

Knowledge Managers: Who They Are and What They Do

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Knowledge management (the process) and knowledge managers (the people) are recent organizational phenomena. The latter (the knowledge managers) are those key individuals charged with the task of making the former (knowledge management) successful. Due to the recent emergence of these organizational initiatives, a study of knowledge managers – who they are and what they do – was thought to be instructive and revealing as well as being sufficiently current to enable organizations to either adopt or adapt their knowledge management strategy. A survey to reveal the characteristics of knowledge managers as well as knowledge management initiatives was designed and distributed to practicing knowledge managers, primarily from US and Canadian organizations. This chapter, based on the analysis of 41 completed questionnaires, reveals the backgrounds, goals, ambitions, initiatives and challenges as self-assessed by these individuals. By pulling this information together, a profile of a “typical” knowledge manager is presented. The question that remains to be asked is “Are these the most appropriate individuals to lead the KM charge”?

Keywords: knowledge management; knowledge managers; knowledge managers’ characteristics; knowledge managers’ activities; organizational knowledge management activities

1 Introduction

The emergence of the knowledge management function all started with Peter Drucker's now famous quote in *The Post Capitalist Society* (1993) ...

"The basic economic resource - the means of production - is no longer capital, nor natural resources, nor labor. It is and will be knowledge".

With such an endorsement and the instant legitimization that followed, organizations began the process of learning how to "manage" this new resource. Organizations higher on the information-intensive scale moved quickly. Positions were fashioned, systems were implemented, and metrics were created as titles such as "knowledge manager" began to dot the organizational panoply. With characteristic adherence to the adage "anything that can't be measured can't be managed", organizations began the search for value directly attributable to knowledge. Armed with oft-repeated success stories and evangelical exuberance, knowledge managers accepted the challenge articulated by senior management.

Knowledge management is an emerging management function. As such, we have an opportunity to study its evolution almost from the outset. The purpose of the study reported in this chapter is not only to explore the current organizational role of knowledge management but also to understand the knowledge managers themselves - their career aspirations, backgrounds, challenges, initiatives and key challenges/problems.

Our chapter is organized into the following sections. The research questions we investigated and associated literature are described below. A description of the methodology we used to answer our research questions follows. The findings from our study are then presented and discussed.

2 Literature Review

We had two main objectives for our study. First, we wanted to develop a profile of knowledge managers. Second, we wanted to understand what activities they were working on in their organization. In order to help us meet our objectives, we looked for previous similar studies that had done similar things. We briefly review the studies we found below and describe how our study relates to and adds to the existing body of knowledge.

2.1 Previous Studies Examining Characteristics of Positions

Although we were unable to find any existing studies of the characteristics of knowledge managers, various organizational positions such as CEO (Shin, 1999), CIO (Feeny, Edwards, and Simpson, 1992; Stephens, Ledbetter, Mitra and Ford, 1992) and CKO have been studied and we used those approaches to guide and inform our study. Below, we specifically review the existing studies on CKO's because it is the closest position to the focus of our study that has been empirically studied.

It has been estimated that the position of Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO) exists in about one-fifth of the Fortune 500 companies, although not all the positions carry the title of CKO (Stewart, 1998). Although the job of CKO is still relatively new for most organizations, it has existed in some firms since the early 1990's, with the big six accounting firms leading the way (Watt, 1997). As far as we could determine, there have only been two studies that examined the characteristics and competencies of CKO's (Duffy, 1998).

Bob Guns' study of 52 CKO's in the United States found that the CKO's came from a wide range of backgrounds and were generally hired internally because of a deep knowledge of the business (Duffy, 1998). The author of the study concluded that the skills necessary for a CKO are diverse. A CKO needs to be able to champion knowledge management (KM) initiatives and be able to energize the organization. He/she needs vision, change management skills and strong interpersonal and communication skills. The CKO's studied were business-oriented in that they realized they had to produce concrete business results within a fairly short time period in order to survive and maintain support. Seven main challenges were identified:

1. Set knowledge management strategic priorities,
2. Establish a knowledge database of best practices,
3. Gain commitment of senior executives to support a learning environment,
4. Teach information seekers how to ask better and smarter questions of their intelligent resources,
5. Put in place a process for managing intellectual assets,
6. Obtain customer satisfaction information in near real-time, and
7. Globalize knowledge management.

Michael Earl and Ian Scott (1998) studied 20 CKO's from Europe and North America. They found that although CKO's had varied backgrounds, they shared similar personality traits. They tended to be outgoing, extroverted, and persuasive, as well as being high-achievement people. They were able to both play the part of actor on stage and be willing to be behind the scenes, influencing people. Communication skills were critical in terms of building support and commitment to KM programs. Earl and Scott (1999) found that CKO's had two main design competencies. They were both technologists and environmentalists. As a technologist, they understood how current and emerging information technologies could help capture, store and share knowledge. As an environmentalist, they understood the need to create social environments that facilitated creating markets for conversations and sharing. Two leadership qualities also strongly emerged. CKO's were willing to take risks and enjoyed the newness of their tasks. This spirit of entrepreneurship also implied that they were visionary, while still being able to focus on producing deliverable results. As well as being entrepreneurs, CKO's were able to take on a consulting role, bringing ideas into the organization and listening to other people's ideas.

