

Sneaky Learning: Has Knowledge Management Had its Day?

Abstract: David Byrne - Head of Information at BT Legal - explains that within the commercial, legal and regulatory division of BT, their approach to knowledge management is to introduce cultural change whereby knowledge capture and re-use are subordinate to the prime goals of revenue generation and competitiveness. He discusses the innovative methods used for building effective knowledge-sharing relationships including using the “best of the rest”; ensuring that the right technology is in place; measuring value; collaboration and creating the “Sticky Organisation”.

Keywords: knowledge management; special libraries

Introduction

BT's information needs audit has been followed up with regular surveys and collection of feedback, so that the knowledge management system continues to deliver the right solutions for specific needs. The BT Professional Community has vastly increased department productivity, decreased project turnaround time, lessened “information overload” for legal research and increased work product quality and consistency in department outputs. But what does the future hold? Vision from internal ‘thought leaders’ shapes a knowledge strategy and implementation plan, so that in-house and panel law firm knowledge can be captured, organised and its impact measured.

BT and knowledge for legal, commercial and regulatory

BT is an organisation in transition, moving from traditional services to end-users, such as voice telephony (only one in 10 calls is a voice call now), to more of a “new wave” company, exploiting the power of the internet to provide broadband and multi media services.

Several years ago, BT Group split into a number of operating units; namely BT Retail, which focuses on the needs of UK customers; BT Wholesale, which provides services to other licensed operators in the UK; BT Exact, which provides BT's research and technology capability; and BT Global Services, which is BT's international arm. Commercial, Legal and Regulatory teams (CLR) work across organisational boundaries to create and share

valuable knowledge; to collaborate with people of similar interests, and to learn and develop key skills.

The BT approach to Knowledge Management (KM) very much depends upon introducing a cultural change, whereby knowledge capture and re-use are subordinate to the prime goals of revenue generation, cost saving and competitiveness, but more integral to their success. The primary focus is not on technology, as KM is seen as being much more about facilitating the right culture and behaviours. See Appendix B for an organic knowledge structure.

Key tools for systematic and formal knowledge capture within BT include Livelink from Opentext (a pan-BT document management system available globally); Live Meeting (web conferencing space for collaboration, training and learning); and LibraryOnline (a portal providing online access to up-to-date, accurate legal, regulatory and commercial information, as well as allowing learning, knowledge creation and knowledge sharing). In addition to dedicated areas of Livelink, with public and private space for posting of documents and sharing knowledge, the team has built Contracts Online, a world class documents review and retrieval system that supports BT's international operations.

Other KM activity built around the available people, processes and technology include Knowledge Calls; Best Practice Workshops; mailing lists by team, subject or jurisdiction; Commercial, Legal and Regulatory “Horizontal” or workgroups sharing knowledge; after action reviews/structured interviews and the industrialisation/sharing of information. Appendix C provides a knowledge matrix, which sets out the range of knowledge activity, structures and processes within an organisation.

Knowledge web

The knowledge challenge is to combine flexible technology with low cost initiatives to ensure that legal, commercial and regulatory knowledge is re-used to improve organisational efficiency.

Technology alone will not drive the success of a knowledge portal. The organisation must create the culture, processes and incentives to facilitate quality contributions to the system, and effective exploitation of what is available. This is easier said than done, and we continue to work at our organic approach to knowledge sharing, whilst pushing through a formal knowledge management structure within the legal community structure.

“Push” technology, such as email alerts generated from a comprehensive knowledge system, drives usage and demand. Marketing and branding for knowledge sharing can be subtle and low cost, but have a significant impact on the success of an overall knowledge management programme.

Typical implementation stages

An information needs audit is an essential prerequisite to any investment in knowledge management technology. A comprehensive knowledge portal is vital for any organisation planning to invest in the creation of a substantial knowledge management system.

A clear knowledge management vision should be captured in a KM Strategy linked to business plans. Knowledge management can fail if it is not seen as something ‘done to you’, rather than an initiative requiring the active engagement of every employee. KM should build on what is already in place and bring new drive and energy to existing initiatives.

Critical Knowledge Management Success Factors

Key

- I** = Incentives to use the system
 - O** = Good organisation of knowledge within internal systems
 - T** = Good use of technology (simple, flexible, creative, low cost)
 - A** = Appropriate Vision, Strategy and Plan
- Knowledge vision – internal ‘thought leaders’ essential - **A**
 - Knowledge policy – capture essentials, identify champions, secure buy-in - **A**
 - Knowledge implementation plan - **A**
 - Valuable content (internal and from panel law firms): systems open to third parties - **T**
 - Contribution process - **O**

- Incentives to share knowledge (recognition scheme and personal objectives) - **I**
- Easy access to content (simple structures and smart searching) - **T**

Ten ways to build effective knowledge sharing relationships

1. Follow your instinct

The information profession provides a unique mix of skills that make the law librarian well placed to develop new roles within her organisation. Encouraging cultural change in our people to develop sharing of information and knowledge:

- Be yourself – real, honest, open
- Listen to what people say
- Understand your instinct and follow it.

