

Briefing

March 2020

SMARTER LEGAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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Lessons learned from **Briefing**
Knowledge Leaders 2019

RESCUE REMEDY
How DLA Piper set out to avoid
shiny object syndrome



Look who's talking

Sharing is caring – so, how are firms encouraging and enabling their people to plug into collaborative cultures?

INDUSTRY ANALYSIS

Change your minds

Jane Bradbury, consultant at 3Kites, reflects on lessons learned at **Briefing's** November 2019 Knowledge Leaders conference and picks out some innovation trends

At last November's **Briefing** Knowledge Leaders 2019 event, Christopher Tart-Roberts, head of knowledge and innovation and legal technology at Macfarlanes, explained how the knowledge function at his firm had evolved into knowledge, innovation and legal technology. The title of the talk, 'The (r)evolution is coming', suggested a significant change to the traditional structure of law firm knowledge functions, with associated functions such as information services, or learning and development, being frequently included within the knowledge ambit.

Client expectations are changing. As we embrace automation and intelligent systems in our personal lives, clients will rightly expect that lawyers will be using technology to create efficiencies and insights.

Skill seekers

3Kites has observed a growing awareness among knowledge professionals that if they don't embrace the innovation challenge, separate innovation roles and functions are likely to spring up. In our experience, these people will soon come knocking on the knowledge function's door for assistance with assessing new practice-related technology or providing content for document automation, case management or document analysis applications. Or, indeed, they will bypass the knowledge function altogether and create a separate workstream, which may become disjointed or conflict with the efforts of the core knowledge team.

Knowledge has always been concerned with legal service delivery; the key objectives of the function are to keep lawyers up to date and so maintain the quality and consistency of legal

advice. The function is often involved in designing resources that enable lawyers to deliver their services in an efficient manner – from precedents and checklists to automated documents and collaboration platforms. Knowledge has also been concerned with the ever-important change management aspects of introducing new software or processes and with ongoing training. As such, knowledge is in a prime position to innovate legal services delivery. However, this may require the function's shape, and its perspective, to change.

