

*The SMR Knowledge Services e-Profile*  
December, 2006

## **Karen Kreizman Reczek at Bureau Veritas: Playing the Realignment / Knowledge Services Connection**



Time spent with Karen Kreizman Reczek is nothing if not rewarding. The ideas fly back and forth pretty fast, and her enthusiasm and her excitement about what she's doing as a KM/knowledge services professional are so infectious that you can't help but be enthusiastic yourself. Just to get the qualifications taken care of first, let's identify Reczek. She is a practicing special librarian (Manager, Information Resources Center, Consumer Products Services, Bureau Veritas in Buffalo, NY) and the author of an important book about how to put together an information center (*Establishing an Information Center: A Practical Guide*, published by Bowker Saur in 1999). But her success does not stop there. Through SLA, her primary professional affiliation away from work, Reczek is enjoying an exceptional career as a volunteer leader. She is generally credited with having led the formation of the Association's Competitive Intelligence Division in 2004, coming at the same time as her appointment as Chair of SLA's Baltimore Conference Committee, with responsibility for planning last June's conference (which attracted some 5,200 information professionals from around the world!). And if that weren't enough, with colleagues from SLA's Leadership and Management Division Reczek recently led the effort to transition that division's Knowledge Management "section" to an official Division of the Association. Need we say more?

Still, we must not overlook the fact that, despite her exemplary record as a volunteer leader for her profession, Reczek is no stranger to knowledge services and the workplace demands of providing KM/knowledge services delivery for her employer. She has a job, and at Bureau Veritas, as the *de facto* Knowledge Manager for the company's Consumer Products Services (CPS) Division, she focuses her professional energies on ensuring that the KM/knowledge services function is structured and its products and services delivered to meet corporate needs. With over 60 locations in 40 countries, CPS works with retailers and manufacturers to help them assure their products meet regulatory, quality, and performance requirements, as well as working with them to assess manufacturing facilities to ensure social compliance, review processes, and audit capabilities. With its wide range of products and services, CPS is of necessity an environment in which knowledge management and knowledge services are taken seriously, a point Reczek acknowledges.

"When you speak about knowledge services at CPS," she says, "there are really two levels we're dealing with. Knowledge management is the key piece of the knowledge services framework, and since the division is part of the larger corporation, it's at that level where we deal mostly with KM. There's a lot going on, because the company has made KM a high priority for the corporation, an integral part of the corporate business model."

As a first step, the company created a new position and installed a CKO last year, and soon thereafter created what it calls the "BV Academy."

"It's a learning program for top leadership," Reczek says, "with everything driven around business models and communities of practice. And without meaning to do so, it builds on combining KM and learning, that knowledge services connection we speak about so much."

Having come to the company 10 years ago, starting as a one-person, or solo, librarian, Reczek has watched CPS grow significantly. Indeed, even in her own unit there has been growth, for she now has a staff of seven managing the delivery of knowledge services. What she has witnessed—and certainly contributed to—has been the development of a service company whose success is based on knowledge development and knowledge sharing (KD/KS).

“Absolutely,” she says when asked if KD/KS is implemented at the company. “For example, we have recently been working to create a suite of tools that specifically support KD/KS, and our first project is an enterprise-wide search engine. Other projects include developing a yellow pages-type of solution, so that people can connect with other people. We are also building a collection of CVs, because much of the company’s work has to do with identifying inspectors, experts, and technical contractors, both from within the company and externally. Keeping track of CVs has always been an administrative and logistical nightmare and now we think we’re getting this under control. Together, the two products create something like an experts database that will bring important benefits to everyone in the company who needs to find this kind of information and then leverage it into the knowledge the company requires for its corporate success and the delivery of its services.”

A third KM/knowledge services product being developed is a thesaurus, starting with acronyms, to be part of the corporate portal, “something everyone needs to have at hand,” she says. It’s all part of the larger corporate drive, and Rezcek enjoys being able to work with KM/knowledge services at the corporate level.

At the division level, she says, “We don’t focus so much on the word ‘knowledge’ itself, because it sometimes carries some baggage that can be off-putting to some information customers. So we don’t make a big deal about the KM/knowledge services part of it. But while it is a slightly different picture at the division level, the types of service delivery play into the same theme, using the KD/KS paradigm. It’s just that at the division level we’re building on technical knowledge, capturing it so it can be re-used, or used to develop new knowledge.”

Rezcek talks—with some pride—about how important it is, for example, to be building databases, and to be using technical knowledge to provide products that enable people to do their work better. And, without any sense of false modesty, she happily describes three types of database products her organization is currently building.

“The first,” she says, “is about what we know as a company, as a division, a database of all compliance and government requirements data from all the different countries around the world, so it’s there in one place. Another—not so easy to get a handle on—is a database of opinions and interpretations from various government agencies. And another, not surprisingly, is CI. Competitive intelligence is required in business today—indeed it drives business—and we need to be able to respond when someone asks, ‘What do we do about the competition?’ Our people have to have a clear understanding of what the competition is doing. So the basic idea here is to capitalize on the expertise we have, and use it to benefit the company.”

It all comes down to using KD/KS to ensure that internal clients (and external clients, who purchase services from CPS) have access to the knowledge they require to do their work. So it comes, naturally enough, with an added role. Marketing to the clients becomes another focus, and it’s a role Rezcek embraces with typical enthusiasm.

“Oh, yes,” she says. “We produce publications, things like *Compliance Guidebooks* and such. No one else is doing what we do, so it makes sense to put these together and market them to our clients.”

