many ambiguities characterize the new corporate role of CKO and knowledge management in general.

In many large organizations, and some small ones, a new corporate executive is emerging — the chief knowledge officer. Companies are creating the position to initiate, drive, and coordinate knowledge management programs. We have studied twenty chief knowledge officers (CKOs) in North America and Europe both to understand their roles and to gain insight on evolving knowledge management practice.

An accepted definition of knowledge management does not yet exist, although perspectives on knowledge abound. Most of the CKOs we studied have little time for such conceptualization, but they agree on three points.

1. Knowledge today is a necessary and sustainable source of competitive advantage. In an era characterized by rapid change and uncertainty, it is claimed that successful companies are those that consistently create new knowledge, disseminate it through the organization, and embody it in technologies, products, and services. Indeed, several sectors — for example, the financial services, consulting, and software industries — depend on knowledge as their principal way to create value. Thus knowledge is displacing capital, natural resources, and labor as the basic economic resource.

2. There is general recognition that com-
panies are not good at managing knowledge. They may undervalue the creation and capture of knowledge, they may lose or give away what they possess, they may deter or inhibit knowledge sharing, and they may underinvest in both using and reusing the knowledge they have. Above all, perhaps, they may not know what they know. This is probably true of explicit or articulated knowledge: that which can be expressed in words and numbers and can be easily communicated and shared in hard form, as scientific formulas, codified procedures, or universal principles. It is undoubtedly true of tacit or unarticulated knowledge: that which is more personal, experiential, context specific, and hard to formalize; is difficult to communicate or share with others; and is generally in the heads of individuals and teams. 3. Recognizing the potential of knowledge in value creation and the failure to fully exploit it, some corporations have embarked on knowledge management programs. These are explicit attempts to manage knowledge as a resource, in particular:

1. Designing and installing techniques and processes to create, protect, and use known knowledge.
2. Designing and creating environments and activities to discover and release knowledge that is not known.
3. Articulating the purpose and nature of managing knowledge as a resource and embodying it in other initiatives and programs.

These three activities need not be solely, or even mainly, intraorganizational. To be sure, there is usually potential for improving knowledge capabilities, both within and between units of an organization. But external or interorganizational possibilities may be at least as attractive and ultimately more important. These include, for example, mutual sharing of knowledge with partners, allies, intermediaries, suppliers, and customers. Equally, protecting external leakage of some knowledge can be a vital concern to companies that have focused on intellectual capital formation.

Current movements such as intellectual asset (or capital) management and organizational intelligence are closely related to knowledge management. Together with other related themes such as organizational learning and information management, they may be conceptualized or practiced differently from the emerging praxis of knowledge management or, in some cases, they may be much the same. Consequently, there are some corporate executives leading such initiatives who will feel that they are, in effect, CKOs. However, they have different titles, such as director of intellectual capital or vice president of organizational learning.

The much commoner and well-established role of chief information officer, or CIO, although sometimes thought to be similar to that of CKO, is quite different. CIOs have distinct responsibilities — IT strategy, IT operations, and managing the IT function — and so far have not formally taken on the full range of knowledge management activities. Where a CKO exists, there is also likely to be a CIO, but the corollary is not true.

Those “chief knowledge officers” we studied are senior corporate executives with “knowledge” in their titles. In other words, we could assume that they had been appointed specifically to orchestrate a knowledge management program. They are all first incumbents in the role, most having been in office less than two years. We studied them using semistructured face-to-face interviews plus a personality assessment questionnaire. Subsequently, we conducted two workshops with some of the participants to compare our results with their collective experiences.

Other than for reasons of curiosity, why study chief knowledge officers? Eight practical questions stand out:

1. What do CKOs 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. How does a CKO differ from a CIO? (Could one person take on both roles?)
4. Is there a typical CKO profile or personality? (If I, as a CEO, wanted to appoint a CKO, how would I select one?)
5. What resources and support does a CKO require? (Am I, as a CEO, signing a blank check?)
6. What are the early lessons of experience? (Are there any emerging “critical success factors” for CKOs?)
7. Is the role of CKO likely to endure? (Is it a temporary role or a short-term fad?)
8. Does knowledge management require a CKO? (Is appointing a CKO the wrong place to start?)