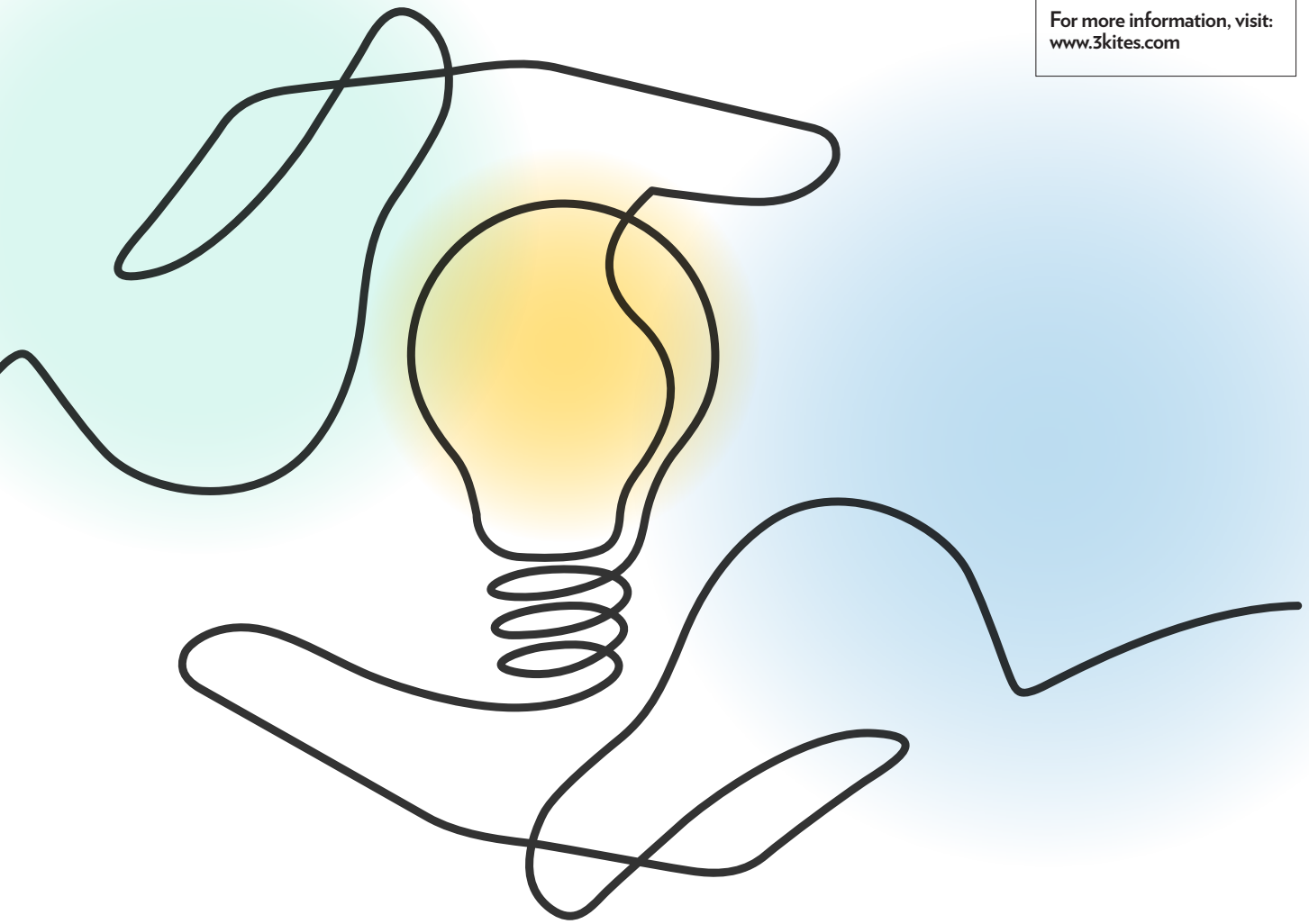
Unsurprisingly, there was much debate at November's conference around the key skills required for this new type of knowledge function, and how to attract, train and retain those skills. The consensus was that the most in-demand skills would include:

- Data analysts and data scientists
- Automation specialists
- Process improvement specialists
- Product designers.

But what about existing knowledge skills? What about those specialist lawyers who can ensure that the share purchase agreement, with all its permutations, is up to date and fit for automation? Who is going to do the initial process mapping of a complex legal transaction for critique by the fee-earning teams? Where will the firm find the necessary quality control for checking the automated machine learning within due diligence software? This is where a central knowledge function will often turn quite rightly to PSLs (professional support lawyers) or KDLs (knowledge development lawyers) for support – and this is often where there will be a stumbling block.

We have met many PSLs engaged in exciting and transformative projects. However, we have

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also met PSLs who say that they're so busy with their current work that they really don't have the time to consider helping with new initiatives. What needs to change? We know that PSLs are often stretched but, equally, resources such as Practical Law, LexisNexis and other services have evolved to provide many of the day-to-day updates and basic content which was previously only created by PSLs.

Prepare to fail

If we want PSLs to get more involved in innovation, then firms need to acknowledge that working time is finite; some services PSLs provide will need to stop. This may require changing both PSL team structures and reporting lines.

A common model is for individual PSLs to report to their respective practices, but with a dotted line report to a director of knowledge. The strength of that dotted line report can vary. In some cases, the practice partners view their PSLs

as a 'free' (without client demands) legal resource to help with marketing (including writing articles and preparing presentations) and with administrative tasks. If a managing partner is looking to expand the ambit of a knowledge function to include legal technology and innovation, then the PSLs are key resources and the practice partners to whom those roles report need to be on board.

Furthermore, PSLs, the knowledge or innovation function and the whole firm, must embrace an approach which enables ideas to be developed quickly, but to fail fast – and be okay with that. This is often anathema to lawyers, for whom the concept of failure is uncomfortable. A change of culture is needed, and this is often hard to deliver until there are some success stories alongside the failures. We often find that a good illustration to use is the ubiquitous WD40 lubricant – so named because, we understand, the first 39 versions didn't work. ▀