How is our study of knowledge managers different from the CKO studies? In the mid- to late-90's, appointing a CKO was thought to be the appropriate strategy to leverage the collective knowledge of organizations (Capshaw, 1999). A CKO is a senior executive position, commanding high annual salaries of \$200,000 to \$350,000 in the US (Herschel and Nemati, 2000; Hibbard, 1998). However, a 1998 study by the Delphi Group found that the use of CKO's was a small part of the knowledge management picture. Rather than a centralized, top executive-led strategy, a more typical strategy is to use a team of knowledge management experts who work closely with business units or are even a part of the business units (Cole-Gomolski, 1999a). The knowledge leaders in this strategy typically have titles like knowledge manager, knowledge architect and knowledge analyst (Capshaw, 1999). This strategy is more consistent with the overall goal of sharing knowledge and involving all aspects of an organization. By specifically studying knowledge managers, we add to the overall knowledge management picture.

Although we were unable to find any empirical studies that have specifically looked at the characteristics of knowledge managers, Cole-Gomolski (1999b) suggested the following requirements for successful knowledge managers. She suggested a business knowledge comes first, although understanding technology is very important. Extensive business background (i.e. 10 years experience) is needed because knowledge managers have to be able to determine what information is worth sharing. A deep understanding of the business, along with IT expertise, are strong prerequisites for successful knowledge managers. Having an entrepreneurial spirit is also important since many knowledge managers have to develop their own vision and mandate (Cole-Gomolski, 1999b). TFPL (1999) conducted interviews, surveys and workshops with KM practitioners and experts in Europe and North America to identify the skills needed for knowledge workers. While the focus of this was not specifically on knowledge managers, the findings were generally consistent with Cole-Gomolski's suggestions and the results of the CKO studies.

In their study of CKO's, Earl and Scott (1999) addressed several questions, including:

1. What do CKO's do? (What activities and interventions have they been engaged in so far?)
2. Is there a model CKO? (What capabilities and competencies do they require?)
3. Is there a typical CKO profile or personality?
4. What resources and support does a CKO require?
5. What are the early lessons of experience? (Are there any emerging "critical success factors" for CKO's?)

In our study, we address all of the above questions from the perspective of the knowledge manager. This enables us to meet our first objective. Our second objective was to identify the knowledge management activities that the knowledge managers and their organizations were working on, which is further discussed in the next section.

2.2 Previous Studies Examining Knowledge Management Activities

One of the few empirical studies that reports knowledge management activities was done by Ruggles (1998). Based on a study of 431 US and European organizations, he described what firms were doing in 1997 to manage knowledge, as well as what firms felt they should be doing, and what firms felt were the greatest barriers they faced. Creating an intranet, creating knowledge repositories, implementing decision support tools, and implementing groupware to support collaboration were the four most common projects being worked on. The three objectives that firms felt they should do, but hadn't yet done, were mapping sources of internal expertise, creating networks of knowledge workers and establishing new knowledge roles. The three largest difficulties to implementing knowledge management initiatives were changing people's behaviour, measuring the value and performance of knowledge assets, and determining what knowledge should be managed.

Our study builds on Ruggles' (1998) work and provides an update to it. Specifically, we wanted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the most significant challenges to managing knowledge in the respondents' organizations?

2. How well are organizations performing knowledge activities?

The next section describes the methodology we used to address our research questions.

3 Methodology

3.1 The Questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed to collect data to answer our research questions. A variety of question types were used varying from open-ended questions to Likert-type scales. There were six sections in the questionnaire, roughly corresponding to the research questions. The sections gathering information about knowledge management activities, background on the knowledge management position, future knowledge management directions, information on the company, respondent's views of their job, and demographics about the respondent. To assess views about the respondent's job, we asked questions designed to measure job satisfaction, organizational commitment, ability to cope, and job stress. These constructs were measured with established instruments. Specifically, Warr, Cook and Wall's (1979) scale was used to assess job satisfaction. Job stress was measured using the scale developed by Rizzo, House and Lirtzman (1970). Mowday, Steers and Porter's (1979) scale was used to assess organizational commitment and ability to cope was measured using the instrument developed by House, Schuler and Levanoni (1983). Table 1 reports the reliabilities of these scales, all of which are acceptable. The items were averaged together to obtain a score for the construct.

Table 1: The reliability of the multi-item scales

Name	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Job satisfaction	11	0.92
Organizational commitment	7	0.93
Ability to cope	5	0.79
Job stress	5	0.85

Pre-tests of the questionnaire were done with 5 people, 4 of whom were experts in questionnaire construction and knowledge management issues. The fifth person was a practicing knowledge manager. The questionnaire was modified to reflect the suggestions of the pre-test participants. Both a web-based version of the finalized questionnaire and a paper-based version were prepared and used to collect data.

3.2 The Sample

In order to reach knowledge managers, we employed two strategies. First, the organizers of the Braintrust International 2001 conference helped us by sending notices to their participant list asking them to participate in the study. Braintrust is a practitioner-driven event that was developed by and for knowledge management practitioners so it was well suited to our goal of reaching knowledge managers. Potential respondents were offered two things in return for participation. In addition to being given a summary of the findings, the preliminary results were presented at the Braintrust International 2001 conference, held in San Francisco in February 2001. Our second strategy was to contact and invite participation from as many knowledge managers as we knew personally. Again, participants were offered a summary of the findings in return for participation.