Another product that her team has undertaken with considerable success is the organization of an annual regulatory conference, an activity that could have been daunting for some, but for Rezcek, with her long experience of programming in SLA (she also served a three-year term on the SLA’s Board of Directors and as Chair of the Pharmaceutical and Health Technology Division), this activity simply translates into one more leadership activity, but this time with her employer as the beneficiary.

So she and her staff are very busy, and it makes you wonder if it is difficult to get support for the work her unit turns out.

“Not really,” she says. “Our job is to filter and disseminate, to produce solutions like our *Global Technical Update*, and when you’re working with these kinds of knowledge products, it’s not so much for a profit, or to turn our unit into a profit center. That would be nice, of course—what business wouldn’t want to do that?—but when it comes to the financials we’re primarily interested in cost recovery for knowledge services delivery. It’s not about the money, it’s about providing added value for the client and, as important as anything else, providing a service that distinguishes us from our competition.”

The conversation then takes a practical turn, for as she speaks about some of the work, the subject of compliance requirements of various countries, continues to come up as an important focus.

“What I’m seeing,” Rezcek says, “is that this knowledge, all this information and knowledge and learning about compliance requirements, is needed by big companies. They are seeking to create/house this knowledge and they need a third party doing it for them, so we’re getting into that as well. We have recently been asked to consider building a database about restricted substances for consortia of some big apparel companies. We have an expertise that is valued, inside and outside the organization and that is beginning to be recognized in the industry. So what we are doing is creating unique knowledge that benefits the parent organization, both the division and the corporation, and then benefits the external client as well.”

From the practical point of view, for Rezcek it all comes down to understanding the role that knowledge services plays in the parent organization, and that often simply means connecting the dots. In today’s workplace, the old paradigms don’t work, and despite the corny allusions we all make about trying to think outside the box and moving toward a management framework that builds on innovation and connections, it is all true (which is why the allusions get thought of as sort of, yes, “corny”). Rezcek’s way of thinking about the subject builds on realignment, that critical element in the modern management picture that recognizes that the old ways of doing things have to be re-shaped and re-focused to meet new demands and new responsibilities. It’s a topic she discusses with considerable confidence.

“When we realign our work, our thinking, our solutions, and even our alliances,” she says, “it simply means that we’re recognizing that today’s workplace requires new tools and new techniques. If something still works, fine, but if it needs to be re-thought, or re-framed, or even dropped from the larger scheme of things, we take that action.”

It is this kind of thinking that defines, in a certain way, Karen Rezcek’s perspective about KM/knowledge services.

“Take the idea of networking,” she says. “We talk about it all the time, about how important networking is in our professional organizations, in our personal lives, and for us, we network work. In our company, we literally work with every group. We work with HR, with the quality teams, with the technical staff. We don’t care who it is. It doesn’t make any difference because if any group, any team, any unit needs knowledge services delivery through us, we deliver it.”

It is not only the networking, though, as Rezcek will tell you with no hesitation.

“No way,” she says. “It has to be a ‘package.’ If you want knowledge services to work for your organization—and we think knowledge services works for CPS—you need a combination of tools. From where I sit, there are at least two other elements that we must—absolutely *must*—embrace. The first is measurement. At our shop, we work very hard at evaluating what we’re doing, and at establishing the value of each of these pieces, these elements. We are constantly re-evaluating.”

And since evaluation is a KD/KS essential, the act itself leads to the second critical element in Rezcek’s tool box.

“We can’t get away from it,” she says, “and we don’t *want* to get away from it. As we create knowledge, we are constantly *sharing* the knowledge we create. And we are not shy about sharing it with upper management. One of my colleagues refers to our unit as ‘the heartbeat of the company,’ and it’s not a bad characterization, for we are into everything. We see everything that is going on, we know who’s working on what, we work in all the business lines and all the locations. Yes, what we do is perhaps a little skewed—our library management system, for example. It’s not something we focus on, and I expect some of my colleagues would be a little surprised if they came to examine how we ‘run the library.’ But we are focusing on what our clients need, on what both our internal and our external clients require to do their work, to make their success, and from that perspective, it seems to be the right way to do it.”

Rezcek’s comment brings to mind a concluding point of view that was put forward in her book. Describing how to establish a framework for knowledge services, Rezcek identified a strong list of required attributes. In the book, she was of course referring specifically to KM, since we weren’t using the “knowledge services” construct then, but the attributes—especially three of them—easily translate to the wider framework of knowledge services. To succeed in this arena, she wrote, there must be a knowledge-oriented culture, a strong technical and organizational infrastructure, and senior management support. Agreed. And her notion about the necessity for these attributes leads back to an earlier part of the book, where she referred to a friend, Alice Wiesling, who always said that an information center should always focus on connections and not on collections.

That tune, not sung so often in 1999, is now something of a mantra for the successful knowledge services organizations. It's clear that Karen Kreizman Reczek (and her friend) got it right. And she's still getting it right. She's focusing on the connections.

*Contact Information:*

Karen Kreizman Reczek  
Manager, Information Resources Center  
CPS Bureau Veritas (Consumer Products Service)  
100 Northpointe Parkway  
Buffalo, New York 14228, USA  
Tel: 716/505-3592  
[karen.reczek@us.bureauveritas.com](mailto:karen.reczek@us.bureauveritas.com)  
[http://cps.bureauveritas.com/homePage\\_frameset.html](http://cps.bureauveritas.com/homePage_frameset.html)