Although, not surprisingly, we found differences in what CKOs did in their particular organizations, we
CEOs have appointed CKOs more through intuition and instinct than through analysis or strategic logic.

found a remarkable similarity in their personal profiles and in their experiences to date.” “Chief knowledge officer” is an unusual and arresting title; as one participant said: “I have the honor of having the most pretentious title in the corporation.” Our study suggests that CKOs are also unusual and arresting people.

What Do CKOs Do?
The role of the CKO is so immature that there is no job specification. Different corporations are likely to have different expectations of it. So CKOs have had first to work out an agenda for themselves, and they commonly refer to the rapid learning involved. This is mainly because their mission or mandate is not clear. “Everybody here, me included, is on a vertical learning curve about knowledge management,” admitted one CKO. Almost invariably, CKOs are appointed by the CEO; one CEO said, “At the time, appointing a CKO was much more of a gut feeling than anything else.” In other words, CEOs have appointed CKOs more through intuition and instinct than through analysis or strategic logic.

The CKOs we studied thus had to discover and develop the CEO’s implicit vision of how knowledge management would make a difference. On the one hand, the CEOs were thinking boldly; on the other, they were not thinking in detail. Their goals, however, were fairly clear, usually concerned with correcting one or more of these perceived corporate deficiencies:

- Inattention to the explicit or formal management of knowledge in ongoing operations.
- Failure to leverage the hidden value of corporate knowledge in business development.
- Inability to learn from past failures and successes in strategic decision making.
- Not creating value or “making money” from knowledge embedded in products or held by employees.

So the primary task of a first-generation CKO is to articulate a knowledge management program. This is a twofold task that involves evangelizing the nature and value potential of knowledge and selling not only the concept of knowledge management but also how to sell it to both corporate and line or local management. In particular, CKOs have found they need to engage senior executives one on one to understand possible individual or local knowledge gaps or opportunities and to initiate customized knowledge management projects. As one CKO explained, “Unless I can persuade people that knowledge management is not just for the benefit of other people, I haven’t got much hope of persuading them to buy into it. They have to believe there’s something in it for them and that I care about that as much as they do. Otherwise it just comes across as the latest form of cynical manipulation.”

Therefore, CKOs spend a lot of time “walking around the organization.” In particular, they interact with four types of managers (see Figure 1). They look for those who are excited about a particular knowledge management idea or project and thus have identified where improvement is possible and are likely to want to try something new. These are their knowledge champions. They also seek to identify from the senior executive cadre those who are enthused by knowledge management, identify with the concept, and make public statements about it. These are potential knowledge sponsors who will invest in and support knowledge management projects.

Surprisingly, several CKOs we studied also spent time identifying executives who are hostile to knowledge management and or the appointment of a CKO. They sense that in a new and as yet ill-defined corporate initiative, especially one with the CEO’s personal (or idiosyncratic) support, there will be doubters and reactionaries who must be converted to the cause or

Figure 1
The CKO’s Network

![Knowledge Network Diagram]
avoided for now. These are the knowledge skeptics. Finally, the CKO, once he or she has initiated a project of any substance, will need allies in implementation, typically, IS executives and HR professionals. These are the knowledge partners.

**Corporatewide knowledge management investments often need a high-level nonfunctional sponsor like the CKO.**

Rarely, however, do these partners come from outside the organization. For example, CKOs are skeptical about how management consultants can help, feeling they are lower down the learning curve than themselves. One interviewee complained, "The consultants who have woken up to knowledge management as an opportunity and are peddling expertise in this field actually know less about it than we do." In a similar vein, CKOs have soon concluded there is little to be learned from conferences and external contact, as they discover that knowledge extraction is more common than knowledge sharing!