These two strategies resulted in 41 responses from knowledge managers. These knowledge managers came from a variety of companies. Table 2 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the sample. Most of the sample was from North America with a fairly even split between male and female respondents. 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).

Table 2: Demographics of the Respondents

	Number	Percentage of Sample (valid responses)
Origin of Respondent		
• U.S.A.	26	70%
• Canada	8	22%
• Europe	2	5%
• Asia	1	3%
Age		
• 51-60	8	20%
• 41-50	17	44%
• 31-40	9	23%
• 21-30	5	13%
Gender		
• Male	18	46%
• Female	21	54%
Respondent's Type of Industry		
• Services	21	55%
• Physical Goods / Products	4	11%
• Both Services and Physical Goods/Products	13	34%
Industry of the Respondent's Firm		
• Financial Services	7	19%
• Government	6	16%
• Health and Social Services	1	3%
• High Technology/Computers/Telecommunications	7	19%
• Manufacturing	5	14%
• Pharmaceutical	2	5%
• Professional Services (Legal, Accounting, Consulting)	8	22%
• Other (HR Services)	1	2%
Size of Respondent's Organization (number of employees)		
• Less than 500 Employees	5	13%
• 501 to 1,000 Employees	7	18%
• 1,001 to 5,000 Employees	5	13%
• 5,001 to 10,000 Employees	3	8%
• 10,001 to 20,000 Employees	2	5%
• More than 20,000 Employees	17	43%

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Knowledge Managers

According to our sample (see Table 3), knowledge managers are very well educated. 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 rest of the sample selected from a broad variety of graduate programs.

We were interested to know what kind of background and previous work experience these knowledge managers brought to the KM position. 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. Although we failed to ask directly, it appears that the majority of knowledge managers (approximately two thirds) were hired from within their organizations. Later on we will examine this trend further to discover more about hiring practices for the selection of individuals to fulfill the role of knowledge manager.

Table 3: Educational Background and Previous Experience

	Number	Percentage of Sample (valid responses)
Highest Degree Held		
• Diploma/Certificate	5	13%
• Undergraduate	11	28%
• Graduate	23	59%
Field of Undergraduate Study		
• Arts/Humanities	17	49%
• Computer Science	6	17%
• Business	6	17%
• Engineering	5	14%
• General Science	1	3%
Field of Graduate Study		
• Business	7	33%
• Arts/Humanities	4	19%
• Information/Library Science	4	19%
• Engineering	3	14%
• Computer Science	2	10%
Previous Job		
• Line	26	65%
• Staff	14	35%
Previous Job Experience (in total years for all respondents)		
• Functional Business Manager	36	38%
• Systems/Technical Analyst	23	24%
• Partner/VP Level	14	15%
• Project Manager	12	13%
• Consultant	8	8%
• Librarian	2	2%
How Long with Current Organization		
• Less than 1 year	5	13%
• 1-5 years	17	44%
• 6-10 years	6	15%
• 11-20 years	7	18%
• More than 20 years	4	10%

4.2 The Nature of the KM Job

Table 4 presents the results of a number of questions examining the nature of the knowledge management position. It is clear that the KM initiative definitely has its genesis in high places. In 44% of the organizations polled, the CEO or equivalent ranking officer created the KM position. In a further 22%, the position was launched by a divisional manager or vice president and, in 31% of the organizations, a director level executive was responsible for introducing the knowledge management position.

Given the high level initial sponsorship of the KM position, it is not surprising to find that the reasons for creating this position are commensurate with senior ranks. “Leveraging knowledge content”, “developing a knowledge strategy”, and “promoting awareness of knowledge management” – the reasons stated by 77% of respondents – are very lofty goals. Given the newness of the KM position, this is perhaps to be expected. The incumbent in the KM role would be left to articulate specific achievable goals with appropriate timeframes.

While knowledge managers have been given substantial license to “carve out the KM role”, it appears that they have not been equally blessed with the budgetary means to do so! In many cases, the KM budget is somewhat vague – often subsumed as part of another budget (for example, the IT budget). As a result, we were frustrated in our ability to successfully capture an accurate picture of the KM budget and/or the budgetary process. Based on anecdotal evidence we received, KM budgets appear to be “modest if not lacking, ephemeral, and extremely difficult to defend”. Given this state of affairs, it is not surprising to find that the majority of KM positions (58%) in the organizations sampled have one or fewer (i.e. zero) supporting staff members. This likely reflects the developmental status of knowledge management within the majority of organizations.

Table 4: The KM Position

	Number	Percentage of Sample (valid responses)
Who Created the KM Position?		
• CEO/Chair/President	16	44%
• Director level	11	31%
• Division Manager/VP	8	22%
• I did	1	3%
Why Was the Position Created?		
• Manage/leverage knowledge content	14	37%
• Develop KM strategy	9	24%
• Awareness/promotion/communication of KM	6	16%
• Implementation of KM activities	6	16%
• Standardization of information	2	5%
• Improve virtual work	1	2%
How Many KM Staff Positions?		
• No staff	5	21%
• 1 staff	9	37%
• 2 staff	2	8%
• 3-5 staff	4	17%
• 6-10 staff	3	13%
• more than 10 staff	1	4%

Despite the difficulties in attempting to separate the *person* from the *position*, we asked our sample of knowledge managers a number of questions seeking their personal reflections of the KM position, their

interest in seeking the position, and what they currently enjoy about the position. In Table 5, we report our findings.

