

Knowledge accountability drives knowledge management success

By Bill Kaplan, founder, Working Knowledge^{CSP}

Gaining value from knowledge

Knowledge is the foundation of any organisation. This is true whether in the public or private sector. Knowledge is essential for planning, decision making, operations, and the growth of the organisation. Like any other critical organisation resource, knowledge must be continuously used and it must flow easily across an organisation. It must be created, leveraged, and further developed in an organised, disciplined, and systematic manner as part of the business and operational processes of the organisation.

Success requires a guiding strategy to enable individuals, teams, and the organisation to become more 'knowledge enabled' by complementing and supporting both operational and infrastructure components in their everyday work and providing tools and relevant technology that make work easier through the flow of knowledge and its use. As organisations develop and scale, there should be an increasing urgency to intelligently and systematically leverage 'what they know about what they do'. This enables the agility that an organisation must have to remain competitive, adapt to change quickly, and to achieve its organisational goals. It enables the organisation to 'create value from its knowledge'. Gaining value from knowledge improves problem solving, facilitates better decision making, and enables the leadership and workforce to become more productive

and effective – with the objective being improved overall organisational performance.

For organisations that recognise this value, they also understand that they need to create accountability for leveraging the knowledge of their organisation. Accountability should exist at the leadership level and at the operational or business level. Assigning a senior executive who is responsible for ensuring that the organisation maximises the value it achieves through one of its most important assets, its knowledge, is critical. This executive, the chief knowledge officer (CKO),¹ a vice president for Knowledge Management, or another title, is not a relabeling of existing positions like a chief information officer or a variation of another position. The CKO is a unique, integrated or hybrid leader and manager possessing skills and attributes that include an ability to think conceptually, manage people and projects, communicate effectively both internally and externally, and (very importantly) an ability to persuade and advocate. The CKO is very often 'a', if not 'the', principal 'agent of change' when it comes to leading behaviour change around the flow and use of knowledge in an organisation.

What is the organisational context for the CKO?

It is helpful to think of the CKO in the context of other organisational leadership and the functions and responsibilities they have with respect to developing and managing the organisation's critical assets. The chief financial officer (CFO), for example, manages



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Figure 1: CKO Organisational context

the financial assets of the organisation; the human capital officer (HCO) manages the workforce; and the chief technology officer (CTO) manages the technology assets of the organisation. It makes solid business and leadership sense to have an organisational leader that is responsible for and focused upon developing and leveraging the intellectual assets – the knowledge – of the organisation. This individual is the CKO.

Where should the CKO operate in the organisation?

The CKO should be considered an integral part of the senior leadership team and have

an equal 'seat at the table'. The CKO is accountable for the 'knowledge framework' of the organisation. While the CKO is accountable for the framework, including developing and maintaining the framework, execution should and will always reside at the operational level where the work gets done. While the CKO is accountable for providing KM concepts, strategies, and implementing practices in collaboration with the operational side of the house, the accountability for implementation 'in practice' and as 'part of the way work gets done' resides at the operational level. This makes sense, for example, because profit and loss

The CKO should:

- Report to the senior leader;
- Be an integral part of the senior leadership (seat at the table);
- Be an internal consultant for KM;
- Act as practice leader for external consulting;
- Have accountability for the knowledge framework; and
- Have the responsibility to develop, define, persuade, and share.

accountability and performance measurement very often resides here as well.

Successful advocacy of the tools and techniques that leadership and the workforce must use to successfully capture, adapt, transfer, and reuse knowledge is better enabled by the right positioning for the communication of the message. This includes a reporting structure where the CKO reports to the most senior leader in the organisation. This sends a clear message that the organisation views leveraging the knowledge assets of the organisation from the same value perspective, for example, as leveraging the financial assets of the organisation.

What attributes should the CKO possess?

Since KM involves integrating people, processes, and enabling technology, the CKO requires a specific skill set; this critical role must be filled by a person who can understand the organisation and its big picture; they must be able to tie all of this to the organisation's strategic plan and its measures of success.

The CKO must be someone who is not only capable of being both cheerleader and teacher, but also someone with a vision of knowledge sharing. Furthermore the CKO must have the authority and experience to enable the corporate culture and processes

The CKO's essential skill set

The skill set for the CKO is wide and includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Interpersonal communication skills to convince employees to adopt cultural changes;
- Leadership skills to convey the KM vision and passion for it to leadership and the cross-functional teams supporting KM in the company;
- Business acumen to relate KM efforts to efficiency and profitability;
- Strategic thinking skills to relate KM efforts to larger goals and strategic organisational vision;
- Collaboration and facilitation skills to work with various departments and facilitate their ability to work with each other;
- Understanding of the relationship of information technology and its role in enabling success through KM; and
- Demonstrable experience as a practitioner in delivering operational and business results through KM.

to not only achieve the KM goals, but also to facilitate the achievement of the corporate goals.

