

CKO - JUST ANOTHER NAME IN THE GAME

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"Most important, I'd give myself a new, less-pompous title . . . maybe something like CMLAWNSO--Chief Making Life at Work Not Suck Officer."

[D. Weinberger, JOHO, 1999]

Even calling myself CKO was a mistake. It got a lot of attention from the outside, but it created a lot of internal hostility. 'Chief' is a bad word, and even 'knowledge' is a word to be wary of."

[V. Ward, CKO, NatWest Markets, 2001]

1. INTRODUCTION:

In October 2001, I submitted a paper titled "Musings on Corporate Myths – CKO and Knowledge-Sharing in the World of Real Business" (Berner, 2001). In the paper I argued that the role of Chief Knowledge Officer CKO was "inimical" and that its creation did not suit the current organizational culture and politics in the business world.

Here I propose to follow on with the opinions I presented in my initial paper, and show that from CKO is only one aspect of leading knowledge management projects, and not always the best one at that. Through purveying business literature and looking at what existing CKOs and other KM leaders have been saying since 1996, I propose a different method to managing knowledge in corporations, a method based on mentoring/championing, where every worker is a knowledge worker, and every one takes ownership of the total knowledge generated.

CKOs are a new breed of executive positions. Looking at the history of this job title is very educating, and points to an almost pervasive American fascination with fads, power-titles and prestige. While it's hard to pinpoint an exact date, the first chief knowledge officer positions are generally acknowledged to have emerged around 1994, many of them in specialist consultancy firms. By 1997, the role of CKO had become common enough for articles extolling its emergence as the next corporate trend to become a regular feature in business magazines. According to McKinsey, "First employed in the early 1990s to foster the flow of knowledge throughout increasingly complex organizations, they functioned rather like plumbers, routing bits of information through different pipes to the right people. They then built better pipes, such as company-wide e-mail networks and corporate intranets, and, still later, redesigned work and communications processes to promote collaboration" (Foote, Matson & Rudd, 2001).

Thomas Davenport (1996[1]) has been a defender of CKOs since his first article in CIO in 1996, in which he predicted, albeit incorrectly, that by the year 2000 "every major consulting firm will have a KM consulting service", and CKOs trickle will turn into a flood. He was of the opinion that since "knowledge is power," it should not surprise anyone that knowledge management is a highly political undertaking. If knowledge is associated with power, money, and success, then it is also associated with lobbying, intrigue, and back-room deals. If no politics appear around the

knowledge management initiative, it is a good indication that the organization perceives that nothing valuable is taking place. He states that in terms of managing knowledge, astute managers of knowledge will acknowledge and cultivate politics: lobby for the use and value of knowledge, broker deals between those who have knowledge and those who use it, cultivate influential "opinion leaders" as early adopters of knowledge management approaches, and try to shape the governance of knowledge to better utilize it across the organization (Davenport, 1996). Unfortunately, by 2001, CKO had become for some one of the "myths about Knowledge Management". Curley (2001) in the online version of last year's January Computer World states flatly: "The creation, distribution and application of knowledge drives the value of an organization's goods and services and determines its market value. Whether you recognize and cultivate them or not, your knowledge processes are at the heart of your business. They can't be left in the hands of one executive, however effective."

In 1997, an article in Records Management Quarterly expressed doubts as to the permanence and direction of the CKO role. "It would be difficult to say what the fate of the CKO will be over the long term. It makes some sense to suggest that if the CKO is able to take what is increasingly commonplace technology and optimally utilize it to create disseminate, and apply knowledge, CKOs may overtake CIOs in number and stature. Or the CKO role may prove to be complementary to that of the CIO, and cooperation rather than competition may characterize their relationship (...) On the other hand, what has often happened to the CIO could happen to the CKO: employees may eventually become so adept at finding and applying knowledge that the CKO might be put out of business" (Pemberton, 1997).

In 1999, Early and Scott found in their research on CKOs that there was little or no job specification for them, but that their organizational goals were fairly clear. The job description for many of the knowledge managers, regardless to what the title is, continues to be nebulous, because many of the appointing company do not really understand what knowledge management is about, or what it is that the newly acquired "shaman" will be doing. Five years after Davenport hailed the new species, a National Defence University paper stated that "CKOs are springing to life in public and private sector organizations addressing a *perceived unmet need* to capitalize on knowledge-based assets" (Neilson, 2001). Although the US Army has been at the forefront of "chiefdom" in many ways, it seems slow when it comes to discovering that chiefs exist other where.

However, not everybody is as dismissive. Organizational uniqueness means that there are as many approaches to the task of managing knowledge strategy as there are distinct organizations. In turn, the relative novelty of the field of knowledge management has spawned a range of approaches to leadership, all dependent on organizational nature. This resulted in a diversity of phrases that describe organization's chief knowledge steward: Knowledge Coordinator, Director of Intellectual Assets, Knowledge Gardener, Knowledge Manager, Knowledge Broker, Knowledge Management Champion, Chief Knowledge Officer, Knowledge Facilitator, and Knowledge Shepherd. This babble of job titles represents great diversity in philosophy underlying the responsibilities aligned with these positions. They also seem to indicate a creative confusion at work at this particular time in organizational history, as these kinds of jobs are constantly being invented and re-invented. The positions themselves exhibit divergent styles and methods based on underlying programs that are founded on different premises. Some of them may well be short-lived and are certainly not appropriate for all organizational cultures (Hunt, 2000). Leitch and Rosen (2001) in the Manchester Review applaud the naming of CKOs as "the executive responsible to make all of this happen. Knowledge management success requires a holistic approach, and the most effective leader will possess solid technical, business, and social skills. The CKO is someone who could lead an enterprisewide knowledge management program."

As for the potential in growth of this new management addition, statistics vary depending on who is reporting. In 1997, a study by the London Business School put the number of CKOs worldwide at 20 (Earl & Scott, 1998).

In its September 1999 issue, the US e-zine "Knowledge Management" termed CKO "the most visible of the knowledge careers" in terms at least media attention. Their executive status, diverse qualifications, substantial salaries (between \$250,000 and \$1,000,000) and "visionary styles" have earned them considerable attention. Now here comes a bit of an interesting statistic: a 1999 survey by the Conference Board of 150 executives at 96 global companies with an average of 40,000 employees found that 27 percent had CKOs in place (Jones, 1999). That makes around 25 CKOs. If we compare this to Earl and Scott's 1997 study, then we have gained only 5 converted companies. Not exactly what one would term a "career path". More on the upper side of statistics is the 1999 study by Delphi, stating that there were 500 CKOs worldwide (Brown, 1999).