A common word in the CKO's vocabulary is "design." CKOs are designers of knowledge directories, knowledge-based systems, knowledge-intensive business and management processes, knowledge exchange events, knowledge-sharing physical spaces, and knowledge protection policies. Mostly, their designs are conceptual. In other words, they work on an idea with a champion and contribute design suggestions and inject thinking from emerging knowledge management practice, as a consultant or systems analyst would. They then enlist the help of relevant partners.

Occasionally, however, CKOs are themselves sponsors. For example, they promote and contract-manage the construction of meeting, eating, and resting places to encourage informal social interaction, reflection, and chance conversations. In some organizations, they are the primary promoters of intranets and videoconferencing (and related groupware) to facilitate enterprise-wide or team-based communication and knowledge sharing. And, in especially knowledge-intensive firms, such as consultancies, financial services, and science-based manufacturers, they drive initiatives to both measure and protect intellectual capital. In other words, corporatewide knowledge management investments often need a high-level nonfunctional sponsor like the CKO.

The twenty CKOs we studied recognize both the explicit and tacit dimensions of knowledge. They believe that early opportunities exist to address and improve the capture, codification, storage, protection, and sharing of explicit knowledge and that this is the area with which potential champions and sponsors commonly identify. However, some believe that the most valuable and untapped knowledge is tacit and are concentrating on this area. In particular, they seek to encourage and facilitate conversations and unplanned or chance encounters. This is why designing physical meeting spaces is on their agenda. The second best intervention in the tacit area that CKOs favor is videoconferencing. This augments the same time/same place interaction of conversation with same time/different place dialogue, yet retains both verbal and nonverbal messages.

So, most CKOs initiate both social and technological investments. One CKO described knowledge management as "20 percent technology and 80 percent cultural change." CKOs are not therefore monolithic but are eclectic change agents. (For a matrix of their typical knowledge management initiatives, see Figure 2.)

**The Model CKO**

CKOs have two principal design competencies: they are technologists and environmentalists. They encourage and initiate investments in information technology and also in the social environment. They have to be able to manage both sorts of projects (see Figure 2).
3). As a technologist, the CKO has to understand which technologies can contribute to capturing, storing, exploring, and, in particular, sharing knowledge. Several of these are emerging new technologies. Thus the CKO has to be sufficiently informed about technology to evaluate what works, to judge when to adopt a technology, to appreciate the opportunities enabled, and to assess any demanding implementation issues. On some occasions, the CKO is the sponsor of the IT project and nearly always has to work with the CIO or a senior IS executive. Thus the CKO needs the confidence to have credible discussions with technology partners. Among the CKOs we studied, this was more likely to come from past involvement with IT projects than from formal IT training.

The CKOs studied stress their design role, namely, the creation of social environments that stimulate and facilitate both arranged and chance conversations.

Such technology capability is not optional: the CKOs we studied recognize that they cannot operate in the organizational domain of knowledge management alone. Indeed, their first initiative is often based on IT, such as creating knowledge directories, developing knowledge-sharing groupware, or building an intranet. As one recently appointed CKO reported, “We found we desperately needed an intranet to get people connected who did not know each other.” And reengineering knowledge-intensive management and business processes, such as new product development or sales planning, often requires development of a knowledge-sharing IT application, such as groupware to record experiences and ideas or a database to work from agreed on or continuously updated know-how.

In contrast, the organizational domain and the management of tacit knowledge require much “softer” competencies. Here, the CKOs studied stress their design role, namely the creation of social environments that stimulate and facilitate both arranged and chance conversations or the development of events and processes that encourage more deliberate knowledge creation and exchange. The CKO is therefore also an environmentalist, which implies several things. It includes the design of space, such as designing office and relaxation areas or acquiring and furnishing retreats and learning centers. “I spend 90 percent of my time creating markets for conversations,” reflected one CKO. It includes bringing together communities with common interests who rarely interact with each other. For example, all those in different functions who serve key customers or have information on them may be brought together or connected in order to exchange knowledge (especially experience and gossip).