The right organisational positioning and reporting structure is only a start. Actual success also depends on how well the CKO takes advantage of the skill set they possess.

In fact, one of the most powerful attributes (and the one I believe is most required for success) is the CKO's ability to achieve results through their peers. The CKO must be able see the value of leveraging knowledge, and then working with and through the organisation to coach and facilitate the ability to adapt business and operational processes



Figure 2: What attributes should the CKO possess?

– and to make this happen ‘as part of the way the organisation does business’. This will only occur if the peer leadership and the organisation as a whole really understand and believe that there is value in doing do so.

What are the key messages for leadership?

Organisations that can move knowledge effectively across their organisation to continuously improve their performance recognise the following key concepts:

1. Leadership has enabled a framework for ‘performing and learning’ – sharing experience and insight from doing,

supported by appropriate enabling technology, that helps people at all levels in the organisation to improve their performance;

2. Leadership and the workforce recognise and understand that helping people and teams to learn before, during, and after the work they do is the single, most effective way to improve performance in the short term, and to establish the value of capturing, transferring, and reusing knowledge in the longer term;
3. Experience and learnings are captured, stored, and made accessible after each project or activity in a format designed to meet the needs of the re-user of the knowledge;

4. A consistent and disciplined process is in place to integrate captured knowledge with what the rest of the organisation knows and to make it searchable, accessible, downloadable, and reusable for others;
5. Responsibilities are defined for maintaining all knowledge processes and activities;
6. Facilitated people networks or communities of practice are maintained through active participation within the organisation in all areas that drive organisational performance; and
7. Someone must be focused on and accountable for the 'knowledge' of the organisation.

Four key aspects of a KM culture

1. People must find value in changing their behaviour;
2. KM is about continuous performance improvement – nothing else;
3. The focus is not on knowledge management – it should be on knowledge leadership; and
4. KM must be part of the way work gets done – not something extra.

What support does a CKO need for success?

Success also really depends on providing the CKO with sufficient resources to take the organisation's KM concept 'from theory to strategy to practice', to 'operationalise KM' within and across the organisation. This means resourcing the CKO team with sufficient budget and people and maintaining a consistent message across leadership about the value of KM. While it is important to place the CKO in a position that visibly reflects the organisation's view of the role's value – and, in turn, the value of knowledge

management to the organisation – without a budget, the CKO's skill set and that of the CKO team will be marginalised at best.

Five essentials for CKO success

1. Words and deeds;
2. Right position in the organisation;
3. Resources for a team (internal consulting and external delivery);
4. Leadership and workforce belief in your message and therefore your value and the value of KM within the organisation; and
5. Ability 'to speak truth to power'.

Success is about knowledge and performance outcomes

CKO success, and organisational KM success, can be measured in many ways and depends on the context of the organisation, its culture, and its leadership. I offer the following general measures of success, which, if achieved, can reflect success for KM in an organisation:

1. A consistent and disciplined process for the explicit or formal leveraging of knowledge is a part of ongoing operations;
2. There is an ongoing effort to improve the ability to leverage the hidden value of corporate knowledge in business development and organisational growth;
3. There is an ongoing focus on improving the ability to learn from past challenges *and successes* in strategic decision making;
4. There is an ongoing focus on creating value from knowledge (information, experience, and insight) held by employees;
5. Capturing and reusing knowledge is woven into the organisation's business

and operational processes to provide real value to the individual and the team in their day-to-day activities;

6. Clients are involved in organisational learning (lessons are learned from supporting clients and meeting or exceeding expectations); and
7. Performance measures of success compared to a baseline show improvement.

The US Army is an excellent example of an organisation where KM is embedded at every level.² The US Army has:

- A full-time Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL);
- An owner for every doctrine;
- 'lessons learned integrators' in every battalion, as well as the training centres;
- Facilitators and core teams for the communities such as `companycommand.mil`, `platoonleader.mil`, etc.;
- Hundreds of trained AAR leaders; and
- KM training at all levels guided by Army Field Manual 6-01.1.

