

The Role of Knowledge Management at Academic Law Libraries

by Kevin Butterfield

The principles of successful knowledge management challenge librarians to move beyond the technical apparatus of collecting, collating and sharing information. In short, KM seeks to transform organizational culture and capture what we take for granted: the current and historical perceptions that make knowledge centers, such as libraries, function. An interesting concept, but how does one move from philosophy to practice? The KM discussion has so far largely centered on its benefits to the corporate arena. Using the principles of knowledge management, law firms, corporate libraries and corporations have debated, theorized and planned how to capture the wisdom of their employees and the essential work processes within their departments.

Less discussion has occurred, however, on the role KM might play in an academic law library. The law library, its collection and staff, as well as the law school faculty and staff, constitute the knowledge base upon which the law school's mission depends. Together they contribute the expertise necessary to educate and train students as attorneys. All facets of the library, including the catalog, staff and collection, are parts of the knowledge base. Law libraries — the intellectual heart of any law school — produce, preserve and promote a "knowledge culture" within the law school and university setting.

Viewing law libraries as knowledge-management pioneers often requires a cultural shift in the institution. In the law library, KM arises in two arenas: managing the library or the law school's internal information structure and educating students in KM methods so they become effective managers and practitioners upon entering the profession.

According to Yesha Sivan's "Knowledge Culture — Beliefs and Practices" (*Webnet Journal*, April-June 1999, pp. 16-19), an organization must develop a *knowledge-management culture* before it can create a knowledge-management strategy. When

beginning a knowledge initiative, one must look at the organizational environment. An academic law library can cultivate this knowledge culture internally. Libraries have always expertly developed a KM culture around information they *collect* but have not done as well for information they *create*. From the simplest binding policy or reference procedure to the organization and continued expansion of intranets and extranets, libraries create vast amounts of working knowledge vital to their everyday function and historical life.

Building an intranet, recording policies or other library tasks may seem like a simple way to begin, but it is often more difficult than it appears. Each librarian, administrator and staff member must participate in order to create a culture that contributes to the collective knowledge base of the library. However, to ensure simple and seamless participation, the organization ought to continually train employees. Thus the individuals' comprehension of KM increases as methods to capture and distribute knowledge to new and current employees are developed. The knowledge comes from the staff, but the technology gives them a means to contribute. Training and information-technology support are as essential as time, patience and commitment.

When the library wishes to move on from managing its own knowledge, it can turn to the parent institution. Having set an example by building the relationships and infrastructure necessary to maintain and grow its own knowledge culture, the library is in a position to assist its parent institution. Just as libraries create a vast array of information, so do law schools. The library may not be able to play a central role in organizing and archiving the knowledge created by the school — often a function of university archives — but the library can serve as mediator or liaison to ensure that information flows continually. Because law schools may also generate information that is not acceptable to or appropriate for the

Knowledge Management — What the Buzz Is All About

"Succinctly put, KM is the process through which organizations generate value from their intellectual and knowledge-based assets — [usually by] sharing them among employees.

— "The ABCs of Knowledge Management,"
by Megan Santosus and Jon Surmacz,
www.cio.com

Knowledge management is a catch phrase that nearly everyone has heard. Some librarians and information professionals have begun to designate themselves with the title "knowledge manager" as they take on new roles and responsibilities, while others still wonder what the buzz is all about. As information-gathering and electronic storage and access to knowledge become increasingly recognized as valuable resources for the successful law practice, librarians are finding themselves in the midst of a knowledge-management phenomenon.

What does it all mean? Are there implications for academic, court and firm libraries that we have not begun to consider? And if you know what knowledge management is, do you know how to implement it? What are the keys to a successful knowledge-management program?

These are questions facing librarians and information professionals today. The articles in this Members' Briefing are designed to help you better understand what knowledge management is and is not, while also providing some basics for implementing a knowledge-management program in your own work environment. Knowledge management isn't just a catch phrase — it is a new role and responsibility that we must understand and embrace.



Carol Avery Nicholson
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archives yet needs to be retained, the library can develop suitable retention policies.

A law school's intranet and extranet can also benefit from the library's KM. Partnering with the law school in creating scalable, user-centered intranets and extranets aids both organizations. When libraries and law schools establish and maintain extremely close relationships, faculty and staff gain knowledge of teaching methods and institutional direction; law libraries can become pivotal partners in developing the future of their institutions. However, technologies must not be allowed to drive the development of the cultural shifts; human needs must be at the center of such transformations. All parties must

help employees deal with the stress of change and learning new methodologies.

