



LexisNexis In-house Legal Innovation and Knowledge Excellence (LIKE) Forum

How to build and embed a knowledge-sharing culture

On the 12th of October 2016, the LexisNexis LIKE forum met to discuss how to build and embed a knowledge-sharing culture. The session was led by Hélène Russell, author and teacher in knowledge management and focused on the following key topics:

- Understanding your organisation's culture
- reducing barriers to knowledge sharing
- promoting leadership-buy in

What Is Knowledge Management

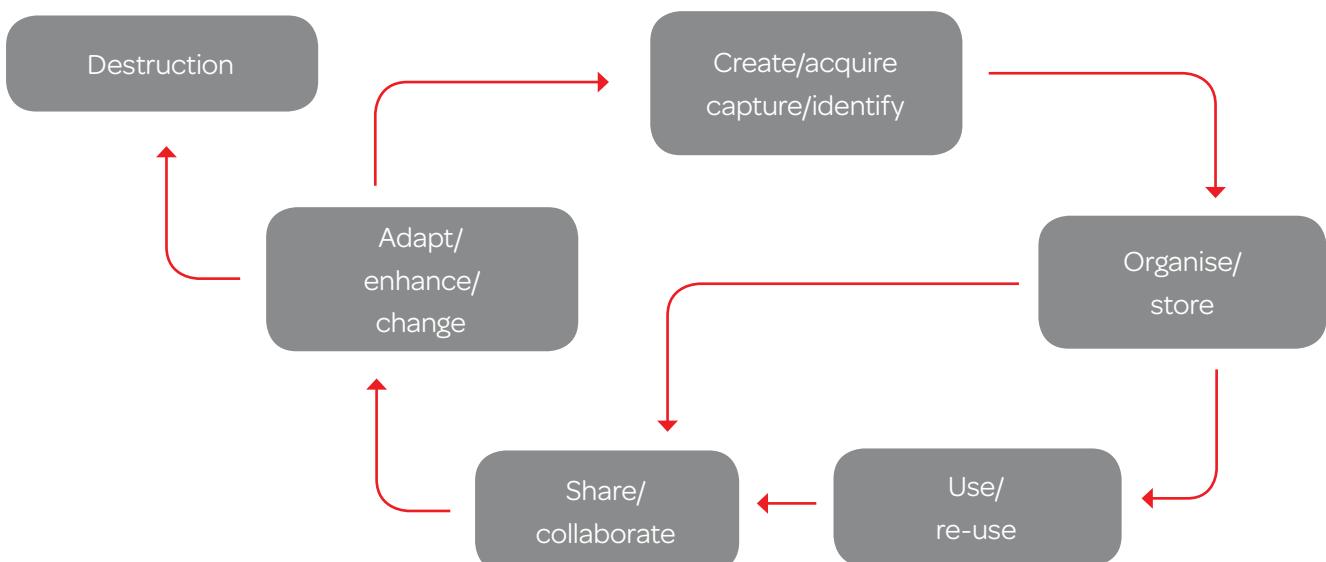
Helen opened the session with an introduction to Knowledge Management and defined it as:

The **capabilities** by which **communities** within an organisation **capture** the **knowledge** that is **critical** to them, **constantly improve** it and make it **available** in the most **effective** manner to those people who need it, so that they can **exploit it creatively** to **add value** as part of their work

– British Standards Institute/Shell

In essence what you are managing is all the behaviours around knowledge and exploiting the value. Knowledge management is a cycle where you capture, organise and learn lessons from work, and research suggests that businesses that are better at knowledge management and sharing learn lessons more quickly and are more agile and efficient.

Knowledge cycle



What does good knowledge sharing look like?

The forum discussed what knowledge management looks like in their companies and agreed that good knowledge management requires a knowledge sharing culture, top down endorsement and technology.

1. Knowledge sharing culture

- having a mind-set where people use the systems in place to store information and go to look/ask for information
- every team thinking about knowledge sharing in the same way rather than colleagues in different teams / jurisdictions being siloed off

2. Top down endorsement

- having strong endorsement from the top which allows knowledge sharing to become embedded in the culture

3. Top down endorsement

- having technology which makes information easy to access and find

Very often teams focus on bringing in new technology to try and improve knowledge sharing however, technology doesn't provide a solution if knowledge sharing isn't built in to the culture of the organisation and if there isn't buy-in for knowledge sharing from the leadership.

Creating a knowledge sharing culture

1. Assess the company's culture

The starting point is to undertake an assessment of the company's knowledge sharing culture. A cultural assessment helps you understand where you are now and also to look back and reflect as you try and move your company's culture.

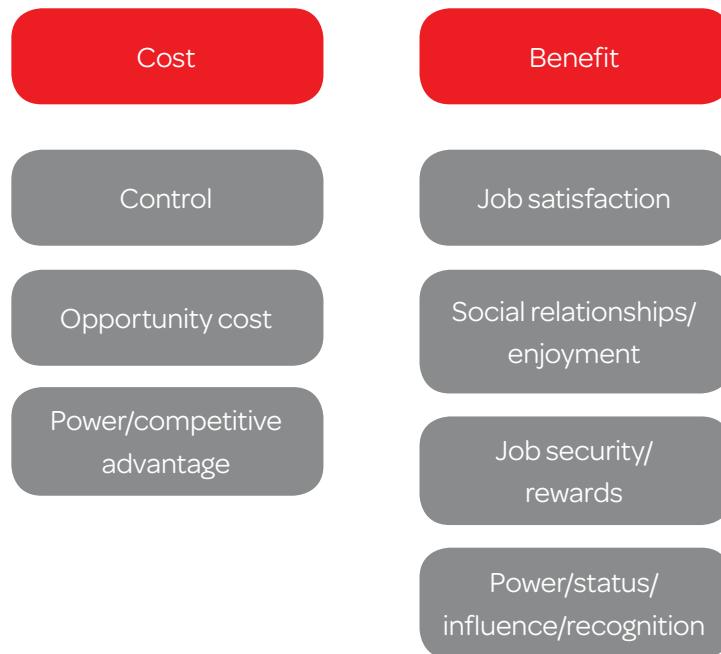
One culture assessment tool is the Schein model which looks at:

- **Artefacts** – all the visible elements for example what the office is like, how people interact and whether they chat, what is shared and the processes in place
- **Espoused Values** – the values backed by leaders such as what the company wants to be, the values that are put on the website, what is put on job descriptions
- **Basic Underlying Assumptions** – these are the actual values of the company and the unseen drivers of behaviour. You can find out the underlying assumptions by looking at who got promoted last and what did they do that was different to everyone else

Once you have all this information, you can begin to develop a better understanding of your organisation's culture, not just the picture that management and formal company documentation may wish to portray, but the real picture. Culture is not something that can be changed easily but by having a clearer view as to what goes to making up your organisation's culture you are more likely to be able to identify ways in which you can have an impact, for example, if the focus of the company is to increase profitability then you should look to demonstrate how much knowledge management and sharing can improve efficiency.

2.Understand the barriers to a knowledge sharing culture

Research so far suggests that people's decision whether to share or ask for knowledge is based on the following costs and benefits.



Costs: People may be averse to knowledge sharing because of the time associated and the opportunity cost of not being able to spend time on other work. Also, there can be a perception that knowledge sharing leads to a loss of power and that the way to be indispensable is to hold on to the knowledge rather than share it.

Benefits: people who share knowledge see the benefits as: providing them with job satisfaction because they like helping people out; building social relationships and reciprocal support; job security and rewards because they are seen as a team player; and power and status because they are being recognised as an expert.

Research undertaken by Helen based on 165 lawyers across a range of PQE levels showed that most participants were intrinsically motivated to share knowledge however, they wanted more extrinsic rewards. The study also found that the biggest barriers to knowledge sharing were structural/organisational.

3. Encouraging knowledge sharing

The forum discussed several tips for encouraging knowledge sharing:

- Increase awareness of the benefits of knowledge sharing through training
- Incorporate knowledge sharing in the team's recruitment and selection process by selecting people based on their intrinsic motivation to share, as well as other competencies.
- Overcome barriers to knowledge sharing. For example, incorporate knowledge sharing in rewards systems and appraisals and show that knowledge sharing is valued
- Create an environment where people feel comfortable to let go of knowledge and that they won't get criticised for their work

Conclusion

When you are changing the culture it is the small steps that are very valuable. Here is a one-month plan to help you improve knowledge sharing within your organisation:

Week One

1. Start a reflective learning diary to understand what works
2. Acknowledge or reward a prolific knowledge sharer
3. Solve a small process or knowledge problem for a nay-sayer
4. Introduce and connect two people you think can help each other
5. Share a knowledge team success story with your organisation

Week Two

1. Find someone new to knowledge sharing and give them a small reward or acknowledgement
2. Ask someone from a different department to provide a new perspective on a process or knowledge problem for you
3. Join a new knowledge sharing group (a face-to-face one if possible, but if not, an online one)
4. Identify a simple low/cost way you/ your team can add value to a client's experience
5. Help someone who has produced a knowledge artefact, to leverage that for maximum return on effort

Week Three

1. Talk to someone who shares knowledge a lot and give them a small token of appreciation which is tailored to them
2. Sit somewhere new for the day and listen in to the kinds of knowledge and process problems people experience
3. Try out a simple tool for improving networking, such as the "RCT", or start a lunchtime bookclub, choir, yoga or running club etc
4. Identify a new simple/low cost way you/ your team can support your organisation's next pitch
5. Ask HR to include a question about knowledge sharing behaviour in a job interview

Week Four

1. Ask a trainee/ junior to nominate a knowledgeable and helpful person for a small reward or acknowledgement
2. Map out a short/ simple process and look for obvious/ simple improvements
3. Encourage someone in your team to join a new online group and make a contribution
4. Invite an individual to join a knowledge project you think they'll enjoy
5. Review what worked well over the past month and plan to repeat it, or understand what didn't work and change it for next month

About Hélène



Hélène Russell of TheKnowledgeBusiness specialises in helping organisations to grow and improve profitability, by helping them to understand and improve their knowledge systems.

Hélène is the author of the Law Society's "Knowledge Management Handbook" and Legal Monitor's "Practical Projects in Legal KM". She teaches open and in-house courses in Knowledge Management and also offers coaching, mentoring and advice. She also runs Knowledge Network UK, the only regional knowledge sharing and networking group for law firm KMers in UK.

Hélène has spoken extensively on KM for Ark, Butterworths, UWE, Bristol Law Society, Allice and at Knowledge Network UK, and has written regularly for Managing Partner Magazine.

After a decade as a solicitor with a major regional firm specialising in clinical negligence defence litigation, 8 years in Knowledge Management and having recently obtained an MBA with distinction, she has a unique, deep understanding of how knowledge flows helps law firms and professional services organisations.

Contact her on **07548 912 779** or visit www.theknowledgebusiness.co.uk.

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