Being an environmentalist also means radically redesigning performance measurement and executive appraisal systems to break down incentives centered on the individual, visibly encourage collective knowledge development and sharing, discourage people from avoiding risk, and encourage learning by experimentation. More basically, being an environmentalist means connecting to any management education and organizational development initiatives that increase the emphasis on, and enhance capacities for, knowledge creation. Examples include arranging for experience-sharing events and experience-shaping projects and assignments for fast-track managers, and instilling career development programs with broad and deep knowledge acquisition.

Leading and Managing

Two leadership qualities also are apparent in the CKOs we studied (see Figure 3). All see themselves as builders, starting a new activity, capability, or function. So the CKO must be a self-starter who is excited by business development and by growing something. The CKOs studied recognize the personal risks involved in taking on a newly created position,
in particular, one whose label invites ridicule (although most valued having knowledge in their titles). However, all the CKOs studied seem stimulated by the risks. This spirit of newness, adventure, and risk taking invites the label of “entrepreneur”; it is one with which the CKOs immediately identify.

A critical attribute of such entrepreneurship is being a strategist who can grapple with the implications of using knowledge management as a tool for corporate transformation. To a degree, the CKO is a visionary, able to see the big picture that the CEO has in mind, but also able to translate it into action, to think of new ways of doing things and yet focus on deliverable results. In short, the CKOs we have met are driven by building something and seeing it through. One CKO reflected that she “would hate to leave it undone.”

CKOs are thus entrepreneurs inside organizations.

The CKO can operate only through influence, persuasion, and demonstration. And he or she must be willing to let others take center stage and receive the credit.

However, vision and determination are not enough. The CKO is also a consultant. He or she has to bring in ideas and seed them and listen to other people’s ideas and back them if they make sense and fit the knowledge vision. In other words, without ideas and projects, knowledge management is likely to be little more than rhetoric. So, as in classical management consulting, a valuable skill is matching new ideas with managers’ own business needs and “buyer values.”

Managing relationships is therefore an important capability. The CKO can operate only through influence, persuasion, and demonstration. And he or she must be willing to let others take center stage and receive the credit. One CKO described the role as “the most influencing job I’ve ever had.” At the same time, it is important to be able to read the company’s appetite for change and appreciate how to connect to, and work along with, other change initiatives. One CKO said she is “driven to make a difference in performance,” but added that such goals are to no avail unless the CKO “understands the organization’s business model and is clear on the kinds of knowledge that are relevant and will create value.” This reflection reads like the key competence of a top strategy consultant.

The model CKO therefore needs multiple competencies. More particularly, the model in Figure 5 suggests distinct differences from other related jobs. The “leading” axis of entrepreneur and consultant has the strategic, integrationist, and enterprise-level qualities of the CEO. It also has the catalyzing, selling, and implementing qualities expected of the change agent. The “managing” axis of environmentalist and technologist has the softer, organizational, and process-oriented perspective of the human resources specialist. It also has the technological, systems, and informational perspective of the CIO. In all these respects, the CKO is perhaps deeper than the CEO often is expected to be and broader than the CIO wants to be or has the time to be. The qualities required of the CKO are an unusual and perhaps rare mix.

What Is the Profile of a CKO?
If you are appointing a CKO, how do you know one when you see one?

As environmentalist and technologist, a CKO’s outlook or mindset needs to be broad. CKOs appointed to date come from a variety of backgrounds and have often worked in various roles. The professional backgrounds of those we studied range from finance, legal, marketing, HR, and IT through journalism, academe, and consulting to CEO of a small company or a business unit. In general, CKOs are not single career-track people. One, for example, has held jobs in IT, process change consultancy, and organizational learning; another has been a consultant, academic, editor, and anthropologist.