The competitive environment in which universities find themselves — their "knowledge economy" — requires graduates to have information-literacy skills, said Ian C. Reid of the Flexible Learning Center of the University of South Australia. The same can be said about law schools and law libraries. Reid suggests that one way to address these uncertainties is to refocus on the fundamental educational outcomes that a law school education aims to imbue in its students. This perspective enables the institution to radically change its KM processes while focusing on the educational outcomes it facilitates. When teachers and students fail to concentrate on those outcomes, they may engage in innovation for its own sake, not for strategic gain. By managing and learning about the

knowledge of the institution through continuous training and documentation, the library can play a strong role in developing students who can participate meaningfully in the KM processes at their firms after graduation. Academic law libraries can partner with firm and corporate librarians in this instructional role.

Many of these roles are familiar to librarians and knowledge managers. In many ways, librarians are repackaging themselves when they embark on KM initiatives. The benefit lies in seizing the opportunity to become ever-more active participants in the lives of their institutions.

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Assistive Technologies for KM Initiatives at Law Firms

by Catherine Sanders Reach

Technology is not a panacea for knowledge management. A law firm cannot install a KM software package and solve the KM dilemma any more than taking a zinc lozenge will cure the common cold. However, information technology can make huge strides toward achieving KM by providing a means to create, share and use knowledge more effectively.

Knowledge cannot be stored in a computer — it can only be stored in the human brain, according to Peter Gottschalk in "A Stages of Growth Model for Knowledge Management Technology in Law Firms" at <http://elj.warwick.ac.uk/jilt/02-2/gottschalk.html>. Law firms must identify essential areas for KM and judiciously apply software that provides the best data-collection methods and access for each. Technologies such as global search and data mining can bring disparate information together from varied sources. Logical points of access, such as an intranet, bring usability and mobility to the data. Training and security issues cannot be overlooked.

Law firms produce and require certain types of information to remain viable, to grow and to thrive. The technology for capturing this information helps achieve knowledge management. A corresponding type of software is available to help store and manage the underlying data for each different type of knowledge a firm creates and seeks to capture.

Knowledge of the Firm. A firm's knowledge consists of business

information. All members of a firm should be able to find and access procedures, holidays and policies. Human-resources software can be purchased, but a simple in-house database or creative use of a GroupWare product can also successfully capture this information. Adding a repository of staff and attorney resumes allows users to determine local expertise. Consider adding experts and expert witnesses to round out information for full manipulation of human resources. General information about other aspects of the firm, such as practice areas and reporting structure, should be included. Insurance, financials, recruiting and all other business information should be accessible to members of the firm. Such information is often overlooked but can add significantly to the knowledge-sharing process.

Knowledge of the Law. Knowledge of the law is at the heart of a law firm. Information feeding this knowledge includes legal research, best practices, documents, memoranda, briefs, forms and e-mail. Document repositories, document-management systems and some case-management systems allow users to capture, store, search, organize and revise this essential information. Firms should also consider imaging technologies for electronic management of print resources. When shopping for software to manage this information, look for the ability to add metadata to take full advantage of both indexed searches and full-text hunting.

Document-assembly software allows users to pull information from other resources to save time and eliminate errors. Court-related information, such as forms and rules, should be integrated into the legal knowledge systems.

Knowledge of Clients. Accurate, detailed and accessible client information is essential to a law firm's success. In-house databases, GroupWare contact functions, customer-relationship-management (CRM) software and some case-management software packages use varying methods to capture client data. Comprehensive data and single-click access to essential case information empowers users and ensures success. Attorneys who monitor client matters will be able to make knowledgeable decisions about necessary actions, leading to client retention and satisfaction.

Knowledge of Marketing. Firm attorneys and staff are all responsible for marketing the firm. A marketing database could include information about cases, as well as awards, articles, initiatives and acquisitions. Clients also figure into marketing endeavors. CRM software allows a firm to track and report on growing business opportunities and provides information for direct-marketing endeavors. Because marketing and client information are complementary, consider a product that allows tight integration of both.

Knowledge of Matters. Case and matter management is a common way for a law

firm to structure workflow. This organizational structure allows an attorney to track documents, deadlines, contacts, billables and court-related information from a single access point. Case-management software, also called "practice-management" software, offers many opportunities to capture this information. Software functions may include rules-based calendaring, document assembly, document management, task assignment, contacts, time tracking and conflict-of-interest assessment. Firms with a litigation practice will find programs specifically designed to work in a document-intensive environment, with such added features as timeline creation, deposition transcription and discovery processes.

Knowledge of Financials. Law firms have multiple levels of financial information, which gauges its success. From tracking the hours spent on a particular case to discovering billables so an associate can recover costs for office expenses, financial information is at the core of a law firm's decision-making. Time and billing software allows attorneys to track time, create bills and generate reports. Legal-specific accounting software puts trust accounting and general ledger creation at a firm's fingertips.

