

Practical Matters

Getting some Feedback

Abstract: Cathy Mattis shares some ideas for conducting KM surveys within a law firm.

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Introduction

One of the first challenges in my new role as KM Project Manager at the London office of Berwin Leighton Paisner (BLP) was to produce a Knowledge Management (KM) user survey. BLP is a full service international law firm with 200 partners. It has an established KM team led by Lucy Dillon, Director of Knowledge Management. The KM team in London numbers 43 including 23 Knowledge Development Lawyers (KDLs) and seven members of the Library team.

Having worked for ten years for the firm as a Corporate Finance KDL, I have a good grasp of how the KM team operates and the services they deliver. I quickly understood what was required from the firm's perspective and felt comfortable drafting the text of the survey.

I was guided in the nuts and bolts of putting together an electronic survey by experienced members of our Central Management and Marketing teams. I learned a lot from the process and the following guidance contains ideas for what areas you may want to think about should you be planning your own KM survey.

Why are you doing the survey?

There should be a clear strategic reason for conducting the survey. With that reason in mind you need to decide what feedback you want. You may wish to assess:

- Perception of how the KM team operates;
- The relative value of specific services provided by the KM team;
- The relative value of specific information sources or services;
- Overall "customer satisfaction".

You may also be looking for new service delivery ideas for internal or external clients, or you may need specific feedback to guide current business decisions.



Cathy Mattis

Who will you target?

The approach you adopt will depend on who you want to ask for feedback. When dealing with large numbers of people, an on-line survey is particularly effective in doing the donkey work for you, allowing you to spend your time analysing the results.

- You may choose to survey all your fee-earners;
- You may be interested in feedback from other business services e.g. how KM collaborates with Marketing;
- Think about drafting some additional face-to-face questions to put to those who respond with either strong positive or negative opinions;
- Consider asking for feedback from individual members of your KM team at the same time, by sending them a parallel survey focused on issues from a KM team perspective.

What sort of questions will you ask?

The design of the survey will depend on what you want to learn. It is essential to have a clear idea of how you will use the results before you start. We decided on the areas we wanted to cover and then asked respondents to:

- Agree, tend to agree, tend to disagree or disagree with lists of statements with "not applicable" as a further option;
- Select from multiple choice options;
- Respond using free text boxes.

We consulted with our KDL Associate Directors, Practice Group Business Managers, some lawyers and Dunstan Speight, our Library Manager, on the questions we were proposing to ask.

How will you make your survey irresistible?

In any survey you want to maximise the number of responses you receive. A bit of forward planning should make all the difference when competing for the attention of a busy fee-earner.

- Use a branded covering email from the Managing Partner;
- Include a link to an electronic survey;
- Say “it will take you less than five minutes to complete” having made sure that it will;
- Tell them how you will use their feedback;
- Give them a deadline;
- Don't send it just before the financial year-end!

How will you use your results?

On-line surveys will usually churn out responses in an Excel spreadsheet. Reading the responses and working

out what the data is telling you will be time-consuming but very interesting. Highlight bits as you go because you won't want to read it all twice! Once you are clear about what you have learned:

- Pick out key quotes, ideas, themes and statistics;
- Present and discuss the results separately with the Board, Know-how Partners and the KM team;
- Hold a KM Away-Day to distil new ideas into an agreed list of projects aligned to the firm's strategy;
- Use feedback on specific sources and services to influence how KM time and money are spent in future;

Top Tips for surveys

- Keep them short and simple;
- Avoid offering either a “sit on the fence” or an “other” option as part of a range of possible responses;
- State whether responses will be anonymous;
- Test-drive your prototype survey with some trusted colleagues before going live.

Current Awareness

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