

Champions Of Knowledge Management: Towards A Framework Of Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO) Effectiveness

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Abstract

In recent years it has become increasingly common to support corporate knowledge management (KM) initiatives through the creation of a senior management position, which is most frequently labeled "Chief Knowledge Officer" (CKO). There is agreement in the existing literature as well as amongst practitioners as to the purpose of such a position: The CKO is supposed to develop, diffuse and maintain organization-wide KM solutions. In a word, he or she is supposed to act as the corporate "champion" for KM.

The decision to assign responsibility for corporate KM initiatives to a formally appointed CKO -- as opposed to relying on a more decentralized philosophy -- has not been free from critique. Reservations center around three main arguments linked to the *perception* of, *responsibility* for and *resistance* against KM that may result from such an approach. Attributing the responsibility for KM to a senior executive and a specialized staff department may (a) increase the risk of KM being perceived as another "flavor-of-the-month" management fad, (b) have an adverse effect on employees' perceived responsibility for contributing to KM, and (c) prompt outright resistance when employees' consent and involvement in building KM tools and solutions is not solicited. As a result, some argue that the formal appointment of a CKO is an inadequate solution for dealing with the issue of creating, sharing and sustaining organizational knowledge and competencies.

Based on several sets of exploratory interviews with CKOs, line managers and members of top management in a variety of companies headquartered in Germany and Switzerland we will attempt to build a general framework of factors that contribute to the perceived effectiveness of the CKO. CKO effectiveness will be evaluated from two sides: top management satisfaction with corporate KM initiatives and line manager satisfaction with the implementation of concrete KM initiatives. From a review of existing research on CKO roles and from theories of management fashion, strategy process, change management and issue selling we derive a number of potential determinants of CKO effectiveness, which will serve as an initial research template. These determinants include top management support for KM, individual background of the CKO (internal or external, staff or line origin, contextual knowledge about organization), rhetoric used by the CKO (time frame, rational or institutional, form of presentation, bundling with other issues), involvement strategies used by the CKO (upward, lateral, downward, mixed), and process moves (formality, preparation, timing).

The results of our study are expected to have implications for organizational research and practice. From a practitioner's viewpoint, the results should indicate success factors for effective managerial behavior in a CKO position. To a certain degree, these results can be expected to be generalizable to formally assigned organizational "champions" of new management concepts. From a research perspective, the main contribution is expected to fall in the area of management fashion research. The mainstream of the recent fashion literature takes a macro view of the management fashion "market", lifecycles of single management fashions or the effects of "bandwagons" on various organizational-level variables. In contrast, our paper provides an implicit focus on the microprocesses of diffusion of a new concept through the activities of an organizational "champion".