2. LEADERSHIP IN KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT:

Britton Manasco, the editor of Knowledge Inc, was one of the first proponents of knowledge management. He has also been one of the loudest critics of CKOs. However, he admits as early as 1997 that "Corporate knowledge initiatives and programs will not succeed without decisive and determined leadership," and that "while some organizations think the power associated with knowledge-based leadership must be widely distributed, others are convinced that it takes an accountable individual to ensure that knowledge is effectively highlighted and capitalized upon" (Manasco, 1997). As examples, such giants as Ernst & Young, Coopers & Lybrand, and Booz Allen & Hamilton, PriceWaterhouse, A.T. Kearney and Buckman Laboratories all have CKOs. Andersen Consulting and McKinsey do not. Despite their huge commitments to the growing field of knowledge management, the two companies have decided that knowledge leadership is best left to a network of leaders. One could easily make a compelling argument that 'CKO' flies in the face of the agile enterprise. Maybe that explains the latest embroilment of Andersen Consulting with Enron's scandal?

Why do organizations need knowledge leaders? Simply put, to bridge the natural hurdles to sharing knowledge within the large enterprise. Organisations have realized that communication of best practices, not application of technology, is at the heart of knowledge management's ability to meet business goals and user needs. This is typically fostered through fluid communication channels in an open culture. Unfortunately, neither comes naturally to a large organization. Leadership is needed to foster the climate, the practices and the incentives for knowledge sharing.

Tomas Koulopoulos (1999), the President of Delphi Group, wrote a paper on the knowledge leader. He stated that what distinguishes the breed is their "passion, fearlessness and confidence". The question for him is not whether knowledge leadership is needed, but what kind of leadership is needed. The Study performed by Delphi showed that "knowledge leadership spans a broad domain of positions and types of individuals. Regardless of the differences in title or organizational placement, knowledge leaders exhibit similar qualifications. The most notable have hybrid business/information technology experience, at least ten years (and often much more) of line-of-business experience, an entrepreneurial attitude and a relatively high level of interest in career definition and development. They also exhibit acumen in corporate communication throughout the formal hierarchy reflected in most organization charts, as well as in the informal networking that occurs in communities of practice or the "corporate underground." It is through all these channels that knowledge leaders introduce methods and systems to match knowledge seekers with knowledge providers.

But another researcher from Delphi makes it clear that she is no proponent of CKO, stating that appointing one "doesn't make sense, given where knowledge actually exists" (Capshaw, 1999).

“Many organizations mistakenly apply a very traditional, hierarchical organizational model to knowledge leadership. This approach speaks to a command and control method of KM. Knowledge management doesn't work that way (...) Traditional hierarchy stands in direct contrast to [fluid communication channels in open culture] business model. There are many natural points of ownership for knowledge. Trying to roll all these up to one point of ownership flies in the face of KM's basic tenets. The best you can hope to do is to coordinate the KM process, not control it.”

The chart below shows the results of a recent poll conducted by the e-zine Knowledge Management. It shows the way 566 respondents perceived who was leading their KM ventures (KMM, 2001).

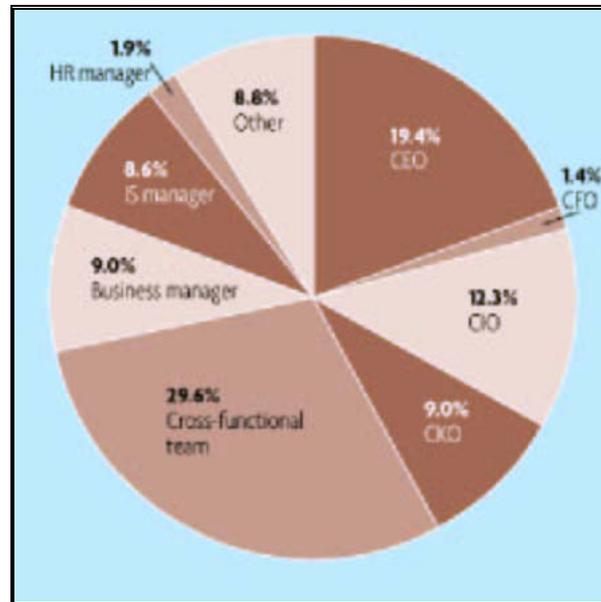


Fig. 1: Chart showing respective percentage and position of KM leaders (© KMM)

Whatever the role and responsibilities of knowledge leadership, few doubt that it is an essential ingredient of competition in the next millennium. The owners of knowledge are the individuals who have the most to gain from KM. They will perpetuate the culture and systems necessary for maintaining a competitive edge more than any singular approach to knowledge leadership. The role of the knowledge leader is to build the bridges. Organizational executive leaders build the culture, but it is ultimately the knowledge workers themselves who will have to build the reasons, their own reasons, to use KM.

3. DEFINITIONS OF CKO:

Let us now look at a few CKOs as they perceive themselves, and then follow that with more rigorous definitions from academic literature and business media.

Steve Cranford, VP of Knowledge Solutions Area in KPMG (just another title for a knowledge manager) defines a CKO as “a champion of best practice”. Jerry Ash, a prominent US writer on management, agrees on the championship aspect of the CKO, and adds “a coordinator who understands the knowledge asset and who has the combined ability of a leader, a grassroots organizer and match-maker to begin developing the people link on the knowledge highway” (Ash, 1997)

Ernst & Young defines CKO as "a position in the organisation with the charter to harness the company's knowledge and use it strategically. Together with senior management, the chief knowledge officer is responsible for creating the vision of what is possible and designing the framework for realising the results." Reflecting a broader view, the London School of Business, which is conducting ongoing research into the function of CKOs, defines the CKO as "a senior executive leading a knowledge management program or initiative who has the word 'knowledge' in his or her title" (Corporate IT, 1998).

A CKO provides an anchor between the people, technology and the business side of an organization. job function includes a few basic guidelines: facilitate knowledge sharing; reward teams, not individuals; document expertise areas; and set up incentive programs. He is a strategic leader who is helping senior management translate knowledge/learning into a strategic business capability.

