

Briefing

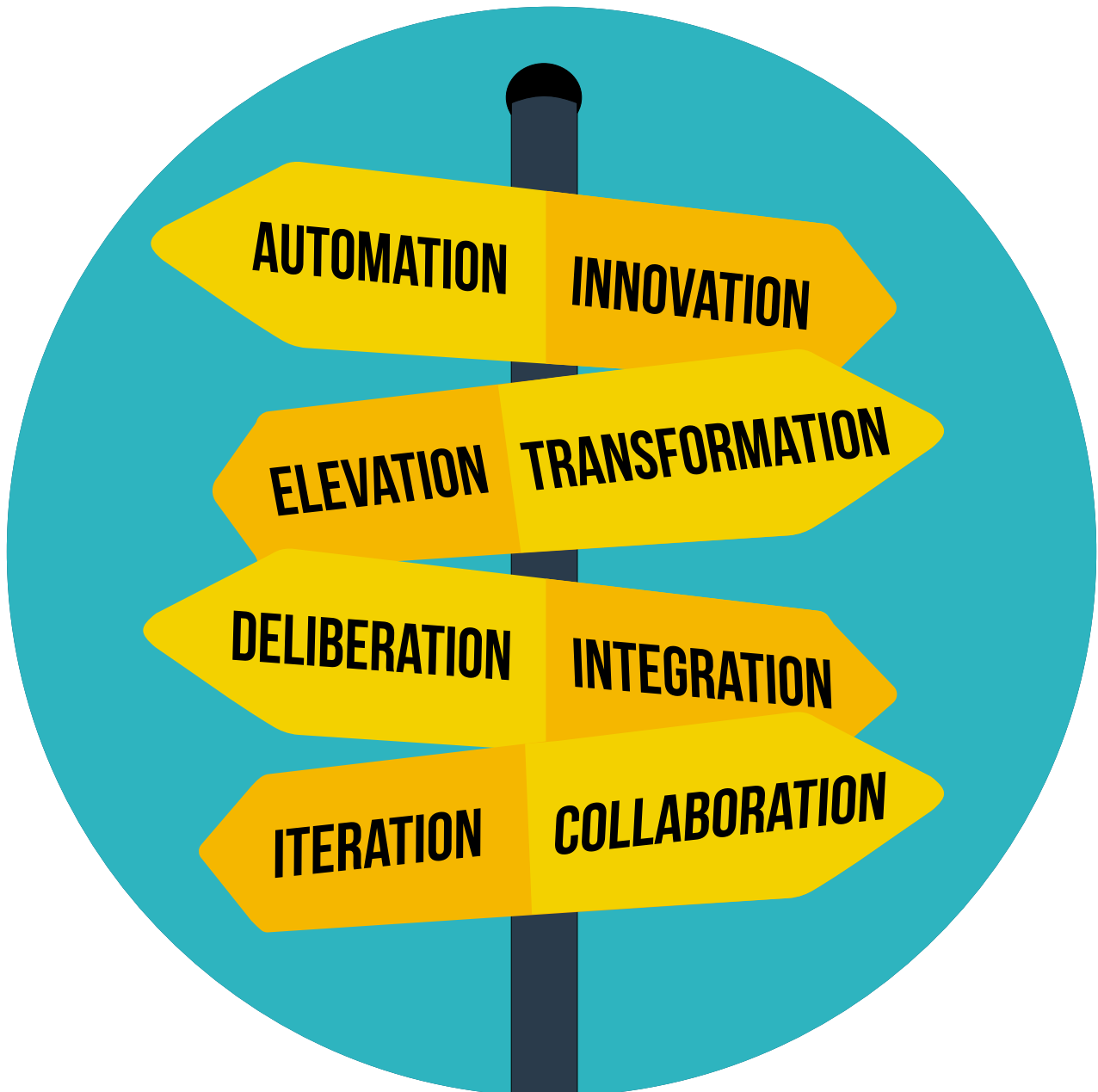
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SMARTER LEGAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

LEADING AT LARGE
Just a minute with Briefing Strategic Leaders
speaker EY's Dr Cornelius Grossmann

INTO TRANSACTION
New career paths are forged in the
Addleshaw Goddard Transaction Services Team

SHARING THE WEALTH
How CMS used theory and data to
drive more collaborative behaviours



Where next for knowledge?

The law firm knowledge management function has long left the confines of the library. Now it's looking for several other places to call home



INDUSTRY ANALYSIS

What do you know?