2. Use other people’s ideas

Choose the ‘best of the rest’ rather than trying to re-invent the wheel. Have you considered getting involved in the bigger national or international information agenda? It can be surprising how ideas from one sector can provide inspiration in other contexts. Do not be put off by the apparent barriers between professional associations. Get involved and use your new skills and ideas back in the workplace.

3. How do you answer reference queries – making knowledge more easily accessible?

There has been a real growth in end user searching with the arrival of Google. The challenge for the information professional is to seek ways to enhance end user search skills and access, and find ways to enhance the knowledge agenda so that colleagues can work smarter and quicker. Librarians can adapt to new contexts and, if necessary, adapt with new job titles and new roles to deliver the broader knowledge agenda. See Appendix A for how the information professional can move up the value chain. The law librarian can secure new roles of greater value in the generation and application of knowledge. The skills that need to grow with the knowledge agenda include: communication, coaching, mentoring, facilitation and negotiation.

4. Technology supports people and processes: ensuring that the right processes are in place

The technology needs to be in place and function correctly - that is a given. Technology can become a distraction for sorting the people issues. Powerful, stable technology at low cost is generally available in the shape of email, websites and web conferencing. The full range of business benefits from knowledge activity and the small but critical role of technology can be seen in Appendix D that identifies business benefits.

5. Measuring value - value gained from spend on technology, people and processes

Measuring impact is much more than quantitative measures, such as website counters and document access statistics. See Appendix D for business benefits of knowledge activity.

6. Don't reinvent the wheel

People are more likely to help you do what they know works. If you can take an idea from elsewhere and recycle the process, you will be able to move more quickly and save valuable resources.

7. Collaborate with others: exploiting knowledge inside and outside the organisation. Capturing and leveraging outside counsel knowledge

Collaboration lets you achieve more with less resource - use your connections outside as well as inside your organisation. If you attend a professional meeting and come away with two useful ideas to take back to your workplace, then your time has been well spent.

8. Demand more, accept less - always negotiate

The power gained from internal and external knowledge can be much greater than that provided by commercial information products. Information professionals have a good track record of negotiating with suppliers and the same skills can be used in developing a knowledge organisation.

9. Creating the 'Sticky Organisation'

Never stop networking. Feedback is the lifeblood of knowledge sharing. Do not underestimate the value of

maintaining positive relationships with colleagues both outside and inside the organisation.

10. Sneaky learning - keep learning and innovate as you go: capture lessons learned: recycle knowledge

Learning is all around us. Training does not only happen when you attend a course. Coaching and mentoring takes place 'on the job' and yet we can underestimate the benefits of tapping in to the learning and knowledge sharing that already takes place within an organisation. Providing a strategic context to the coaching, mentoring and knowledge sharing can leverage additional value. Communicating good practice can bring benefits to participants and ensure that good ideas are shared as widely as possible.

Routes to learning are important in any discussion of knowledge sharing:

- Specific class-based sessions
- Computer-based training
- Job shadowing/mentoring/leadership programmes
- Coaching
- Secondments into and out of the organisation
- Secondments from and to law firms
- Online training – mandatory and other modules
- Audio
- Live meeting Knowledge Calls
- On-the-job training
- Videos
- Live meeting recordings
- DvD
- Podcasts
- Inter-departmental training
- Training 'nuggets' linked to practice manuals and precedents
- Context linked training

11. Volunteer! Develop skills and build the team

Volunteering opportunities are available from within professional associations (BIALL, CILIP etc), voluntary organisations and local schools (as school governors etc) as well as in the workplace. Do not underestimate the value of volunteering for developing new skills. Volunteering for new projects at work provides a route for making new connections, exploring new sectors and developing skills that may be under-used in the day job. Do not feel restricted by your level of job title. Act as a 'thought leader' in your organisation and beyond.

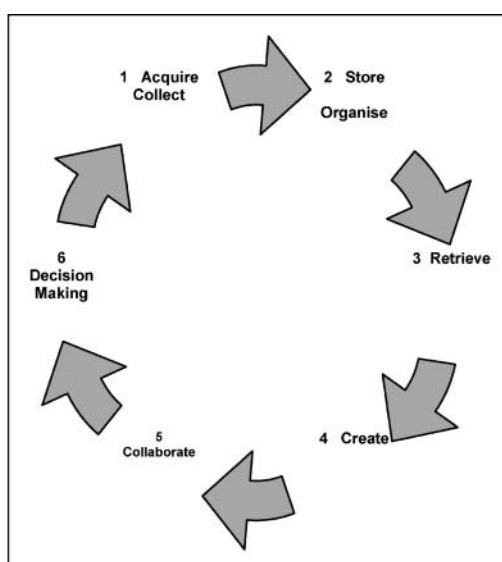
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Conclusion

