND

Previous papers on Grey literature (or more widely – and used hereafter to mean - grey objects such as hypermedia) by the authors (in the GL Conference Series) have described:

1. the need for formal metadata to allow machine understanding and therefore scalable operations (Jeffery 1999);
2. the enhancement of repositories of grey (and other) e-publications by linking with CRIS (Current Research Information Systems) (Jeffery and Asserson 2004);
3. the use of the research process to collect metadata incrementally reducing the threshold barrier for end-users and improving quality in an ambient GRIDs environment (Jeffery and Asserson 2005);
4. an architectural model for scaleable, highly distributed, workflowed repositories of grey literature based on hyperactive 'intelligent' documents (Jeffery and Asserson 2006).