Accountability strategies for KM Structure and assignment

Successful KM implementation can be affected by how KM accountability is structured and assigned. When it exists, part of the cultural or behavioural resistance to KM can originate with how KM accountability is positioned within the organisation. Both centralised and decentralised accountability can be effective depending on the structure, size, leadership vision, and culture of the organisation.

For example, I worked with a global speciality chemicals company that understood the concept of KM and its value at the senior corporate level, but all progress in implementing KM really started at the business unit or plant level. This makes sense

when you consider that each business unit or plant is different. Each possesses different challenges and operating environments, produces and delivers different products and services, and resides in different geographic areas globally and nationally. Each has a workforce with a different demographic in terms of culture, customs, age, and education. One size KM cannot fit all... and nor should it.

Senior leadership in the organisation must communicate the value of 'performing and learning', of leveraging the knowledge of the organisation. But how does this become real so that it permeates through the organisation and becomes part of the fabric of the organisation down to the work processes?

Part of the answer is to ensure that there is a KM strategy for the organisation grounded in the overall organisation strategy. Accountability requires understanding the context of KM implementation in the organisation, understanding the strategic plan of the greater organisation of which you are part, and then ensuring that the business case for KM investment over the longer term can be made.

Developing a KM strategic plan (a KM strategy) that is linked to the overall strategic plan of the organisation helps to ensure that there is funding and resources – or at least an open discussion – to sustain the investment. Most importantly, meaningful measures of success must be developed not only to track the progress of KM integration and deployment in the organisation, but also the value (return) it provides in order to ensure continued KM funding and resource support.

The KM strategy is much more likely to be successfully implemented at the business or operational unit level than at the broader corporate level because the detailed insight necessary for KM success does not often reside at the corporate organisation level

when the organisation is large and the parts are many.

Balanced scorecard

Another part of the answer can be the integration of a 'balanced scorecard' across the organisation's leadership. To move an organisation from KM concepts to KM strategy to implementing practice, to enable a corporate (top down) and workforce driven (bottom up) knowledge culture, organisations should focus on easily stated and easily understood outcomes tied to selective measures of (KM) success that can be tracked to existing strategic initiatives and measures of value, and then integrated into organisation and personal balanced scorecards. These broadly accountable outcomes can include:

- Learning and sharing knowledge in and across teams as a routine part of the way people work, resulting in open behaviour and fundamental change;
- Capturing and reusing enterprise knowledge, resulting in immediate improvements in operational and organisational performance;
- Leveraging collective know-how through sustained networks or communities of practice (CoP) across lines of business and practice areas; and
- Continuously improving business and operational process performance in a sustainable manner that can be tracked to enterprise performance measures of success (e.g. balanced scorecard).

Specific knowledge accountabilities are assigned and performance measured. Unless KM accountabilities, authorities, and responsibilities are assigned (and you must have all three!), success is not likely. 'Hope is not a solution', nor is 'serendipity a management tool'. If used, balanced scorecards must be reviewed regularly to

ensure goal achievement and opportunity to change behaviour and direction.

RASCI model

An additional dimension can be introduced with the balanced scorecard – the RASCI model³ – which can be adapted to focus upon knowledge management accountabilities and integrated into the organisation's processes and decision making. The RASCI model is a responsibility assignment methodology for identifying roles and responsibilities and drives broader collaboration across a leadership team. This is particularly useful when encouraging the right behaviour is important and when leadership needs to understand that thinking with the 'organisational hat' on can lead to greater success.

While the CKO and the KM team are accountable for developing (in collaboration) KM concepts and strategy and implementing practices, the operational managers are accountable for the practical application of KM within the organisation – capturing, adapting, transferring, and reusing knowledge to create and drive value for the organisation, the workforce, and the clients/customers/stakeholders.

Operate a senior steering group (SSG) to help to ensure accountability for KM deployment

Regardless of the name, the idea is to set up a group which regularly brings together the operations and infrastructure leadership to discuss KM deployment. The ongoing challenges and conflicts, search for solutions, and the value of moving knowledge across the organisation is addressed in a candid and collaborative conversation. Action items are recognised and accountabilities assigned. This is one place to regularly 'take the pulse' of the KM effort in all its dimensions and

improve collaboration and decision making for KM success.

Create a structure for internal KM support

When resources permit, this support is provided through the establishment of a separate KM function (internal consulting) and embedded into operations through the assigned knowledge managers (KMG). The KMG takes KM to the organisational units. The KMG role is viewed and supported by senior leadership as an alternative form of non-supervisory leadership. This is a clear and visible demonstration of leadership developing knowledge workers and recognising the value of doing so. It moves accountability for operational integration of KM to the operating units by providing the support necessary to help drive and facilitate success.