There is even a dictionary definition of a CKO. Word Spy at logophilia.com has this to say:

chief knowledge officer noun. A corporate executive in charge of structuring a company's store of technical and business knowledge, and ensuring that employees have access to that knowledge.

<http://www.logophilia.com/WordSpy/chiefknowledgeofficer.asp>

4. WHERE DO CKOs COME FROM - Skills, Backgrounds and Hopeful Aspirants:

Steve Denning, CKO of the World Bank, stated at the Ballanet Workshop mentioned above that "an impossible set of characteristics is being laid for a knowledge officer" and that organizations should not be too picky when it comes to choosing. "A person who does their best to take advantage of the opportunities presented" should be good enough (Hunt, 2000).

Davenport (1996[2]) describes a good CKO as one who "should combine an orientation to structured, explicit knowledge with an intuitive feel for precisely how cultural and behavioral factors may impede or enable the leveraging of knowledge in an enterprise," and that this combination of "hard" and "soft" skills was hard to find. I would not even mention the need to be thoroughly familiar with the particular organization one is trying to implement a KM project in. Davenport further states that "culture-oriented CIOs make good candidates for CKOs". This is not an opinion many KM writers agree with. A colleague of Davenport, Santousus (2001) states in her ABC of Knowledge Management that "since KM is not a technology-based concept but a business practice, enterprisewide KM efforts should not be lead by the CIO."

Another IT bandwagon promoter for the chair is Weinstein (1998), who - after informing us of how much a CKO gets paid - explains that since the demand for the talents (presumably for being paid anywhere between US\$60,000 and 1M) being so intense (especially with the growth of 5 new CKOs in two years), IT "pros" can create jobs for themselves once a need is identified. "If you're already a running an intranet and are an experienced technologist who understands how information is manipulated, stored, retrieved and organized, you might be a perfect candidate." Keep thy hands to thy cables and hubs, brethren of the crashed server!

An article by Corcoran & Jones (1997) in *Information Outlook* entitled discusses the competencies needed by knowledge managers. They include:

- ✚ Knowledge and understanding of the business rules and processes of the organization
- ✚ Entrepreneurial skills (communication, salesmanship, product development, inter-cultural skills)

- ✚ Information technology skills (ability to understand current and envision tomorrow's technology)
- ✚ Leadership skills (inspire people, create alliances)
- ✚ Financial management skills
- ✚ A thorough understanding of how people learn and how knowledge is developed, shared, renewed, etc.

Neilson (2001) adds to this:

- ✚ Political skills (flexibility, openness,)
- ✚ Risk analysis and management skills
- ✚ Creativity (includes presentation skills and innovation)
- ✚ Mentorship (ability to release full potential in others)

He also states that this diverse mix of skills and behaviours rely more on personal influence, persuasion, interpersonal skills, and flexibility versus a more directive mix of skills associated CEO and COO traditional roles and responsibilities. Appendix 1 below is a mapping of the skills a successful CKO (or any other knowledge leader for the matter) should possess.

But, in the opinion of Ash (1997), because most companies want to fill in their CKO positions with a “techie with a head for business,” the strategy is destined to fail. Unlike Davenport, Ash cannot see a former CIO in the position of a CKO for two reasons; the first, that it is rare to find a techie with the interest, skills or experience to provide the vision, leadership and business expertise required of a CKO. The second reason being that a KM strategy which is focused primarily on IT management is likely to fail because a company’s knowledge capital does not reside entirely in its information systems. Ash strongly supports the drafting of CKOs from Line-of-Business leaders, and providing them with the training necessary to overcome major social, political, bureaucratic and resource barriers to realize unfulfilled human and corporate opportunities.

Pemberton (1997) makes the rather outrageous proposition that record managers could make good CKOs because they “are very concerned about keeping up with the uses of information technology,” and that all they need to land the job is to “consider how records management-or whatever we choose to call the discipline in the future-can find, as in the CKO mandate, ways to extract additional knowledge from records and documents, how to add value to the information being created, received, and disseminated by the organization.” Considering that the majority of record managers I have met in my consulting career have about as much business vision as the proverbial mole, I think Mr. Pemberton must be pulling someone’s leg.

McKeen and Staples (2001) from the Queen’s University in Canada crunch real numbers in their study: interviewing 41 knowledge managers (with various titles) have shown some interesting results. Of the 41 interviewed managers, most knowledge managers were in the ‘41-50’ age group with an average age of 42.2 years. Very few of the respondents worked in a purely physical goods type industry, and most of the respondents worked in large companies (e.g. greater than 5,000 employees in the firm). Almost 90% held undergraduate degrees and 60% held graduate degrees (as well as undergraduate degrees). As undergraduates, half of the knowledge managers surveyed opted for a course of study in Arts and/or Humanities; a further third took courses in the sciences (general, computing, engineering); and an additional 17% earned an undergraduate degree in Business Administration. Their choice of graduate degree programs were logically more specialized and predominantly (one third of sample) focused on Business Administration. The majority of respondents held managerial “line” positions (some at the VP or partner level in their organizations) before accepting the knowledge management role. Some (24%) had previously occupied more technical roles (systems/technical analysts) and a few (13%) brought project management skills to the KM position. While most knowledge managers had been with their

current organization 1-5 years, the average was approximately 8 years. Only 13% of respondents had been with their current organization less than a year. It appears that the majority of knowledge managers (approximately two thirds) were hired from within their organizations. When asked “What skills do you think got you the job?”, 26% replied “knowledge of KM concepts”; “managerial experience” (21%); “technical experience” for 13%; “organizational experience” (10%) and “personal strengths” (10%).

5. ROLES OF CKOs:

As early as 1996, Davenport defined three responsibilities of a CKO: creating a knowledge management infrastructure, building a knowledge culture and making it all pay off economically. He stressed the IT component of the position, a thing that is looked upon with an increasing distrust and distaste by the futurologist KM gurus afraid that by implying KM is IT related their “nuggets of knowledge” will devalue to data. Soon after, Pemberton (1997) describes the position with almost no technical aspect to it: “the CKO's focus is on developing the organization's "knowhow," or its intellectual assets. This scope includes managing knowledge currently held, creating new knowledge, accessing knowledge within and external to the organization, representing knowledge through various employee-accessible media (e.g., videotapes, expert-knowledge software, virtual training, satellitebased distance education), and seeing as well that knowledge is transferred all around the organization so that one unit can benefit from the knowledge of another.”

