

[CBP HOME](#) | [BOOKSTORE](#) | [PUBLICATIONS](#) | [KNOWLEDGEBANK](#) | [CONSORTIUM](#) | [PM SOLUTIONS HOME](#)

Personal Best #31
From e-Advisor Issue #51
 by Jeannette Cabanis-Brewin
 CBP Editor-in-Chief

"Miracles of Modern Management: The Anti-Knowledge Organization"

Even those of us who grew up on comic-book spacemen with smoking antimatter weapons might be surprised to find an analog of antimatter plaguing our work lives day after day.

Antimatter, for those non-Trekkies (oops, I meant "non-techies," of course!) out there, is matter composed of elementary particles that are, according to advanced technospeak description in my American Heritage dictionary, "in some special way" mirror images of the particles that make up ordinary matter as it is known on earth. Antiparticles have the same mass as ordinary particles but have opposite electric charges or other electromagnetic qualities. Paul Dirac first conceptualized antimatter in 1928; antimatter atoms were first created in 1995. Antiparticles are apparently very scarce in the universe, and in the absence of any direct confirmation of their existence, the prevailing opinion is that the universe consists overwhelmingly of ordinary matter.

However, here on Planet Work, there are other forms of anti-existence which are very common. We'll skip over, for the moment, anti-morale, anti-logic, anti-productivity and other antics of modern management and focus on the most destructive substance in the knowledge economy.

Anti-knowledge.

I didn't make this up! I'm quoting KM and customer management guru Preston Cameron, who offered the following list of characteristics of a mirror-image organization in the knowledge economy. (Managing knowledge assets: The cure for an ailing structure, CMA Management May, 2002, archived at <http://www.managementmag.com/archive/archive.html>). Naturally, the description of the anti-knowledge environment is made up of a series of negatives:

- * NO incentives or sanctions to promote sharing information and insights among employees.
- * NO time or attention given to identifying lessons learned from project failures or successes.
- * Assumptions about new projects or activities are NOT challenged.

Best Practices e-Advisor	
A FREE newsletter sent twice every month. Get it!	
E-Mail Address	
<input type="text"/>	
Sign up	sample
unsubscribe	

* NO emphasis on important non-technical skill-sets in hiring and promotions: Anti-knowledge organizations don't value communicators, integrators, community-builders or interpersonal leaders.

* NO discussion of lessons learned from failures. In anti-knowledge, failure doesn't exist!

* NO integration of the various missions and visions of divisions or departments; instead, each local silo produces a different culture, and the dominant motif of organizational life is politics, either overt (warfare) or covert (backstabbing).

Unlike anti-matter, however, anti-knowledge seems to be quite common. Most knowledge management experts identify the "anti-knowledge culture" as the greatest barrier to achieving the promised results of KM projects. As long as companies reward for information hoarding, dismiss gathering lessons learned as a waste of time, develop cultures where executives only hear good news, and pit departments against one another, the real knowledge economy will continue to exist only in theory ... in a galaxy far, far away.

Jeannette Cabanis-Brewin writes for the business press on behalf of the Center for Business Practices, the publishing arm of PM Solutions, Inc., a project management consulting and training firm. She is the former acting editor-in-chief of PM Network magazine, the flagship publication of the Project Management Institute. Send comments on this column to jcabanis-brewin@pmsolutions.com.