We asked the knowledge managers if the focus of the job had changed since inception. Of those that felt that the focus had undergone a change, 28% felt that it had taken on a much more strategic focus for their organization while the other respondents felt that it had assumed more of a “support/maintenance” type, a “development” focus, or a “quality” or “research” type focus. The focal direction taken by the KM function is likely highly related to its origins. Given that the majority of KM functions were created by senior executives who articulated broad and strategic goals (see Table 4), it is appropriate that the change in focus for KM reflects a move towards implementation of the established mandate. Hence, we see *development*, *implementation* and *change management* as the driving forces.

Table 5: Knowledge Managers and the KM Position

	Number	Percentage of Sample (valid responses)
How has the focus of your position changed since inception?		
• Strategic focus	5	28%
• Support/maintenance focus	4	22%
• Development focus	3	17%
• Quality focus	3	17%
• Research/analyst focus	2	11%
• Cultural change focus	1	5%
How Are You Evaluated?		
• Meeting Goals/Objectives	21	55%
• No process for evaluation	8	21%
• Customer/employee satisfaction	4	11%
• Systems/Project Delivery	3	8%
• Usage of systems	2	5%
Time in Current Position		
• Less than 1 year	11	28%
• 1-5 years	26	67%
• 6-10 years	2	5%
What Skills Got You The Job?		
• KM concepts/theory/interest	23	26%
• Managerial Experience (problem solving, planning, project management, team experience, leadership, change management)	18	21%
• Technical Experience (IT, systems)	11	13%
• Organizational Experience (networking, culture)	9	10%
• Personal strengths (creativity, eagerness to learn, self-motivated, communication skills)	9	10%
• Knowledge of the business	6	7%
• Research/library skills	6	7%
• Consulting experience	5	6%

Given the newness of the KM position, we were interested to know how the incumbents were being evaluated. Not surprisingly, 21% claimed that they had no process for evaluation. Another 55% indicated that they were judged on attainment of established goals and objectives. Fewer respondents (11%) indicated that they were ultimately evaluated on the basis of customer satisfaction and fewer yet (8%) said that they were primarily evaluated on the basis of project delivery. These findings make sense. With its strategic level inaugural focus, the KM position appears to be changing focus (as indicated above) and gravitating to

more specific and well-articulated goals. It is likely that, over time, the evaluation of knowledge managers would migrate/evolve toward more deliverable objectives, as organizations will want to see measurable impact with maturity of the KM function.

To underscore the newness of the KM function, most knowledge managers (68%) have been in the position between 1 and 5 years, with an average time in their current position of 2.2 years. In almost every case, the respondents are the first individuals to be appointed to the KM position. This means that Table 5 also indicates that the knowledge management function has existed 2.2 years on average and in 95% of the organizations, it has existed less than 5 years.

When asked “What skills do you think got you the job?”, 80% of respondents replied

- knowledge of KM concepts (26%)
- managerial experience (21%)
- technical experience (13%)
- organizational experience (10%) and
- personal strengths (10%).

It appears evident that, other than their awareness of KM concepts, these individuals were chosen on the basis of their proven organizational competence and 8-year track record.

4.3 Organizational KM Activities, Challenges and Capabilities

As pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, we thought that it could be insightful to redo the empirical work of Ruggles (1998) to see how much, and in what ways, organizations had progressed in terms of what KM activities they are doing, or feel they should be doing (see Figure 1). Ruggles (1998) found that the four most common KM projects *underway* by organizations were creating an intranet, creating knowledge repositories, implementing decision support tools, and implementing groupware to support collaboration. By 2001, over 90% of organizations sampled had implemented an intranet, 80% had created knowledge repositories, 50% had implemented decision support tools and 56% had implemented groupware to support collaborations. In addition by 2001, the majority of organizations had created knowledge repositories, built data warehouses, and created internal networks of knowledge workers.

