

Review of *The Executive's Role in Knowledge Management*

Author: Carla O'Dell with Page Leavitt
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At a recent knowledge management conference it was suggested that little new or interesting had been published in the knowledge management domain for some time. The speaker, an author himself, lamented about the repetition that is commonplace in many recent books. He argued that the study of knowledge management has not advanced much since the seminal works of Nonaka & Takeuchi (*The Knowledge-Creating Company*) and Davenport & Prusak (*Working Knowledge*).

Though many observers would be less forthright, there is no doubt there is a need for new and exciting works in the field. Well the wait is over! Dr. Carla O'Dell's newest book is exactly what many of us have craved for so long. Once again O'Dell has focused on the needs of the practitioners, much as she and co-author Dr. Jack Grayson did in their influential work "If only we knew what we know." However, this time O'Dell's aim is to capture the imagination of executives – and she certainly does.

"The Executive's Role in Knowledge Management" is clear, concise and jam-packed with examples from world class organizations. As president of the American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC) O'Dell has worked with numerous executives as she led scores of knowledge management research projects. Through her interaction with organizational leaders she understands the executive's role in knowledge more than most. She has kindly

shared many of her research findings in a fashion that all executives will appreciate.

Though just over 100 pages, this book is an absolute must read for executives in the profit, not-for-profit and government sectors alike. If you are looking for a book of hype then you will be disappointed. "The Executive's Role in Knowledge Management" is not about spin, but rather it chronicles how organizations have applied knowledge management to gain and maintain competitive advantage.

O'Dell begins by describing why executives should take an interest in knowledge management. Next she describes knowledge management in action, which includes a roadmap to knowledge management results. Building on this foundation, O'Dell explains why knowledge management must support the business strategy, how technology may help and a number of tricky cultural issues.

Almost certainly the penultimate chapter will be of the most interest for many executives. In this chapter, O'Dell views knowledge management through an executive lens as she brilliantly chronicles knowledge management case studies from Ford Motor Company, Halliburton, Caterpillar, IBM, and the World Bank. Each of these real-world success stories is clearly described and all include a common happy ending – a validated, positive return on investment – what all executives seek.

All in all, "The Executive's Role in Knowledge Management" is an excellent book, which will be of interest to executives around the globe. This is a first class work that concisely describes the fuzzy art of knowledge management in action in an executive friendly fashion. Highly recommended.