Melanie Farquharson, consultant at 3Kites Consulting, provides her personal highlights of a day well spent at Briefing Knowledge Leaders 2018

It was good to be able to take part in the inaugural **Briefing Knowledge Leaders** event in November 2018. It had a relaxed atmosphere, which I think encouraged the audience to participate, and indeed some of the conversations were very animated. One feature was that most, if not all, delegates were heads or directors of KM – so had much in common – although their organisations greatly varied in scale and complexity. The day had a balance of short TED-style talks, longer presentations, panels and breakout discussions.

My colleague Duncan Ogilvy and I had the opportunity to facilitate the hour-long break out discussions, which covered topics selected by the delegates. They chose technology, lawyer engagement, innovation and the positioning of KM in a law firm. It's always nerve-racking to be responsible for a session with a limit to what can be prepared in advance, but all the topics produced lively debate. Several participants commented that it was good to have the opportunity for an extended discussion among peers.

Perseverance and persistence

One of the standout sessions of the day came from Lynne Jones, the head of library and information services at HFW – entitled 'More information for the money'. She talked about how she had tackled managing the information budget of an international firm, starting from a position where each office had managed its own resources. Many

of the delegates will have recognised the situation, where it can be very hard to rationalise resources when individuals in far-flung parts of the firm have been used to having whatever they want. Lynne showed what can be achieved with dogged determination and careful management of funds. To me, this was also an illustration of a wider point: that even with the more glamorous aspects of the knowledge management role, real benefits are only achieved with a lot of hard work, organisation and persistence in dealing with people and developing relationships. Lynne also advocated transparency, publishing her reports on information spending on the intranet.

The client perspective

There was an interesting panel session with representatives of in-house teams from Barclays and Juul. These are very different organisations, and the views expressed were also different in some areas. In particular, the challenge of finding lawyers with expertise in a new and developing industry with complex regulatory issues made the approach of Juul rather different. However, both organisations had high expectations of what firms should be able to deliver to them in terms of knowledge. It was expressed that firms with international reach were not following through in terms of KM and training offerings to their clients around the world. This is a challenge for a lot of firms, where there may be a number of international offices, but where the KM team may



still be very small and focused in one jurisdiction. Other offices may lack the professional and administrative resources to deliver as much in terms of added value or knowledge to clients. The firms that can really crack this will no doubt find favour with clients. Offering training on soft skills, such as coaching, was suggested as one value-add service that would be appreciated. In our experience, firms are often disappointed by the response they receive to these kinds of offerings and may be put off developing them – so perhaps these comments indicate that, with the right market research, there is still benefit (in terms of client relationships and appreciation) to be gained. And, as we have heard many times before, the lawyer who picks up the phone or sends a personal email saying ‘I thought this particular legal development was of relevance to you, for the following reasons,’ gains far more in terms of relationship development than the author of a mass mailing. It was striking how personal relationships between individual lawyers and their clients remain very important, despite the formal approach to procurement of legal services being adopted by larger organisations. For example, one person cited a lawyer who was instructed following a favour for the client (some useful off-the-cuff information/advice) given in a previous role. It never does any harm to help people out where you can.

Innovation

Unsurprisingly, innovation was a frequently used word. Although many firms now have teams specifically charged with innovation, delegates felt KM had an important role to play, as it has a greater understanding of the way lawyers work

(and the demands on them) than other support teams. Alex Woods, head of knowledge management at Slaughter and May, spoke of the formal structure the firm had introduced to encourage,

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pursue and roll out innovative ideas. Once again, it struck me that organisation and perseverance are so important – almost more than having good innovative ideas, which can easily fall by the wayside without these qualities.

In the breakout session on innovation, it was recognised that the temperament and training of lawyers, coupled with relentless emphasis of management on billable-hour performance management, can make it hard for innovation to thrive in a law firm. Some firms have dedicated hackathon time, while others allow budgeted time for innovation, which may address this challenge. The value of drawing KM professionals into innovation activity was widely appreciated, but seen to need active management of KM resource.

A broader perspective

Finally, it was interesting to hear the perspective from another industry from Simon Atkinson, chief knowledge officer of Ipsos Group. His issues are very similar to those faced by KM teams in law firms. He advised identifying your ‘emblematic products’: that is, the things the KM team has to offer to its internal clients. Time spent articulating what these are and thinking about how to showcase them will not be wasted.

Communicating over and over again about these is important, and Simon cited Alastair Campbell as saying that it’s only when you yourself are heartily bored of the message that you are making any progress. Atkinson also stressed how delicate KM is – everything his team had built up over several years could very easily fade away if not continually nurtured. In short, the knowledge manager’s work is never done. ▴

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