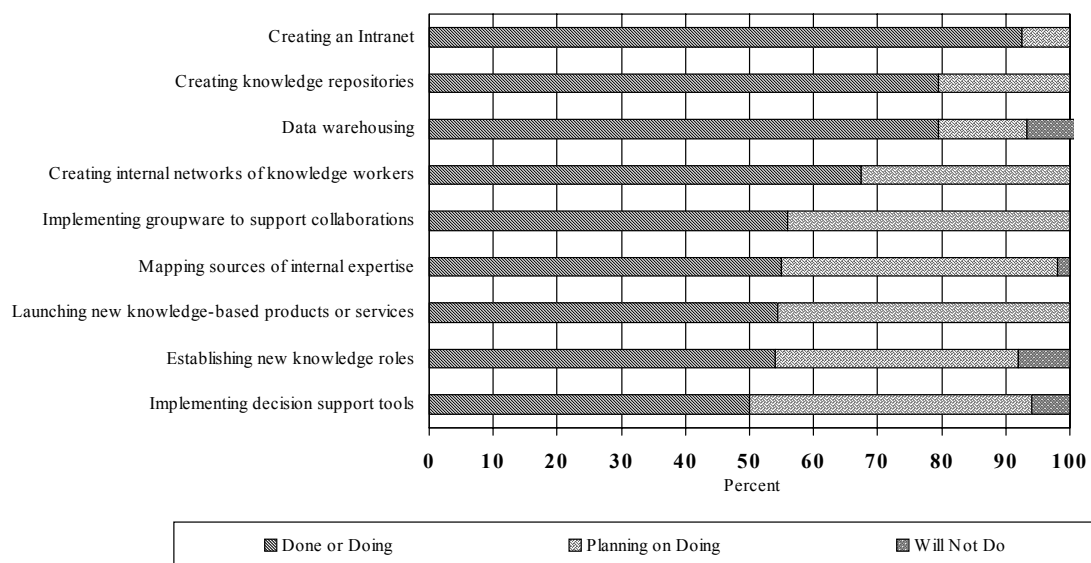


Figure 1: Key KM Activities

In 1998, the three activities that firms felt they *should do*, but hadn't yet done, were mapping sources of internal expertise, creating networks of knowledge workers and establishing new knowledge roles. By 2001, 55% of organizations had completed mapping sources of internal expertise, 68% had created internal networks of knowledge workers and 54% had established new knowledge roles. The three top tasks that organizations felt that they should do in 2001 were launching new knowledge-based products or services, implementing decision support tools, and implementing groupware to support collaboration. Out of the nine KM activities examined by Ruggles and this study, some organizations have consciously decided *not to* implement 4 activities: establishing new knowledge roles, data warehousing, implementing decision support tools, and mapping sources of internal expertise.

In 1998, the three greatest challenges to implementing knowledge management initiatives were changing people's behaviour, measuring the value and performance of knowledge assets, and determining what knowledge should be managed (Ruggles, 1998). It appears little has changed since then. By 2001, the top two challenges were still changing people's behaviour and measuring the value and performance of knowledge assets (see Figure 2). Determining what knowledge should be managed had become less of a challenge while a new challenge moved up the importance scale – justifying the use of scarce resources for knowledge initiatives. We speculate later in the chapter that this challenge is likely to become even more important in the future.

