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Best practices, case studies and strategy



Carla O'Dell

The Executive's Role in Knowledge Management

APQC Publications, 2004

Review by William Ives

Carla O'Dell has been a leader in knowledge management throughout its life cycle and I have enjoyed her previous books. This book continues her practice of writing extremely useful practical guides. In this case the primary intended readers are senior managers who want their investments in knowledge management to be successful and provide real business value. There is another related audience, those responsible for knowledge management who want to educate their senior leadership on how to support their efforts, as well as consultants who want to properly position knowledge management with their clients. While there are many books on knowledge management, including some excellent ones by APQC, I know of no other specifically designed to educate senior management and highly recommend it.

Given its goal to educate senior managers, this book does not assume an understanding of knowledge management or its value but it concisely gets through the necessary introductions. It begins with many examples of the practical business benefits that knowledge management can bring to organizations. It then lays out the proper sequence of steps in a knowledge management implementation.

The first step is to establish a business need and then create a solid business case. I still see instances where this step is skipped, usually with disastrous results. For example, one major organization moved to set up an enterprise infrastructure prior to proving the business value with pilots. Coincidentally, I used the proper stages from an earlier book by Carla to suggest a different approach that was eventually accepted. In another case, done right, the presence of a proper business case preserved an enterprise knowledge management implementation from the budget cutting chopping block.

As this book and others argue, knowledge management appears to be here to stay. More than eighty percent of major corporations have knowledge management efforts and annual spending has exceeded the large projections by analysts in its early days. The time is right for a book to guide senior managers in making the most of their investments in this space. It's a quick initial read that you will go back to as you move forward with a knowledge management implementation.

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