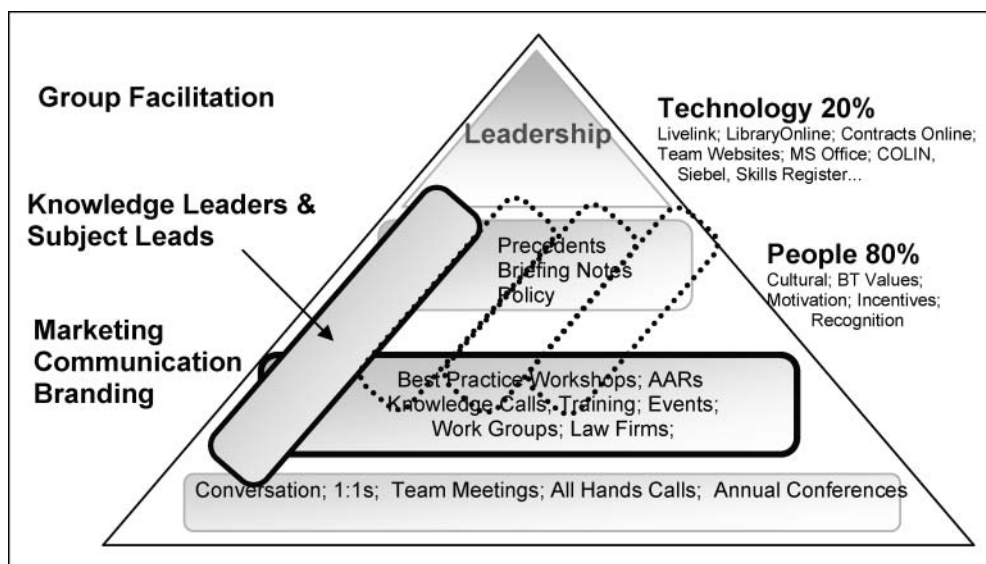
Knowledge sharing has been a real success story within BT. Innovative use of technology has allowed the team to tailor systems to BT's particular needs. The target audience is geographically spread and culturally diverse and yet knowledge sharing initiatives are delivering significant results, by keeping processes simple and letting people and processes drive the technology.

This truly global system enables anyone in the team, whatever their location, to access the programme and benefit from knowledge sharing. It has been innovative in the way that it has provided a practical way of integrating people, systems and processes more fully across commercial, legal and regulatory. Knowledge management attracts a lot of discussion and is the management fad of the moment. If this particular fad can get senior management to take the business benefits of knowledge systems and processes seriously, then it can be a useful tool in the information professional's toolkit.

Appendix A Value Chain for Law Librarians



Appendix B Organic Structure for Knowledge Sharing



Appendix C Knowledge Matrix

Level	Components					
Operational	Precedents	Policy	Briefing Notes	Practice Manuals		
Structural	Practice Groups	Best Practice Workshops	After Action Reviews	Knowledge Calls	Induction	Work Groups
Tacit	Conversations 1:1s	Team Meetings	All Hands Calls	Annual Conferences	Training Events	Personal Development Activity
Structural	Livelihood	LoL: Library Online	Team Websites	MS Office	Knowledge Profiles: Skills Register	
Cultural	Organisation 'values'	Kudos of knowledge sharing	Motivation	Incentives	Recognition	Marketing, Branding, Communication
People	Pan-BT Knowledge Champion	Knowledge Co-ordinator: Lead in each Line of Business	Knowledge Representatives in each team	Group Facilitation	Knowledge Lunches	

Appendix D Business Benefits

• SPEED, QUALITY, EFFICIENCY

Accelerating the speed with which staff members become fully effective increases the return on investment made in that individual and the ongoing contribution they can make.

• RISK MANAGEMENT

Knowledge transfer from experienced to less experienced allows safer delegation

• ORGANIC GROWTH & STRUCTURES

Organisation's knowledge base must be greater than that of its individual staff member: Preserving, sharing and developing individual skills and experience, within context of effective leadership is essential

• OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Organisations face knowledge opportunities and challenges as they seek to recoup their investment in people – at all stages of the staff lifecycle.

• PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Various work products, including templates, checklists and do's & don'ts can be powerful learning tool

• RECRUITMENT

Hires inside and outside BT looking that we are respectable in area of knowledge before making career decisions

• CUSTOMER FOCUS

- work products can be shared with internal customers
- link between each work product and customer or sector of customers should be clear

Biography

David specialises in knowledge sharing, research and creative uses of collaborative technologies for learning. He has in the past written for journals within the information science field, holds a Masters Degree from the University of Wales and is a member of the Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals (CILIP).