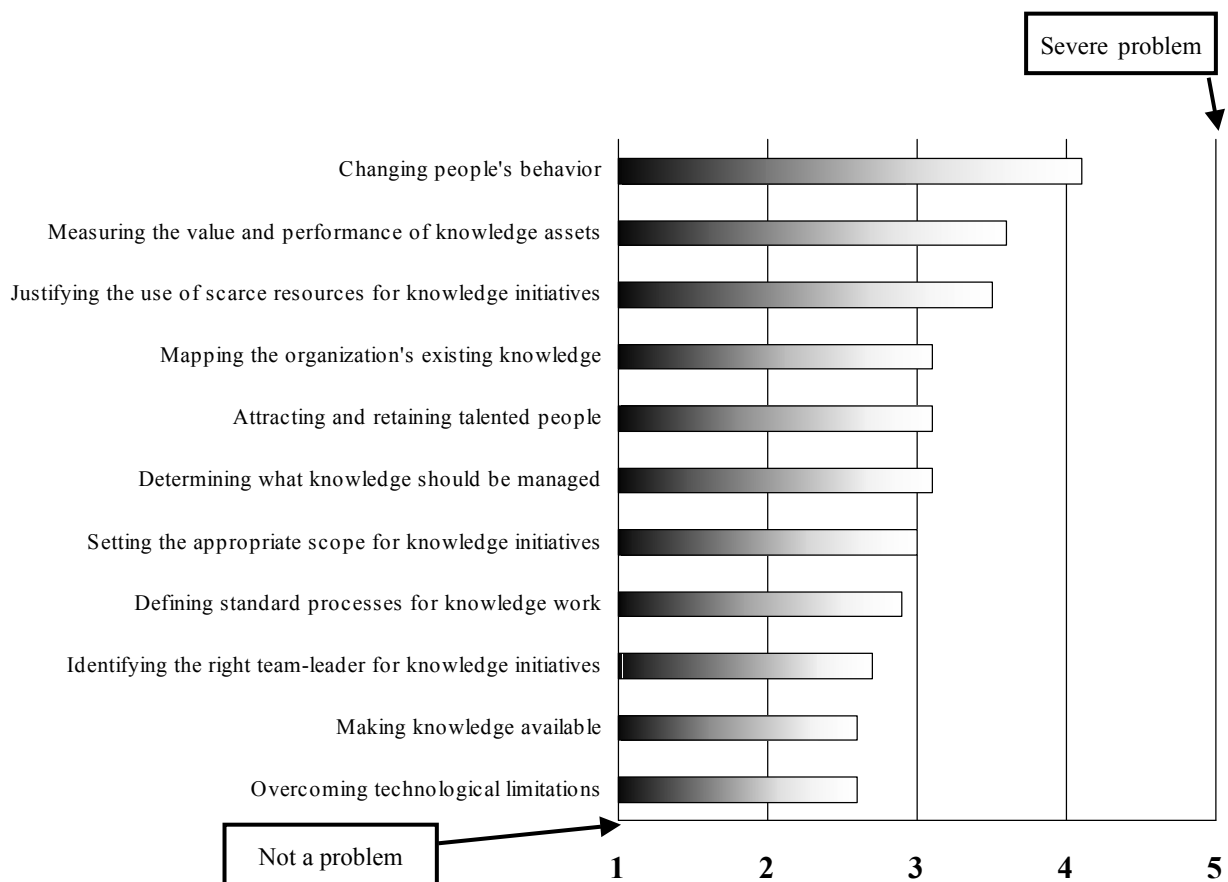


Figure 2: Key Organizational KM Challenges

Ruggles (1998) also examined the organizational capabilities of firms. In 1998, he found that approximately half of the respondents felt their organizations were good or excellent at generating new knowledge. This was the highest rated organizational capability. Accessing valuable knowledge from external sources and using accessible knowledge in decision-making were rated next, with about 1/3 of respondents saying their organizations did these things well. Almost no respondents (4%) felt their organization did a good job of measuring the value of knowledge assets and/or the impact of knowledge management. We found a similar pattern in our study. By 2001, the knowledge managers in our sample felt that their organizations had demonstrated two strong capabilities: generating knowledge and accessing valuable knowledge from external sources. Their weakest capabilities were: measuring the impact of knowledge management, measuring the value of knowledge assets and facilitating knowledge sharing through incentives. Clearly, these have been significant challenges for organizations in the past and remain so today.

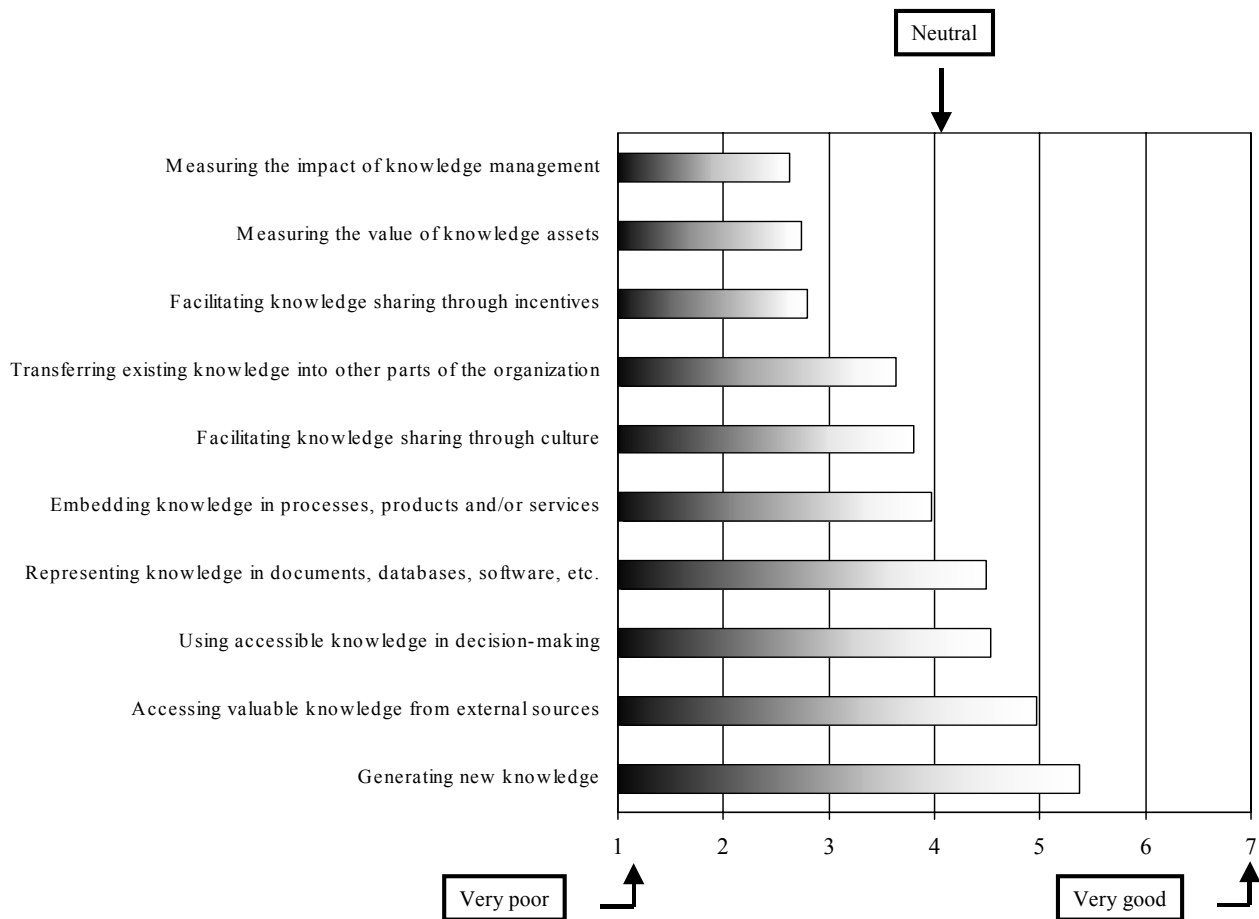


Figure 3: Organizational Capabilities

4.4 The Satisfaction of Knowledge Managers with Their Current Role

Given that knowledge managers (at least those in our sample) have only been in the KM positions 2.2 years on average, it may be slightly premature to evaluate their overall job performance. Nevertheless, we examined four key elements related to job performance: coping ability, job stress, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. **Coping ability** relates to one's capacity to make changes as deemed

necessary to alleviate the pressures of the job; **job stress** refers to one’s perception of job-imposed tension caused by the demands of the job; **organizational commitment** is the degree to which one experiences a positive bond with the organization that causes one to feel dedicated and loyal; and finally **job satisfaction** refers to one’s contentment with their current job’s ability to gratify their interpersonal needs for meaningful employment. While each of these measures a different construct, some tend to be related to each other. For instance, it is common to find high levels of perceived stress related to a low perceived level of ability to cope.