Rose (1997) of IBR Consulting, strongly believes that no KM group can exist without a CKO. He defines the leader's role as “a champion with the power to design the knowledge architecture, to set up the processes and disciplines for control, to harness the resources needed to establish and maintain the system, and to promote its benefits throughout the organization.” Gottschalk (1999) suggests that the role of the CKO is “is not so much to provide KM facilities and services as to enable the organization to innovate”, while Earl and Scot (1999) found that CKOs have to discover and develop the managing director's implicit vision of how KM would make a difference. Duffy (1998) mentions the following:

- ✚ Set knowledge management strategic priorities
- ✚ Establish a knowledge database of best practices
- ✚ Gain commitment of senior executives to support a learning environment
- ✚ Teach information seekers how to ask better and smarter questions of their intelligence resources
- ✚ Put in place a process for managing intellectual assets
- ✚ Obtain customer satisfaction information in near real-time
- ✚ Globalize knowledge management

Earl & Scott (1998) adds that CKO has a dual function: he/she must display strong nurturing qualities and that their success was closely related to their ability and willingness to feel rewarded by the accomplishments of other people. Not only must they be able to play the part of the actor on stage and be comfortable in the center of activity, they must also be willing to operate as the stage manager in the wings, directing the action, unseen. It is this selflessness in my opinion that is so hard to come by among managers in the competitive climate of corporate bodies worldwide. Leitch & Rosen (2001) put the onus on the commercial side of the knowledge management venture: the CKO has to sell KM and buy-in from competing initiative, thus delivering benefits that contribute to the success of the enterprise

Hunt (2000) provides us with a table stating the roles of a CKO:

<u>ROLE</u>	<u>CHARACTERISTICS</u>
Entrepreneur	Enjoys starting up - Tolerant of risks - Spirit of adventure - Sees the CEO's big picture, visionary - Can translate it into action - Thinks of new ways - Produces results
Consultant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brings in ideas • Listens to what stakeholders want • Operates through influence, persuasion and demonstration • Willing to let other take central stage • Work along with other change initiatives • Understands the business model and sees what kinds of knowledge will add value
Technologist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands which technologies can contribute • Judges when to adopt a technology • Appreciates the opportunities enabled • Assesses implementation issues • Credible partner to IT
Organization Development Specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands how people interact with knowledge • Helps establish people-oriented infrastructure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – physical space <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – video-conferencing – electronic spaces • Mobilizes support for knowledge sharing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – e.g. resources for facilitation, librarians • Aligns organizations systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – management development – orientation – performance evaluation, incentives, rewards

Table 1. Roles and Charactersitics of a CKO (© Bellanet)

Shereen Remez, General Services Administration's—and the government's—first CKO said knowledge management requires data sharing at an enterprise wide level and bridging local islands of information. She plans to implement portals through which users could make requests and a Web crawler would gather information overnight. Successful implementation of knowledge management consists of five components: business purpose and measurement of results; strategy; leadership; a culture of sharing; and technology. But she said the emphasis in her office is on the human component—where the knowledge worker is most important (quoted in Date, 1999). Obviously another re-born techie who donned the magic mantle of a CKO. For those interested in how her description actually fits the role GSA had in mind when advertising for the position, you can view the job description on http://www.km.gov/documents/pd/GSA_CKO_PD.html

While the August 2000 issue of Business Week described the role of a CKO as explaining philosophy to board members(!!!), promoting job flexibility and breaking divisional logjams,

Vorster (2000) in ITWeb waxes romantic at the ultra-cultural point of view. For him, a successful CKO would be:

- ✚ Helping the organisation to find its stories, anecdotes and shared history, and using these to set standards and benchmarks for behaviour.
- ✚ Setting the agenda and facilitating the organisation's change towards becoming a knowledge-driven organisation within which learning is a driving principle.
- ✚ Bringing diverse functions, ideas, projects and division into alignment.
- ✚ Sensitising the company towards to the fact that customer service should be a number one priority.
- ✚ Creating KM content activities for the capture and sharing of knowledge.
- ✚ Leveraging corporate-wide learning.
- ✚ Conducting and implementing strategic planning.
- ✚ Being the champion for all things associated with KM and organisational learning.

However, in my opinion, the far most important role of a CKO is what D. Jones from Xerox terms "cultural shifting". "The role of the chief knowledge officer is much about cultural change. Unless you change the culture in an organization, the organization won't get benefits out of the technology" (quoted in Carrillo, 1997).

6. ATTRIBUTES OF THE "BIG CHIEF":

Quite a bit has been written about the "ideal CKO". Most studies portray him/her as an extrovert, with a zeal for knowledge, an evangelical ability to infect others with his visionary reveries, and a tidbit of technological know-how. But there are other important attributes of a CKO.

Ruby (1998) states that knowledge managers in general are "leaders who understand that translating knowledge into business results requires new kinds of information systems, new kinds of organizational behavior, and new kinds of business relationships with suppliers, customers, and even competitors". The best leaders come from within an organisation, embodying tacit and explicit knowledge of organisational dynamics, structures, procedures and processes. Guns (1998) discovered that the background of the typical CKO closely mirrors that of the traditional Japanese executive. Since CKOs are charged with driving the KM efforts for the entire organization, Guns found that it is helpful when they have circulated through the company and developed a holistic perspective. Although few CKOs have identical career paths, most of them have experience in a wide range of functions. Earl & Scott (1999) in their study of CKOs found that "although they came from all sorts of different backgrounds and were working in all sorts of different corporations, they were remarkably similar in terms of the types of people that they were. They tended to be outgoing, extroverted, persuasive, passionate, articulate, committed and at the same time exhibited a lot of personality traits that are commonly associated with high-achievement people."