In other words, breadth of career experience seems to be an advantage. Almost all the CKOs we studied are in their forties or early fifties; many are female. None are approaching retirement. The ambiguities of a new and ill-defined corporate role and the need to be seen as important by the CEO suggest that an executive who has a visible and successful track record of achievement but who also has further to go in the corporation is an ideal appointment.

The entrepreneurial and consulting dimensions of being a CKO suggest the importance of organizational
reputation and credibility. The CKOs studied are established figures in their organizations; the average length of service with their current employer is nine years. Length of experience in the organization probably helps give credibility to the entrepreneurial and building aspects of the job, particularly if there is a visible record of past success. Knowing the organization, its culture, and its key players probably renders acceptability and yields advantages in the consulting and influencing aspects of the job. As one CKO observed, "You then have the confidence that you are both broad and deep. You've been there and done that."

While the ideal résumé for a CKO seems to include breadth of career experience and familiarity with the organization, it is the personalities of the CKOs we studied that stand out. In interviews, they bubbled with infectious enthusiasm for what they are trying to achieve. They are both curious about knowledge-related phenomena and reflective about their CKO experiences to date. They are highly motivated — "driven" is the best description — to prove that knowledge management both is practicable and can improve corporate performance. One CKO is almost altruistic in his zeal, "With the right mandate and the right support, I can make this a better business, and by making it a better business, I can help make it a better world. . . . My potential impact is unlimited." Yet they seem not to mind who takes the credit for any successes, as long as the success is visible and can be attributed at least in part to the knowledge management program.

**Personality Traits**

These personal impressions prompted us to administer a psychometric assessment of personality. The profiles reflect "scores" in relation to the population at large, where 3 = average (see Table 1). The relatively low score on emotionality indicates that CKOs are more likely to be even-tempered, optimistic, moderate, and more able to deal with stress and sensitive situations than average and are not likely to dwell on problems in a detrimental way.

The extroversion rating indicates that CKOs enjoy social gatherings, like to build close relationships with others, are energetic and fit a lot into their lives, seek excitement, and are cheerful. The high ratings on openness suggest willingness to try new things or different approaches. CKOs seem likely to consider issues on their own terms rather than adhering to fixed standards. They are probably receptive to their own and others' feelings and enjoy abstract or imaginative thinking.

**CKOs need to be sociable and energetic yet tolerant and pragmatic.**

The almost average rating for agreeableness suggests a propensity to vary behavior to meet the demands of a situation. They trust others but also need to know others' motives. They are honest and considerate of others, with appropriate consideration of the needs of the individual. CKOs seem likely to be cooperative in some circumstances and competitive in others. They are modest, yet able to promote their own interests, and sympathetic, but without being taken advantage of.

CKOs also appear to be about average in conscientiousness, indicating a balance between the need for control and achievement and a more easy-going hands-off style. This allows for spontaneity, ability to work within guidelines but also to step outside the guidelines when necessary, and ambition and contentment with the status quo.

Therefore, potential CKOs need these personal qualities in addition to career experience and familiarity with the organization. CKOs need to be sociable and energetic yet tolerant and pragmatic. They need to be goal-oriented and interested in change, yet neither naive nor driven by self-glorification. They have a mission but are balanced. When we analyze the aims of knowledge management and the nature of the emerging CKO role, these seem appropriate if, perhaps, rare qualities. Our descriptive evidence sug-
gests that, to date, CEOs have fully understood what is required of a CKO and have appointed appropriate people.

**What Support and Resources Does a CKO Need?**

A CEO or executive team needs to understand the level and nature of resources that a CKO requires to do his or her job. Currently, CKOs’ budgets and staffs are modest, although, in the longer term, their expenditures may grow. High-level sponsorship is essential, partly because the need for some slack resources is becoming apparent.

Current CKO budgets are small for three reasons:

**First,** ideally, any knowledge management projects or investments are corporately funded if enterprise-wide and locally funded if at the business unit or individual level. Thus, discretionary funds for the CKO are necessary only for seed projects, experiments, special studies, and new ideas. One CKO in our sample returned half his first budget once he understood the scope of what he could and could not do in his first year.