Figure 4 reports these four measures of job performance as rated by the knowledge managers that responded to our study. As can be seen, they are in a very healthy position. That is, they perceive a relatively low level of stress and a high level of coping ability. They also feel committed to their current organization and are relatively satisfied with their current KM position. Overall they seem to be content with their current organizational status.

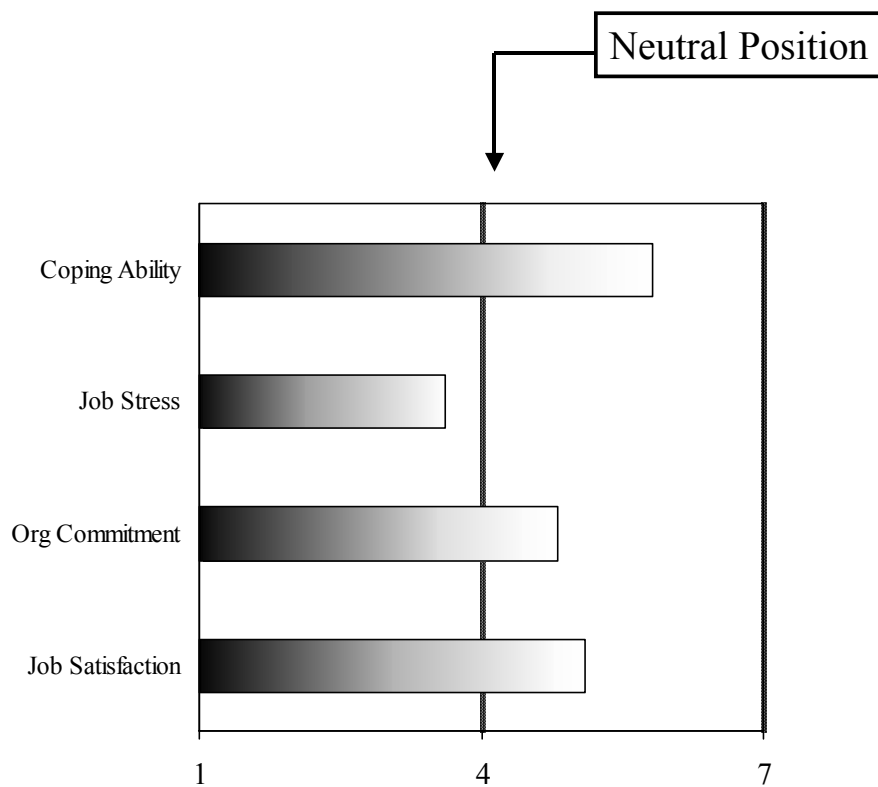


Figure 4: Key Job Characteristics (1 = Low; 7 = High)

As shown in Table 6, it was clear from the responses to the question “Why did you accept the job?” that knowledge managers had accepted the KM position as a chance to “make their mark” within the organization. Their top responses were exceedingly positive including reasons such as “opportunity for learning”, “desire to build something”, and the “ability to influence/impact the organization”. When asked “What do you enjoy most about your job?”, it was clear from their responses that their experiences on the job had basically reinforced their reasons for accepting the job. For the most part, they felt that they were making a difference; they enjoyed the freedom to choose how to carry out the KM mandate; they felt they were working on the cutting edge; they enjoyed forging new networks of people; and they liked the ability to be creative and innovative.

While incumbent knowledge managers clearly enjoyed their current posting, they were also very clear

about its expected lifetime. Exactly half felt that they would remain in this position less than 3 years; another 40% felt that they would move on within 5 years; and only 10% saw their current job going beyond 5 years. The next logical question is “where do you see yourself going from here?” Forty percent indicated that they expected to move within their current organization by “growing the KM position” ... some anticipating the chance of becoming a CKO. Almost a quarter saw a transition back into a line of the business as the next career step for them. As we were interested in how they saw their future careers in KM, we grouped responses into two categories – job categories where respondents continued within KM and job categories that took them beyond KM. This first category included the following responses: “Expand/Grow this job/maybe CKO” (39%), “KM Consultant” (19%), and “KM in another organization” (3%) for a total of 61%. The second category included the following responses: “line of business” (23%) and “technical position” (3%) for a total of 26%. If we divided the “Job is not a stepping stone/ I don’t know” (13%) responses equally between the two categories, we would have 67.5% of the respondents expecting to continue within KM and 32.5% expecting to leave KM. Roughly speaking, two thirds of current knowledge managers expect to continue with a career in knowledge management. This finding reinforces the positive career orientation of knowledge managers as reported in Figure 4.