John Peetz, then CKO for Ernst & Young, defined attributes of his role as follows: influencer, get along well with others, tolerate ambiguity, have initiative, drive and willingness to take risks and have lots of common sense. But he, like many others, says that this "rather odd blend" is difficult to find. "You need to find someone who has enough strategic vision to paint the picture but enough operational experience and attention to detail to drive it." (quoted in Duffy, 1998). Paquette (1998), while terming the CKO the "trendiest job in business", states that to fulfill it, a person must "have a working knowledge of several disciplines, such as information systems, business economics and management, law, research, and communications." This breadth of knowledge is seconded by McKeen and Staples (2001) from the Queen's University in Canada. Based on their study, mentioned above, they found knowledge managers "somewhat unique individuals" characterized by being highly educated, already seasoned organizational performer and chosen for the knowledge management position based on their proven performance, "researchers" seeking new knowledge, like to learn, attracted to "being at the forefront of something new and exciting",

altruistic evangelists, mavericks and risk-takers motivated by challenge more than by power. Koulopoulos (quoted in Brown, 1999) describes them as “nomadic bounty hunters” and masters of the regulatory and professional dimensions of the company. They are harbingers of the new paradigm, and as such must be “different” from usual corporate managers in education, culture, attitudes, values and temperament. Vorster (2000) mentions “an evangelical zeal for knowledge and learning, an urgency to get their message out, and the belief that they can strategically change how their organisations use and value knowledge and learning for competitive business advantage and improved customer satisfaction”.

7. ANGELS AND FALLEN CKOs:

7.1. *Factors for Success*

The most important factor that makes a CKO float or sink is the ability to have executive support. This is the view espoused by most of the newest KM school (Kluge et al, 2001; Gladstone, 2000; Bukowitz & Williams, 2000). The CKO's primary activities should span the “metaprise” (the enterprise and its entire ecosystem which includes customers, prospects, suppliers, other strategic alliance partners, stockholders, governing board of directors, and competitors). To be most effective, the CKO needs to be a member of the senior management team and should report directly to the CEO. The CKO's direct reports could be structured through a matrix or as a dedicated knowledge management organization. For proven success, multiple project teams report to the CKO and team leaders need to be accountable to the CKO for the duration of their specific projects. The CKO has a very complex mission and needs to be very learned in his or her profession. To get the knowledge required for mission success, CKOs have many options available: They can take university courses, read any of the hundreds of knowledge management books on the market, or use trial and error (Leitch & Rosen, 2001). Foote, Matson and Rudd (2001) claim that “success hangs on the ability of the CKO to identify, launch, operate, and evaluate knowledge-related change initiatives that are worthwhile in themselves and can be replicated in various sectors of the organization. Although the tasks sound fairly straightforward, the CKO must succeed in winning support from the wider organization in order to execute any of them. The truth is that CKOs stand or fall by their power to influence (...) To create value, a CKO must be realistic about how much anyone in this role can achieve in a particular organization at a particular time. The limits of the CKO's potential contribution are to some extent set by what the CEO and the senior-management team have done before the position was created; for this reason, even the most gifted candidate should hesitate before accepting an offer from an organization whose top managers don't see the point of managing knowledge and whose employees don't have a thirst for acquiring it.” Unfortunate as it is, a 1997 study by KPMG showed that in 40% of companies with a KM venture, no one from the top management was involved, and around 33% did not have a budget for the venture (Dertouzos, 1997)

Tristram (1998) states “repeated ability to prove the value of KM ventures to users” and working “within the context of the existing culture rather than trying to force abrupt change.” The next step is looking for already existing internal best practices and getting the employees to share what they know. A reward system – not necessarily in financial terms – has to be implemented and become ongoing (Leahy, 2000). Throughout the project, CKOs must remain “highly professional” and keep the number of those under them compact and their roles limited, while involving more and more employees in the venture (Rose, 1997). The Delphi study stressed that “skills in knowledge collection, organization, categorization and communication, rather than advanced skills in specific information technologies, as critical to CKOs' success” (Koulopoulos & Capshaw, 1999).

CIDA's CKO, Adrian Poplawski, believes that there must be a very strong connection between the CKO and CIO, as well as other managers such as HR (quoted in Hunt, 2000). The same has been stated by the Scott and Earl study (1998). In a study of seven state schools in the USA that applied knowledge management, Ash and Persall (2000) found the following to be success elements in KM: data, information, and knowledge were freely shared with staff and stakeholders, systems were

developed to remove the barriers to knowledge transfer; learning was the basic building block for change and improvement and there was a shared vision of the future; change and innovation were promoted and encouraged and decisions made on the basis of analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of data. There were meaningful conversations about work, and these were recognized as effective strategies for improvement. Competitive benchmarking was the learning drive as well as high performance expectations for everyone involved. The talents of all personnel were optimized, and leadership at all levels was promoted. An appreciation for, and understanding of, complex systems and how they work drove the process of strategic thinking.

In their latest re-write of the Sloan research, Earl and Scott (2000) have four different scenarios for the “fallen” CKO:

1. There is a change of CEO. The departed CEO believed in knowledge management and appointed the CKO, therefore, the new CEO must abort knowledge management and fire the CKO.
2. The CKO is asked to take on other-even more "urgent"-tasks as well.
3. The CKO just gets frustrated with the rate of progress and concludes that it might be better to go back to a "real job."
4. The organization declares victory in knowledge management. Something visible with real success has been achieved and it's time to move on to another venture.

But apart from these, there are other factors which may lead to the failure of a CKO. Fig. 2 below shows why knowledge management ventures fail in corporations. According to Vaas (1999), a CKO who is not able to deal with such cultural issues as knowledge hoarding (a phenomenon that arises in cultures that reward individuals--with bonuses, promotions and salary increases--for having unique expertise rather than for sharing that expertise), lack of time, and fear of being made look stupid by asking questions, are on their way to join the fallen warriors.