**Second,** most CKOs have small staffs, usually between three and twelve people only, often working as specialist consultants. However, three of the CKOs studied have larger staffs because they have acquired existing human resources, IT, or consulting units. Occasionally, the CKO may have divisional knowledge managers reporting to him or her on a dotted-line basis. The CKOs studied have no ambition to create a permanent function or capability that requires ongoing maintenance. Most CKOs envisage their role as finite. Any special knowledge management initiatives are transitory because the goal is to achieve embedded knowledge capabilities.

**Third,** at this stage, both budget and staff levels are largely determined by the current needs and progress of the corporate knowledge management program. Full momentum is probably still distant. One CKO asked, “At this stage, what would I do with a large staff anyway?” However, several CKOs envisage needing substantially greater resources in the future as more knowledge management projects are initiated, as investments in wider and richer communications technologies are found necessary, and as line managers request more advisory help.

It is the quality, rather than quantity, of resources that CKOs stress. As the first holders of the role, CKOs have the luxury of appointing their own staffs; they emphasize the importance and value of hand-picking their own teams. Most of the CKOs studied stress the team concept, not just because small staffs prompt teamwork, but because there is an obvious need for collective learning. Also, CKOs tend to operate larger virtual teams that comprise people who are seconded to knowledge projects but who are still “owned” by the sponsoring unit.

Perhaps the most important “resource” is CEO support and sponsorship. This is not only because CKOs believe that such a new, pretentious, and ambiguous role needs a “relationship with the king and a champion and sponsor at the beginning.” It is because CEOs have appointed them, and without subsequent visible support, the CKO becomes potentially vulnerable. “If the CEO changes his mind, I’m dead,” commented one CKO. Another has already experienced this risk. Her sponsor, the CEO, was fired, and the replacement CEO aborted the knowledge management program and eliminated the CKO position.

There are, however, more subtle reasons for CEO support. First, in such a highly influential job, top-level sponsorship helps. “It was only feasible because everybody knew the CEO was behind me,” commented one interviewee. Second, at least at the current stage of evolution, the CKO needs some organizational slack. All CKOs studied stress the need for time to think, dream, talk, and sell. Two or three years into their jobs, they realize that they need more time than they first thought to promote and embed knowledge management. In addition, a CKO benefits if he or she has space and opportunity just to try things, especially in the design role. And the CKOs studied now realize that some guarantee of multiyear funding is necessary to ensure that they can take substantive initiatives and see them through.

**What Are the Early Lessons Learned?**

This issue of organizational slack is one of two “critical success factors” CKOs emphasize. The second is high-level sponsorship that extends beyond visible CEO support. The CKO must make the senior executive team and prominent line managers believe in knowledge management — a goal that is indivisible from winning and retaining personal trust. Such trust may initially derive from the CKO’s track record, but
before long, it is sustained only by visible results. Thus CKOs also need to pursue successes. Several CKOs in the study are under pressure not only to introduce knowledge and intellectual capital metrics but to suggest measures of their own performance. Most feel that “if the CEO is already convinced of the value of knowledge management, he already knows what he needs to know. He doesn’t need metrics.” But CKOs also know that they can win potential supporters at large by actively demonstrating how managing knowledge helps them in their work and by creating reference projects or good case studies that produced obvious benefits.

**Not surprisingly, the CKOs’ goal is to make knowledge management endure, embedding it in daily organizational life.**

A more personal discovery by CKOs is the need to tolerate several types of ambiguity. One is that knowledge does not lend itself to crisp definition or robust description. Thus, on the one hand, the CKOs studied have little time for conceptualization and frameworks of knowledge; on the other hand, they back any idea that can be construed or interpreted as knowledge management, as long as it makes business sense.