Table 6: Personal Motivation and Career Expectation

	Number	Percentage of Sample (valid responses)
Why Did You Accept the KM Job?		
• Desire to Impact the Organization	11	16%
• New Opportunities for Learning/New Challenges	10	15%
• Want to Create/Build Something	9	13%
• Empowerment/Influence/Independence	8	12%
• The People I Get to Work With	7	10%
• Already Doing It	6	9%
• Fun/Excitement	4	8%
• Professional/Career Development	3	4%
• No Choice!!	1	1%
What Do You Enjoy Most About Your Job?		
• Making a Difference	13	21%
• Variety and choice	13	21%
• Learning/Being on the Cutting Edge	10	16%
• Networking	9	15%
• Developing/Implementing Strategy	5	8%
• Chance to be innovative/creative	4	6%
• Passion/Excitement	4	6%
• Speaking Opportunities	2	3%
• Not sure?	2	3%
How Long Do You Expect to Remain in Your Current Position?		
• 0-1 year	8	20%
• 2-3 years	12	30%
• 3-5 years	16	40%
• More than 5 years	4	10%
Where Will You Go From Here?		
• Expand/Grow this job/maybe CKO	12	39%
• Line of Business	7	23%
• KM Consultant	6	19%
• Job is not a stepping stone/ I don’t know	4	13%
• KM in another organization	1	3%
• Technical position	1	3%

4.5 Portrait of the Knowledge Manager and The KM Role

In this chapter, we have examined a number of dimensions of knowledge managers and the knowledge management role they currently play in organizations. By combining many of these findings, it is possible to construct a composite picture of both knowledge managers and the role of knowledge management. This, however, is a highly subjective undertaking and we do it out of interest and with no assurance or confidence that it is statistically valid. Read on at your own risk.

Based on our study, we find knowledge managers to be somewhat unique individuals characterized as follows:

- Highly educated
- Already a seasoned organizational performer and chosen for the knowledge management position based on their proven performance
- A “researcher” ... seeks new knowledge, likes to learn
- Attracted to “being at the forefront of something new and exciting”
- Motivated more by a challenge than by formal power
- Receives intrinsic rewards from helping others ... some altruism and/or evangelism
- A risk-taker ... sometimes a maverick
- Sees knowledge management as a way to “make a mark within the organization”.

Also based on our study, we find the knowledge management role to be somewhat unique. We would characterize it as follows:

- The KM role reports directly to the CEO ... from 4 levels down!
- Modest budget ... small staff ... few entitlements
- Job description is “roll your own” variety ... chances of a written job description are no better than 50%
- Role has existed just over 2 years
- Current KM was the first ever appointed in the organization
- Job was created by/for the current KM
- Original purpose was to “leverage the intellectual capital across the organization”
- Education, awareness, and promotion of KM philosophy is major preoccupation
- Changing the organization remains the key challenge
- KM role typically follows a “middle-out” strategy down and implement up

The individuals in our samples 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.

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. Knowledge management is a risk with a huge payoff – if it becomes widely accepted, early advocates will become legendary. If it becomes little more than a fad, these same advocates will be soon forgotten. This adds to the excitement and challenge particularly in financially-pressed times. This risk-reward balance is clearly

foremost in the minds of today's knowledge managers.

Finally it is clear from our survey that the role of knowledge management has its origins at very high levels within the organizational hierarchy. This gives the incumbent knowledge manager significant credibility. As with many executive level initiatives, there will be a grace period – perhaps as long as 2-3 years. At the culmination of this period, the difficult questions will be asked and answers will be demanded. The fear that each and every knowledge manager wakens to late at night is the imminent question directed to him/her by the CEO – “Can you tell me the return we are getting on our KM dollar?”. Answering this with accuracy and confidence presents the greatest challenge facing knowledge managers today.

5 Limitations of the Study and Ideas for Future Research

Readers should keep in mind the limitations of our study. Our results are based on self-reports from a relatively small convenience sample. Assessment of knowledge managers and their activities in organizations by other managers within the same organization would be a valuable future research direction since it could result in more objective assessments. Most respondents were also from North America, which raises questions about the ability to generalize the findings to other areas of the world such as Europe and Asia. Earl and Scott's (1998, 1999) study of CKO's found few differences between European and North American CKO's, which provides some confidence that our results may generalize at least as far as Europe. We were unsuccessful in obtaining a meaningful picture of the financial resources available to knowledge managers. Pursuing this information in future research studies, as well as looking for objective measures of the impact of the activities of knowledge managers, would be very valuable to answer the critical ROI question. Future research should also study knowledge managers in more depth to understand what makes them effective and ineffective. Longitudinal field research, that allowed the inclusion of multiple perspectives, would be one valuable approach that could be used.

6 Summary

The role of knowledge manager in organizations is a new and growing phenomenon. Our study suggests that knowledge managers are well-educated and experienced individuals who are generally satisfied with their position and the freedom and latitude it affords. The primary goal is to guide their organization towards an understanding of knowledge as an organizational asset so that it can be managed for maximal benefit. As they see it, their key challenge is changing people's behavior. Despite considerable support from top management, they have little direct authority over employees so their levers for effecting change are negotiation, persuasion and communication.

Our study has taken a snapshot of knowledge managers via a self-reported questionnaire. Information on the backgrounds, activities, and views of knowledge managers has been used to help us understand these pioneers. They undoubtedly play key roles in their organizations' quest for competitive advantage from knowledge. We hope our study is a starting point to help practitioners and researchers understand the practice of knowledge managers and, more importantly, the potential of the knowledge manager role in organizations.

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