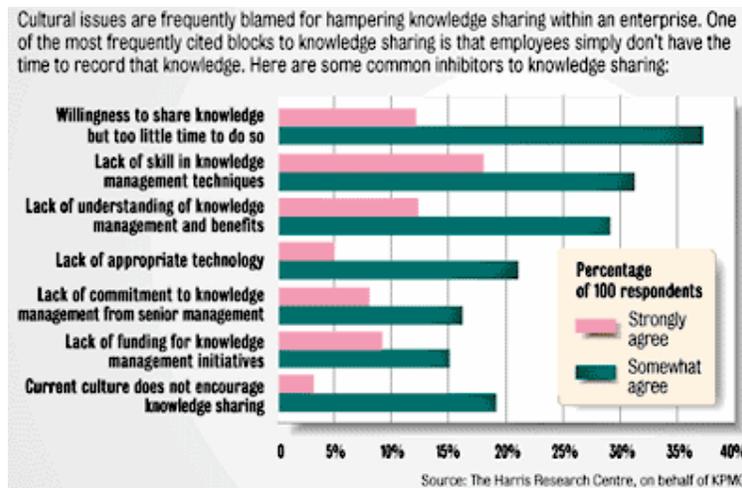


Fig. 2 Incorrect knowledge culture can be a failure factor (© eWeek)

The 1997 study by Ernst and Young of 400 organisations with a KM venture showed similar results: 44% rated their organizations as “poor” in terms of facilitating knowledge management. The offending items list cited organizational culture and structure as well as lack of ownership of the problem (Katzman, 1998). To the list above should be added that often the CKO and the rest of the corporation do not use the same “lingo”, and that they often have different frameworks for doing things. This becomes especially evident when the CKO is drafted into the organization from outside the corporate ranks. Apathy and the “not-made-here” mentality can be as deadly. And

when the CKO lacks objective measures to judge the efficacy of the KM venture, justification to the upper management can become almost impossible (Malinconico, 2000). A CKO faces opposition on both sides of the corporate ladder: the CEO demands quick and visible results, while the employees naturally resist change. And the price is high: Guns (1998) lost 25% of his interviewees within one year of interviewing them for his CKO study. Koulopoulos (1999) warned that “it would be a mistake to put a CKO into an organization that has little executive interest in knowledge management and where LOB managers exhibit a fundamental mistrust of one other. A CKO cannot make up for a pathology of poor communication and mistrust.” Some CKOs have been tempted to launch numbers of interventions, which then failed to show clear results. Others have tried to give their role solidity by building a departmental empire, but the innate amorphousness of the position makes it an obvious budget target as soon as it fails to deliver. And if senior managers disagree on the purpose of managing knowledge, they may urge the CKO to focus on conflicting or low-value activities. The result is more fallen warriors.

8. ARE CKOs NECESSARY - VIEWS PRO, OPINIONS CONTRA:

Now that we have looked at the anatomy, physiology and microenvironment of the CKO, we need to examine whether as a species he/she is of any use to the KM ecology. There seem to be two schools of thought, which I will term “American” and “Japanese”.

At the risk of repeating myself, I would like from the outset to make my commitment to the Japanese model obvious. I will, however, try to present the opposing point of view as objectively as possible.

The “American” model is based on the army: Chiefs-of-Staff, Executive Officers, top-to-bottom command lines, battles being fought and resources deployed, positions established, organisations are machines and control means hierarchy (Morgan, 1997). Staff often wears “uniforms”. Knowledge sharing is not actively encouraged, knowledge hoarding provides a feeling of job security. If a knowledge venture exists, it is “managed”. Knowledge itself is owned by the “company” and staff sign non-disclosure agreements that breach freedom of information and freedom of expression rights (witness the Enron scandal, and the involvement of Anderson Consulting). Staff is told to “work, not chatter” and communities of practice are almost non-existent. Budget cuts first aim at training (learning) and the first employees to go are those who are “old horses”. As unappetizing as it sounds, most of the USA corporations are run along these lines, with the exception of few, mostly CIT, companies.

The Japanese model is very different. The Knowledge Worker (no CKO exists) is a mix between a samurai, a sumo fighter and Che Guevara. Job titles such as “knowledge champions”, “knowledge enablers”, “knowledge mentors” and “knowledge activists” abound. Knowledge is coordinated/enabled/shared, not managed/captured/stored. Every staff member is a knowledge worker, and ownership of knowledge is collective. Communities of practice are encouraged, and special physical places created for the exchange of tacit knowledge (Von Krogh et al., 2000; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). “Old horses” are valued, and expected to “mentor” the younger generation of workers. Innovation is encouraged. I propose to describe some of these alternative KM roles in the next section. Here, I will present the arguments pro and contra having a CKO manage a KM venture in corporate organizations.

Dertouzos (1997) argues that since human emotions and foibles have a huge effect on all professional exchanges within an organization, the Information Marketplace cannot pass these human factors or steer them to the good without a general consent of those involved. Thus, the marketplace must be supported with all the traditional methods for building human bonds, including face-to-face, real-life experiences, if it is to serve organizations as more than a high-tech postal system. However, relationships cannot develop instantly even if the mechanics of getting

people together can. In practice, Dertouzos sees no difference between what organizations term “information” and what they term “knowledge”, except in the head of futurologists. He thinks that the increasing use of the term “CKO” signifies the importance that corporate America is beginning to place on the role of information/knowledge. But, he says, “knowledge is ubiquitous, like air and water, or perhaps like reading and writing and remembering. Every employee needs those things to function. So where is the company's chief air, water, reading and writing officer?” He comes to the conclusion that knowledge is most effective when it is fully distributed.

Hadley Reynolds, of Delphi Group, believes the growth potential for high-level executive knowledge positions is limited, in that the top-down approach is only suitable for particular industries or companies. In certain industries – professional services firms, technology integration companies and others that tend to see managing knowledge as their core competency – growth in chief knowledge, learning or innovation officer positions will likely continue. But other companies are embracing a more decentralized view of knowledge management (quoted in Jones, 1999).

Rose (1997) on the contrary, makes the success of a KM venture based on the creation of a CKO: “You cannot just depend on line management to make the system work. Put a “can-do” person in charge. Knowledge management systems are like exercise; sometimes somebody has to prod you and remind you to keep at it, or you lose the benefit.” In my opinion, if the line management owns the knowledge – which it does – and is rewarded for doing things with it together – which it more often than not isn’t – then the system will work. Both Steve Denning (World Bank) and Jean-Pierre Beguin, of the International American Development Bank disagree with Ross, saying that although there should be a focal point for such activity within the organisation. The term Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO) is an “unpleasant one which has hierarchical connotations” (Denning) and “problematic” (Beguin). It conjures notions of someone exercising power over the organisation, completely counter to knowledge sharing. The person should influence by what they do rather than by their title. The position must be participatory and integrated into the organisation. Care must be taken with what the person would do and how they would relate to the rest of the institution. A perception of creating an expert group should not be given, but one designed and implemented in ways that keep it in synchrony with the rest of the organisation (Hunt, 2000). However, there are several advantages to having a centralised CKO, as the same publication has found:

- ✚ No one else in the organization looks at knowledge management on an ongoing basis
- ✚ Knowledge embedded in workers or products fails to add value or money
- ✚ Takes time and effort, so need to keep up the momentum
- ✚ Business development opportunities get lost
- ✚ Organizations don’t learn from past failures/successes in the strategic process
- ✚ Need to galvanize, direct and coordinate
- ✚ Nobody else is in a position to reflect on and articulate a KM program

Allee (2000) says that CKOs must temper their IT enthusiasm with an appreciation of knowledge networks and communities of practice and focus on learning. Manasco (2001) worries that about the creation of new bureaucracies led by chief knowledge officers and questions whether they would be entrepreneurial and influential enough to meet today's business challenges. With few exceptions, leadership has not come from senior management or the creation of a Chief Knowledge Officer, although some companies, including IBM, have found this method successful. Companies who are successfully using KM techniques believe that true knowledge leaders are found near the middle of the organizational chart (Duffy, 2000; Hill & Storck, 2000). Mid-level managers frequently have the responsibility of proving KM's worth upward, downward and across organizational structures (Ash, 1997). Davenport (1996b) is optimistic: as long as CKOs are smart(!) they will eschew faddistry, address all the key KM resources, manage all the stages of the KM process, and by 2000 become a commonplace. Well, they didn't! Monasco (1998), who, by the way, runs Knowledge Inc together with Davenport, dismisses this as “breathless business reports”

and doesn't think even Fortune 500 companies will all employ a CKO, because he doubts new knowledge management departments would really make organizations more successful or whether far-reaching, centrally directed initiatives would ever get the respect they seek. He predicts that most of them would crash down embarrassingly, because "we don't need new knowledge bureaucracies, funded from the top and divorced from any particular business objective. We don't need CKOs running around looking for nails to pound with their "knowledge-enabled" hammers". And even Davenport with his "smart people" had to admit that "a knowledge management function could inspire resentment and concern within the organization if it seeks to assemble and control all knowledge" (ibid.) The goal of a CKO would be to "facilitate the creation, distribution, and use of knowledge by others". Furthermore, the knowledge managers themselves should not imply by their words or actions that they are more "knowledgeable" than anyone else, and should be at best "egoless".

Rash (2001) presents a number of conflicting views from within the KM industry itself. It looks like the knowledge managers themselves cannot decide whether to be or not to be. While some advise that knowledge should be managed by the CKO, who should be high in the organization, others like Carla O'Dell, president of the American Productivity & Quality Center (APQC) say the CKO title is going away because it was faddish and knowledge management is now being run by business leaders. Allee thinks that if you name a CKO, you narrow the definition of knowledge and that creation of another executive position may create a turf war over and over again. Others recommend creating a cross-functional committee to back up an underempowered CKO.

In 1997, Ernst and Young measured the pulse of American corporations. Only 40% of those surveyed said the CKO position would be of little or no value (Paquette, 1998). However, only 20% of Fortune 500 had by 1998 employed a CKO (Stewart, 1998). In 1999, a Delphi study showed that responses to knowledge initiatives are at best patchy, and that although most organisations in the US are aware of the need to retain and use knowledge, it appears that appointing a chief knowledge officer may not be the way to do it. Instead, companies were turning towards teams that help each business unit understand the benefits of spreading knowledge. The study estimated that there are only 500 CKOs worldwide, and that their titles vary widely. Distributing the responsibility also helps get over the cultural barriers that prevent organisations sharing information (Bicknell, 1999). Brower (2001) of University of Technology, Sydney comments that it doesn't seem that the position is the lever. The lever is an exploration of the systemic causes of the issues and the application of sustainable, leveraged solutions to address them. Someone with a new, senior title, isn't necessarily a requisite for this to happen. If appointing a person with a fancy title lets the rest of the organization off the hook, then it is a mistake. And if the CEO and other top officers do not support a culture and climate of learning, of seeking, of taking reasonable limited risks, of learning from failures instead of condemning them, of quality, and of innovation -- then these things won't happen, regardless of whether or not someone is given a title CKO or whatever.

Herman and Giaioia (2000) from The Herman Group, predict that this widespread job-title invention has a dangerous side effect. While workers may want to see themselves as unique, outsiders may be baffled by what it is those workers actually do. Future employers may not know how to interpret these unique job titles on resumes and would be unable to judge the candidate's experience or potential value to the company. Capshaw (1999) argues that putting a CKO into place is a potential for sub-optimisation, because he/she may dilute the effectiveness of managing knowledge in each particular business units. She supports the internal management of knowledge from within business units. However, she also warns that this approach may encourage fragmentation of knowledge, and that a centralized knowledge leader could provide continuity. However, Dan Rasmus of Giga Information Group is skeptical of CKOs, and believes KM works only when people share knowledge with colleagues and not when some knowledge middleman try to document and store tacit knowledge online (Berkman, 2001)

So while some experts say that knowledge management, by definition, should be decentralized, others insist there must be an accountable individual, someone to champion the concept and spearhead the enormous effort needed to overcome inherent obstacles to the free flow of information within an organization. In the end, it may be more important to select someone who will succeed in the company's political environment than to appoint a person who really understands knowledge management. That profile requires both people skills and clout. It matters less what the title and position happen to be than how closely that function reports to the board. The fact is, many CKOs do not understand their role, nor do the others in the organisation have any clue as to what to expect of the CKO. Perceptions range from being a messiah to produce and crystallise organisational knowledge to that of being a nuisance to be somehow tolerated since he has been appointed by the CEO. While a part of the problem lies in faulty KM strategies, and/or their half-hearted implementations, the other part lies in the background and competence of the person appointed as the CKO.

Vorster(2000) sums it up nicely. According to him, the question of whether CKOs need to exist or not should be answered affirmatively, not because he believes in the "American" model, but because he thinks such "ideal" corporations that could implement the "Japanese" model do not as yet exist, and that a CKO will hopefully assist them becoming one. And as Manasco stated in 1997, "As I see it, the CKO will have achieved real success when his or her position is no longer necessary."