Integration. From in-house databases to complex practice-management software, integration of different systems and software packages is an essential first step for using technology to assist KM.

It is important to have as much information as possible shared across databases with a single entry point to eliminate duplication of effort and inconsistent information. Knowledge gleaned with these software tools is only as good as the information that goes into them: garbage in, garbage out.

Access. There are two main ways to access the information stored in a firm's software and data repositories: search the data or browse it. A combination of methods is often required to find enough relevant information to create knowledge. Information residing in multiple systems — proprietary software, Web-based applications, legal research databases, Internet and intranet materials — can be searched simultaneously using robust search engines or spiders. An intranet, portal or extranet can facilitate browsing and impose a logical structure to data. But the key to success is presenting the information so users can intuitively maneuver through the data or find it through a search.

Issues. Acquiring, installing and implementing technologies are only a minute part of the overall KM mission. The complete commitment of law firm stakeholders is vital to the success of any KM initiative. Firms can offer incentives to participate in the KM process. Training in each of the systems should be available and mandated. The firm must address a variety of security issues as systems are installed, including remote access, privileged

information, client confidentiality, Chinese wall and other security matters.

Conclusion. Thoughtful implementation of information technologies in a law firm is a great way to begin or invigorate a KM initiative. Bill Fraser's "Deconstructing KM in Law Firms," available at <http://www.lwk.co.uk>, cautions that *information* — that stored in a computer — *and knowledge are two different topics. Information becomes knowledge only when assimilated by a human.* The process requires an investment of motivation, time and effort. Predictions for the future of law suggest that information technologies and systems will become increasingly essential, both to knowledge management and to the survival of the law firm. Competition from multidisciplinary and multijurisdictional practices will push firms to streamline processes. As online legal services, expert systems and artificial intelligence become more sophisticated, the human ability to generate knowledge will become the "value-add" in the legal profession. Globalization and the need for mobility will force a higher level of dependence on technology for information sharing and retrieval as the ability for face-to-face communication decreases. Knowledge management will help the legal profession survive these changes and assistive technologies can support this transition.

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KM and the Law Firm Librarian

by Tricia Bond and Nola Vanhoy

Law firm librarians may have had more exposure to knowledge management or "KM speak" than their academic counterparts, but there is still much confusion about KM as a process, its potential for law firms and how the law firm librarian fits into the overall picture.

Thomas Davenport and Lawrence Prusak's *Working Knowledge: How Organizations Manage What They Know* remains an essential reference tool for librarians who want to understand the essence of KM. People processes, such as knowledge generation, knowledge coordination and knowledge transfer, pervade the book. Just one of its nine chapters is devoted to technologies for knowledge management. KM is not just about technology, and technological solutions alone do not translate into successful KM implementations.

Though librarians in law firms can be viewed as indispensable brokers of

information, status issues that continue to plague the profession leave many librarians out of the decision-making loop. Some law firm librarians face credibility issues in influencing the knowledge-management agenda and motivating their firms' opinion leaders. In *Information Ecologies: Using Technology with Heart*, Bonnie Nardi and Vicki O'Day warn that much of a librarian's work is misunderstood or undervalued. Law firm administrators have often perceived libraries as overhead or as an indirect or inconsequential influence in financially successful outcomes. As a result, librarians are frequently limited to internal matters only and rarely have direct contact with a firm's clients.

It is no surprise that when a high-profile topic such as KM comes along, many law librarians once again find themselves on the back burner in developing these projects. However, a transformation

throughout America's law firm libraries mandates that librarians become involved in decision-making roles for KM projects. *AmLaw Tech's* June 2002 issue, "The Incredible Shrinking Library: Polling Librarians: Fewer Books, More Responsibilities," features articles detailing the reduction of print resources in law firm libraries throughout the United States. These articles stress the direct correlation between the shrinking size of the print library and expanded use of online legal research tools in law firms. The push to move the legal research library on to the attorney's desktop has created an expanded role for law librarians within their firms — if they embrace the change.

Many firm libraries report through their information-technology departments. The KM function often reports through IT as well. The marketing department occasionally has

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greater status within the firm and champions the KM agenda. A few U.S. firms merely claim to be undertaking KM as a marketing ploy, according to Stuart Kay's "Benchmarking Knowledge Management in U.S. and U.K. law firms," which can be found at <http://www.llrx.com/features/benchmarkingkm.htm>. The number of vendors advertising KM solutions at the exhibit hall at this year's AALL Annual Meeting in Orlando, Fla., demonstrated how hot a "marketing" topic KM has become.