Develop and train knowledge leaders

Knowledge leadership training is a fundamental component of being a successful knowledge-enabled organisation not only at the leadership level, but also throughout all levels of the organisation. Knowledge leadership is about everyone stepping up and living the values and guiding principles of the company – it is about broader accountability.

Identify and develop knowledge management/leadership competencies

Look for ways to provide KM leadership opportunities either internally or from outside the organisation. Develop a KM education and training curriculum that covers specific topics that make sense for your organisation. Working Knowledge^{CSP} has provided the following types of training to organisations wanting improved capability and accountability for KM throughout their organisations. Knowledge management/

knowledge leadership courses could include the following example curriculum:

- Introduction to the organisation's KM framework;
- Knowledge capture with individuals;
- Knowledge capture with teams;
- Knowledge assets: planning, creation, and sustainment;
- Communities of practice: planning, development, creation, and sustainment;
- Creating a knowledge-enabled organisation: culture and roles;
- Knowledge leadership training for knowledge managers;
- Survey course: knowledge leadership for executives and managers; or
- Knowledge distillation and sense making.

Identify and develop knowledge mentors, champions, and managers

Craft an organisational model that recognises an evolving set of attributes for identifying successful knowledge leaders. Leverage the above training to move them into knowledge manager (KMG) roles.

Introduce KM to new employees on day one

Introduce accountability broadly for 'leveraging the knowledge of the organisation as part of the way work gets done' to new employees on day one as part of new employee orientation (NEO). In fact, each new employee can be provided their NEO KM awareness training by the knowledge manager who will be supporting them to begin to build a collaborative and trusting relationship from the first day on the job. Finally, the curriculum provides the essential KM awareness and training necessary to deliver KM solutions to the workforce.

Recognise/reward knowledge leaders based on measures of their effectiveness

Organisation members can step up and accept knowledge leadership roles. For organisations that choose to embed KM accountabilities at the individual performance level, knowledge leadership tasks can be identified in workforce 'individual development plans' (IDPs) and 'annual performance plans', which then become part of their performance evaluation and performance reward determination. Employees might take on, for example:

- Subject matter expert (SME) reviewer roles for one or more knowledge areas in the organisation;
- Community of practice leadership roles; or
- Knowledge manager roles.

Summary

Organisations that derive 'value from their knowledge' have built 'knowledge management' into the fabric of their organisations. These knowledge enabled organisations, as a fundamental part of how they do their work, learn before doing, learn while doing, and learn after doing. Knowledge is used and flows easily across the organisation.

They have also made the organisation, and the people within the organisation, accountable for the knowledge management outcomes they have determined make sense for their organisation. When KM is part of the fabric of the organisation, it is embedded in the organisational structure, organisational strategy, business and operational processes, technology infrastructure, and most importantly, throughout the organisation leadership and workforce. People find value in capturing, adapting, transferring, and reusing their knowledge.

About the author

Bill Kaplan, a KM practitioner, published author, and KM coach, is the founder of Working Knowledge^{CSP}, an independent knowledge management consulting company and service disabled veteran owned small business. His most recent book, *Losing Your Minds: Capturing, Retaining and Leveraging Organizational Knowledge*, focuses on the challenges and solutions to mitigating the loss of knowledge due to workforce turnover.

Bill served 25 years in the United States Air Force, retiring in the rank of Colonel. Prior to founding Working Knowledge^{CSP}, Bill was the chief knowledge officer and knowledge management practice manager at Acquisition Solutions, Inc (ASI), a public sector only management consulting company. Under Bill's knowledge leadership, ASI earned top 20 North American Most Admired Knowledge Enterprise (MAKE) recognition from Teleos in 2007, 2008, and 2009. Prior to that, Bill was the deputy global KM practice manager at SAIC.

Bill holds a BS in Business and Economics from Lehigh University, an MBA from The Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, and a professional degree in Engineering Management with a concentration in Knowledge Management from The George Washington University.

References

1. For our purposes, we will refer to this senior knowledge leader as the CKO.
2. For those of you familiar with CompanyCommand.com, you know that this is true down to the element level.
3. RASCI: Responsible, accountable, supportive, consulted, informed. (For an example, see it.toolbox.com/wiki/index.php/RASCI_Model).