9. "ALTERNATIVE MANAGEMENT" - Champions, Activists, Enablers and Stewards:

In this last section I propose to introduce various other options of managing knowledge; ones that do not invest in Officers and Chiefs.

Jones (1999) introduces us to the "knowledge team". According to him, a CKO alone cannot do the whole job, and needs instead to assemble a team of 'specialised' knowledge workers. He mentions a medley of those, with short descriptions, most of which seem to seriously overlap. Knowledge professionals and innovation professionals, knowledge managers, catalogers, researchers, media specialist, CI professionals, knowledge academics, theorists and visionaries(!), knowledge strategists, facilitators, trainers and corporate educators, and expert system professionals all figure on his list. The one missing title is the "knowledge mailroom boy", and there is no mention of that very necessary tool for the welfare of communities: the "knowledge water cooler". In my opinion, this taxonomy makes a joke of the whole enterprise, and serves nothing but the employees' egos. When he further down mentions that each of these could be paid anywhere between 60 to 100 thousand US dollars, one begins to wonder which enterprise would want to burden itself with so many. He then states that it is important for these "knowledge workers" to have an understanding of Java, ActiveX, XML and HTML, and one again wonders which IT specialist could roll academics, programming, library skills, training and business suaveness into one bundle. It is interesting, though, that Jones sees "communities of practice" - the backbone of any knowledge sharing - as "interesting, but difficult to define". One would think that his team above should - if possible to assemble - be able to define what it is all about. He does, however, agree that knowledge facilitators, relationship brokers and change agents are the natural fit for these positions are with the individual group members recognized by their own communities of practice as social leaders. Their status within the group generally makes them privy to all the knowledge about the day-to-day workings of the group, and their social tendencies help to spark free-flowing informational exchanges.

The role of "knowledge champion" has been best defined by Forrester Research Group (1998): this is not a chief knowledge officer (CKO) whose title reeks of permanent bureaucracy. It's an aggressive change agent on his way to making other knowledge managers "obsolete".

“The champion must: 1) create a strategy that outlines the company’s overall approach and goals for managing knowledge; 2) drive company-wide initiatives including obtaining funding, modifying incentives, and developing training programs; and 3) recruit the required people.”

Knowledge Activists are a different breed altogether. According to Von Krogh et al (2000), they form microcommunities of knowledge, smooth the way for creating and justifying concepts, as well as for building a prototype; they are essential for cross-leveling of knowledge since they are the people responsible for energizing and connecting knowledge creation throughout a company, and they help establish the right enabling context. These are managers with broad social and intellectual vision as well as experience in nitty-gritty business operations, and ability to connect external and internal knowledge initiatives and mobilizing workers throughout the organization to use knowledge more effectively. Their roles are described in the table below:

Catalyst	Coordinator	Merchant
Motivational skills	Historic understanding of the company's development	Ambassador for the company's knowledge vision
Interpersonal skills: respected	Narrative skills: detect, formulate, and tell stories of knowledge creation	Skills in strategic tools and analysis
Intervention skills: improve group dynamics and relationships	Cartographical and visual skills: develop and maintain shared maps of cooperation	Broad understanding of the company's strategy process
Analytical skills: help the group to develop a charter of their tasks and responsibilities	Analytical skills: draw connections between knowledge creation initiatives	Motivational skills and to sell ideas
Broad social network inside and outside the company	Broad social network within and outside the company	Unconventional thinking and visionary skills
Operational understanding of the business, key products, and markets		

They do not control knowledge, they enable it through not only connecting to others but also ensuring self-connections. Assigning a manager to the position of "knowledge activist" should not be a cover-up for a lack of knowledge. The position is a bit of a “dreamworld” item for the present, but considering that Nonaka, who co-authored the book, is a very influential figure in the world of knowledge management, and given the current lack of enthusiasm for employing CKOs, it is possible that it may take off in the near future. Mostly appealing to many CEOs is the fact that “knowledge activists” are recommended to be chosen from the ranks of middle management, R &D, and technology departments.

A few other titles and job descriptions can be found in Koulopoulos & Capshaw (1999) study. They mention knowledge analysts, who are responsible for collecting, organizing and disseminating knowledge, usually on demand, and provide knowledge leadership by becoming walking repositories of best practices. The liability, of course, is that knowledge analysts can easily take all of the best practices with them if they leave the organization. There is also a risk that these individuals become so valuable to the immediate constituency that they are not able to move laterally to other parts of the organization where their skills are equally needed. Next come the “just” knowledge managers, without the Chief attachment to their title. They are described as coordinators across processes within a business unit (as such, there will be a team of knowledge

managers instead of one chief). Lastly, the study mentions knowledge stewards, responsible for providing minimal, but ongoing, support to knowledge users in the form of expertise in the tools, practices and methods of knowledge management. Usually, he or she is an individual who has fallen into the role of helping others to better understand and leverage the power of new technologies and practices in managing knowledge. The term "steward" best resonated in the interviews with the study participants; it conveys responsibility and a willingness to guide others, yet it is also non-intrusive and the near antithesis of ownership.

The CKOs and other knowledge managers are truly the pioneers of knowledge management and as such, they carry significant responsibility. Given substantial license to fashion the KM role, they more than anyone else will be able to "put their mark" on their organizations with respect to knowledge management. As the first wave managers, they will cast the role for knowledge management within their organizations. They will assume the responsibility for hiring and training their staff and successors. They will build a strategy and direct its implementation. It is obvious that these incumbent knowledge managers, not only recognize this opportunity but also found themselves attracted to this challenge because of this opportunity.

Whatever the role and responsibilities of knowledge leadership, few doubt that it is an essential ingredient of competition in the next millennium. The owners of knowledge are the individuals who have the most to gain from KM. They will perpetuate the culture and systems necessary for maintaining a competitive edge more than any singular approach to knowledge leadership. The role of the knowledge leader is to build the bridges, Organizational executive leaders build the culture, but it is ultimately the knowledge workers themselves who will have to build the reasons, their own reasons, to use KM.

Knowledge management can be interpreted as a religion. It has its well-known disciples and followers. It has recognized dogma not the least of which are the competing mantras of "KM as technology" versus "KM as people". Because of its newness, most knowledge managers are "spreading the gospel" and spending inordinate amounts of time and energy on the communication/education agendas. We will have to wait a few more years to see whether the evangelism pays its ROI. Amen!

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