Book Review

Knowledge Management in Law Firms: Challenges and Opportunities Post-Pandemic, edited by Katerina Menhennet. Published by Globe Law and Business.

As the clock struck 12 to mark the start of the new year on January 1st, 2020, few could have envisaged how much things would change over the next few months. Covid shutdown the world, to an extent, and while many things are now back to normal, some working practices have changed forever.

This is certainly the case with knowledge teams working in law firms, and this book, *Knowledge Management in Law Firms: Challenges and Opportunities Post-Pandemic*, describes some of the key changes that we have witnessed, their impact, and other challenges and opportunities they have generated within the law firm environment.

Each chapter is written by a knowledge professional who is an expert in their field. The writers draw on their experiences during and after the pandemic from across a wide range of organisations and international law firms, sharing ideas on new working practices and developments in technology to advance and support the work of knowledge teams. It's fascinating to see just how deep an impact the pandemic has made on our working lives, and also the opportunities that have been grasped along the way.

The book starts with a chapter by Nick Milton, co-founder of Knoco Ltd who encourages readers to consider what new strategies, business models and approaches will be needed in this post-Covid world. He describes two key dimensions that professionals should consider: namely what new activities and priorities an organisation will face – which will set the knowledge management strategy – and what new ways of working will be required, such as hybrid and remote working – which will address the nature of the KM framework itself. Nick argues that the post-Covid world is not fully here yet and there are some unforeseeable factors that may emerge, and he believes that office life will change again over the next five years.

The authors of the next chapter, Chris Boyd and Amy Halverson – the former chief operating officer and the latter director of knowledge management, research and information services at Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati – lead on the premise that hybrid working is here to stay, and examine ways in which law firm knowledge teams have successfully delivered strategies during full remote working, and how those strategies can be leveraged to get the best returns in our new hybrid environment. They argue that a hybrid work environment "best balances the advantages of in-person work and remote work, [and] law firms will largely embrace hybrid as their standard work model."

Ian Rodwell at Linklaters discusses 'Social KM' in the third chapter in this book, and the ways in which remote work negatively impacted osmotic learning, and reduced learning through serendipity, during the lockdown period. This chapter sets out suggestions on how knowledge professionals can 'rewild' KM to stimulate knowledge exchange and creation once again.

Moving on, there are two chapters which discuss the deeper role that artificial intelligence (AI) has already started to play within the knowledge and innovation teams at law firms. Joe Cohen and Andrea Miskolczi, of Dentons, focus on how this technology is now being successfully deployed in the process for collecting knowhow, and then for searching this body of knowledge. James Loft of Rainbird Technologies then discusses how AI has advanced from being used in process automation and there are now use cases for automated decision making. James emphasises that it is the *combination* of human potential and AI, utilising the strengths of both worlds, which will create the most tangible benefits for businesses.

Next, Joanna Vainikainen of Castrén & Snellman Attorneys Ltd covers the transition from knowledge management to data-driven knowledge-based management which is happening in the legal sector. She focuses on good data quality, how it can be ensured, and the role

it can play in the rise of data-driven technologies and automation which are of growing importance in law firms.

There are also two chapters which cover the topic of legal technology. Elisabeth Cappuyns of DLA Piper LLP (US), and Tiffany M O'Neill and James G Perkins, both from Procopio, Cory, Hargreaves and Savich LLP, look at the positive impact of digital transformation witnessed within knowledge and innovation teams. Covid encouraged lawyers to become more receptive to adopting new technology tools, and this trend has continued and expanded since the pandemic. Digital transformation is closely aligned with cybersecurity management and this topic is also covered in-depth.

Search is an often-neglected topic, so the chapter written by Jon Beaumont, of Shearman & Sterling LLP was of particular interest. He examines the search portion of the knowledge process, reviewing approaches to locating knowledge, data, systems, users, solutions, and results, and he finishes with a positive outlook on potential future advancements in this area.

In the next chapter Gordon Vala-Webb, thought leader and innovation professional, expands on his theory 'KM and innovation in law firms and legal departments: twins separated at birth?', highlighting the interconnections between KM and innovation, and the overlapping skills of knowledge managers and innovation professionals.

Research teams are key components within a wider knowledge function, and the book also includes two chapters on the post-Covid world of researchers. Mark Gediman (Alston & Bird LLP) and Kevin Miles (Norton Rose Fulbright) look at the opportunities that the pandemic has created for Competitive Intelligence (CI) research: "For CI professionals, the shifts in culture have created new strengths and opportunities. CI professionals now have a chair at the virtual table." Meanwhile, White & Case's director of research Kathy Skinner outlines the challenges that the pandemic initially raised, and how these created opportunities for hybrid/remote research teams. Kathy also provides some very practical tips for addressing these challenges and fostering a cross-cultural team environment.

Of course, it goes without saying that knowledge professionals are key to the success of a knowledge function within a law firm. So it's good to see that in the book Tara Pichardo-Angadi of Norton Rose Fulbright tackles the issue of the talent war which is currently raging across law firms and knowledge management, providing guidance on how to manage teams and retain talent. She explains that three areas to consider in retaining talent are the role of good onboarding; development and engagement of talent; and having regular career discussions and a career structure for knowledge teams. She also includes advice on how to let team members go while also encouraging them to be positive ambassadors for your firm's knowledge team. Later, Orla Bingham and Katherine Land (both from Baker McKenzie) discuss best practice for a firm's approach to inclusion and diversity, which has had an increasing impact since the pandemic as employees have reassessed their own values and how these align with their employer organisation's values.

The last chapter of the book by Anthony J. Rhem (AJ Rhem & Associates Inc.) looks beyond hybrid and remote working to the world of the metaverse and discusses how law firms are already interacting with others in this virtual environment, while he also maps out future potential avenues to engage with new clients and communities. Anthony also touches on legal and ethical issues that law firm knowledge teams should be aware of when interacting with this space.

Reading this book, it struck me just how many processes we have adapted and implemented during the time of the pandemic, and just how hard we, knowledge professionals as well as lawyers, have had to adapt to survive. The pandemic has accelerated transformation within knowledge teams, and now we are going through the next wave of change which this book does not touch on, but does lay some of the foundations for, namely large language models and generative AI.

The book also shows what an interesting and diverse profession we work in, and yet the profession as a whole is suffering from a dearth of new people entering it, causing a strain when it comes to recruitment. This book also goes a long way to explain what we do, how we fit in to the bigger picture, and how we drive the ambitions and goals of our organisations; and clearly outlines that we don't do this purely through technology, as many may think, but rather it's the technology working hand in hand with people and processes that is so key.

Knowledge Management in Law Firms: Challenges and Opportunities Post-Pandemic will be of interest to all information and knowledge professionals who strive to improve their own processes and want to learn how others have tackled the challenges they have encountered, while the wide range of contributors means readers will get a truly broad view of this issue.

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