Another ambiguity is that the CKO role is not yet established on the organizational chart. The CKOs studied do not worry about this. Indeed, some of them do not expect the role to endure. “My goal is to go out of business,” remarked one. However, not surprisingly, their goal is to make knowledge management endure, embedding it in daily organizational life.

This leads to the third principal source of ambiguity. Most managers will not argue against managing knowledge. “Actually,” said one CKO, “this stuff is very intuitive for most people. . . . It almost sells itself.” But to commit to any major behavior change or to a knowledge management project requires a clear proposition about business value. So almost all the CKOs studied have spent considerable time and effort identifying current business concerns and emerging value-creation initiatives and then connecting knowledge propositions to them. So the CKO needs to be flexible, opportunistic, and creative.

The CKOs we studied will most likely be in the job longer than they expect or hope to be. Some knowledge projects are quite long-term, especially those that require substantial technology infrastructure. Even articulating and demonstrating the benefits of knowledge management and what it might involve across the corporation takes more than a year. Three to five years appears to be the minimum necessary tenure. Several CKOs in the study — in the spirit of the entrepreneur — do not want to leave until knowledge management is proven and self-sustaining.

“I need long enough to do what I said I’d do,” commented one. Another stressed, “I want to and must demonstrate real success.”

**Do You Need a CKO?**

Appointing a CKO is one way of galvanizing, directing, and coordinating a knowledge management program or campaign. It is unlikely to be sufficient in itself; nor is it likely to be universally necessary. Indeed, some organizations are investing in aspects of knowledge management without appointing a CKO.

There are sufficient strategic reasons to suggest that knowledge management as a concept and practice will survive. In the post-industrial or information economy, to ignore knowledge as a resource could be fatal. Thus, the most appealing goal is that, rather like total quality management, knowledge management will become embedded in organizations and knowledge will become an obviously imperative source of value creation and competitiveness. In this scenario, all members of the organization will own and drive knowledge management. Over time, therefore, the importance of and need for a CKO might decline.

However, today’s CKOs are discovering that knowledge management comprises a large agenda and that making substantial progress takes time. Thus, a driver, leader, or coordinator can keep up the momentum and also distill, codify, and share learning (or knowledge) about raising the organization’s knowledge capabilities. Appointing a CKO may therefore be a good place to start when embarking on a knowledge management program. The appointee may not have the title of chief knowledge officer, but the requisite profile, activities, resources, and success factors are likely to be similar to those suggested by the twenty CKOs we studied.

Alternatively, CEOs could be tempted to add knowledge management responsibilities to the role of the...
CIO rather than to create a new position. This seems inappropriate. While some CIOs might have the capabilities of the model CKO — entrepreneur, consultant, environmentalist, and technologist — most will score high on the technologist and consultant dimensions but be less accomplished on the entrepreneur and environmentalist dimensions. And CIOs are oriented toward directing a substantial function, rather than toward nurturing and leading a transitory team. Most CIOs have demanding enough agendas without adding the ambiguities of the CKO role.

These ambiguities — of knowledge as a resource, of a new and probably temporary role, of having to work through influence not authority, and of the relationship between intervention and effect — characterize the role of CKO. Operating on a steep learning curve and with few resources, but with CEO support and sponsorship, is not unusual but typical of many change agent roles. The personality characteristics and competencies of the incumbents we studied, however, are unusual and distinctive. Finding the right person is at least as important as deciding to create the role.

References
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3. Polanyi probably was the first to distinguish explicit and tacit knowledge. See:


Nonaka and Takeuchi built their knowledge creation framework on this distinction. See:


6. The CKOs studied came from five countries and from seven sectors: finance, consumer goods, industry, technology, consultancy, law, and other services.

7. The NEO Personality Inventory. We wish to acknowledge the assistance of Nigel Nicholson and Emma Soane of the London Business School in administering and interpreting this test. The response rate was 50 percent; the clustering of results suggests that some credence can be given to the generalizations we infer. The sample size is small in absolute terms relative to the worldwide population of CKOs; it is very large.


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