But knowledge management is not about publicity, marketing and purchasing software. It's not about advertising to clients that a firm is "doing" KM. Substantively, KM is about making the categorization and organization of knowledge a core competency at a firm. No matter who embraces the name, many groups soon find that they lack the content knowledge of what various practice areas actually do to fully facilitate knowledge-sharing projects among attorneys. Enlightened information-technology departments and marketing directors recognize the expertise of the firm's library staff early in the process and give them responsibilities over content issues in KM projects.

Librarians are the ideal knowledge managers because their expertise is in retrieval and organization of information. What separates law librarians from most other legal professionals is that they understand how to find information of value, how to distribute that information and how to make it behave. However, librarians must understand more than just distribution and access. They must ensure that people in the organization actually use the knowledge. Bill Migneron, chief information officer of Shook, Hardy and Bacon LLP, acknowledged the importance of choosing the library director as project manager for his firm's portal implementation. "It was key to have someone with a strong grounding in the culture of [the firm] to lead this project. ... It also needed to be someone who holds the concept of knowledge-sharing near and dear," he said. (See "Shaking Up Shook: A Case Study in Implementing Lawport Portal" at <http://www.llrx.com/features/lawport.htm>.)

Because of librarians' traditional role as "indexers and catalogers" of information, their first KM projects often involve studying and developing the taxonomy for the firm's intranet. As librarians begin to lead knowledge-management initiatives, where do they focus their energies?

Knowledge mapping is one of the most useful strategies. That technique allows the librarian to track sources of knowledge so that the organization knows where that knowledge resides. Mapping can be accomplished with slick pieces of software, but the best results are derived when workers get involved and take on the mapping process manually.

For example, librarians at the law firm of Alston & Bird in Atlanta are interviewing attorneys and staff to identify valuable content and discover where the organizational knowledge exists. This mapping process allows the librarians to recognize and organize the firm's needs, ranging from legal education and research to rainmaking. As a result, the firm is embarking on other knowledge-management projects: a searchable repository of best practices forms from transactional practice groups, work-product retrieval and a client-demographics database. The newest challenge of A&B's librarians is converging these KM projects and future endeavors into a centralized location — the firm portal.

In "Creative Intranets: Constant Renewal Is the Key to Developing Dynamic Sites" at <http://www.llrx.com/features/creativeintranets.htm>, Susan DiMattia profiles three law librarians who are responsible for developing their firms' enhanced intranets. At Kutak Rock LLP, the director of library and knowledge services leads a team of library, information-technology and training professionals in developing the firm's Web portal. As more law librarians provide the expertise and training to facilitate successful KM projects, their credibility in these roles will be enhanced.

Firms will recognize the benefits of their librarians as librarians become more involved with knowledge-management projects. Ideally, information becomes more centralized, processes become more efficient and best practices are synthesized. Firms may even recognize the technological advantages, such as the need for less computer memory space. E-mail attachments may decrease, and the amount of "blast" e-mail inquiries may diminish.

Opportunities abound for librarians to initiate and champion KM projects. The key is for them to identify these opportunities so they may sharpen their skills, strengthen their influence and bolster their credentials as knowledge managers and as librarians.

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Top 10 KM Tips

by Tricia Bond and Nola Vanhoy

10. **Befriend the partners who have political and financial influences in the organization.** KM projects that are championed from the top get off the ground more quickly.
9. **Don't be intimidated.** Calling it "knowledge management" doesn't mean it's much different from what librarians already face.
8. **Brush up on professional reading on KM.** A well-read librarian is a well-respected librarian.
7. **Get to know the information-technology department.** Its understanding of KM management may be different from the librarian's, but the librarian will need IT to drive the technology behind any project.
6. **Be prepared to show a cost-benefit analysis.** Attorneys are very concerned with billable hours. Show them that KM implementation makes the organization's processes run more smoothly and efficiently so they can devote more billable time to worthy client projects.
5. **Get greater participation by implementing a rewards system.** Have those in charge — managing partners, the human resources department — reward workers who participate. Money and merit bonuses are great motivators.
4. **Show management that you're an innovator.** Take risks. Don't get trapped in the "books-and-hairbuns" way of thinking. Librarians embrace technology, look to the future and understand how libraries evolve.
3. **Don't be discouraged by projects that move slowly or ultimately fail.** KM is a "lessons-learned" process. Just because a knowledge-management approach doesn't work for one project doesn't mean it won't work for another. Learn from any mistakes to make the next project even better.
2. **Go the extra KM mile.** Don't just think about KM in the organization. Get the word out to others in the legal profession by writing and accepting speaking engagements.
1. **To bolster an alliance with the IT department, volunteer to become a "tolerant" tester for new software or devices.** IT has its share of "unhappy" users and can use a lift.