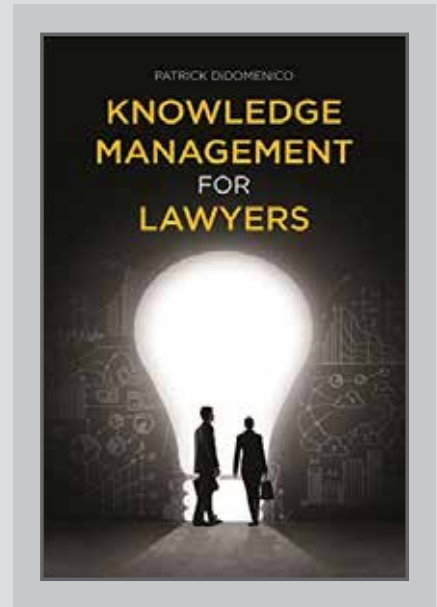


Book Review

Patrick V. DiDomenico, Knowledge Management for Lawyers (Chicago, IL: ABA Publishing, 2015)

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This issue's theme is knowledge management (KM) and information architecture, and what better excuse for me to take a look at this brand new offering from the American Bar Association. Author Patrick V. DiDomenico, recipient of the 2013 International Legal Technology Association (ILTA) Knowledge Management Professional of the Year Award and publisher of the LawyerKM blog (www.LawyerKM.com), is a former litigation attorney who transitioned into a career in knowledge management in 2005. I came to this book a complete novice to the field of KM but hoped to learn more about the increasing role that KM is playing in law firms and legal departments, as well as to better understand how KM is related to (or, I suspected, often intertwined with) the work of law librarians, whether formally or informally.

The stated goal of DiDomenico's book is to provide an overview of "how knowledge management can benefit lawyers," including addressing "what knowledge management is about, why law firms and law departments should consider investing their time and resources in knowledge management efforts, and how to take action towards those efforts" [p. xi]. While the book allows that its topic "should be interesting to almost anyone in the legal services industry" [p. xi] (hey – that's us!), it is explicitly geared towards two categories of readers, which the author dubs "Lawyer Leaders" and "Administrative Leaders." Lawyer Leaders are defined as lawyers with some leadership role in their organizations — partners, practice group leaders, executives, members of workplace committees, and the like — and Administrative Leaders as "those mid-to-high level administrators who are charged with operating the business of the law firm or legal department," such as management staff or members of KM departments [p. xi].

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Each of the book's twelve chapters begins with a description of the "target audience" for that chapter, defined principally in terms of these two categories of readers. (For example, a chapter dealing with a more in-depth or "in the weeds" KM topic might note at the outset that it is primarily Administrative Leaders who will want to read it through, but it might also highlight specific sections of the chapter that Lawyer Leaders would also benefit from skimming.)

Each chapter also begins with a "chapter preview" styled as a succinctly-stated, numbered list of what are essentially learning objectives for that chapter. (For example, in Chapter 2 one such item reads, "You'll learn how knowledge management initiatives and techniques can deliver mutual benefits to clients and law firms" [p. 25].) Chapters also end with "key points," a bulleted list of points that summarize the substance of the foregoing chapter. Taken together, these features make it very easy for a busy reader to determine where she should spend her time and attention or to get a quick sense of a chapter's content without necessarily having to dive in.

So what is knowledge management? An early section of the book is dedicated to explaining how elusive a single definition can be. Instead, DiDomenico discusses the major themes and elements of KM and provides a number of different definitions articulated by both legal and non-legal KM experts for the reader to compare and consider. He explains: "What doesn't really matter is whether we can agree on a universal definition of KM that is acceptable

to everyone across all industries and fields. It is more important that we understand what KM is *about*" [p. 4, emphasis in original]. For DiDomenico, "[l]egal knowledge management, at its core, is about improving the practice and business of law" [p. xi] and about "*creating value* for clients in a way that is also beneficial for law firms" [p. 26, emphasis in original]. His introductory discussion of KM is wrapped up by providing three "catchy mantras" that he employs when explaining KM to attorneys, and he devotes a couple of pages (and some helpful graphics and visuals) to explaining the meaning and significance of each to his reader. In short, these three "mantras" are:

- 1. "Knowledge management is about getting the *right* information to the *right* people at the *right* time."**

The author acknowledges that librarians and information management professionals, among other groups, have also used some variation of this slogan to describe their work. He proceeds to discuss the concept of information overload and the duty of the KM professional to "provide lawyers with the tools, techniques, tactics, terms, and methods for dealing with the inundation of information" [p. 14]. No doubt this sounds familiar to many of us!

- 2. "KM is about who we know, what we know, and how we do things."**

How do we capture and harness the collective knowledge of individuals in our firms or departments – particularly when they



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consist of hundreds of attorneys and other legal professionals – and implement practices, procedures, and technologies to maximize that knowledge?

3. **“Knowledge management is about connecting people with people, connecting people with knowledge and information, and the processes, procedures, and technologies required to make those connections.”**

This tenet is the author’s favorite of the three due to its emphasis on connections. He explains how this mantra actually incorporates each of the previous two in his opinion.

The first four chapters are all essentially devoted to explaining different aspects of what KM is, its role, its value, and trends in KM, particularly in the legal arena. Thereafter DiDomenico dives into chapters that deal with implementing KM in your firm or organization. He notes that KM may go by many names, including “practice support,” “client support,” and “professional services” [p. 35]. He often brings in and addresses larger trends and changes in the legal profession as a whole, particularly those resulting from the global financial crisis of 2007-2008, and posits that KM – by whatever name – has enjoyed a resurgence of popularity due in part to heightened pressure by clients for greater value and efficiency in the provision of legal services. For example, he points out that firms are increasingly confronted with RFP (requests for proposals) questions that relate directly to the firm’s KM practices.

Although certainly useful for those like me who simply want to better understand KM in law, the book is geared primarily towards those who might be seeking to design and implement a KM program or strategy for the first time. As such, it consciously rejects entanglements with issues the author finds overly theoretical. DiDomenico writes, “There is nothing wrong with slow, contemplative thinking. I highly encourage it. But these days, law firms are fast-paced, high-pressure environments where you need to make your point, make it quickly, and make it count. If you can’t communicate your point simply, quickly, and meaningfully to a busy lawyer, then you’ve missed an opportunity that you may never have again” [p. 5].

He is, for the most part, successful in taking his own advice, placing the emphasis squarely on the practical, employing clear language with minimal jargon, and organizing and chunking his material in such a way as to make it easy to navigate and to digest. Helpfully, he also makes liberal use of real-life examples and case studies throughout the book, describing the organizational structures, practices, and features of KM departments in firms and organizations of various sizes in multiple locales around the world.

An appendix provides even more examples of KM implementation efforts and organizational structures in law firms. A second appendix provides the personal stories of how several KM professionals got their start in the field (most of them JDs and former practitioners).



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A major theme throughout the book is that the form a successful KM initiative takes in a specific organization depends greatly on that organization's unique goals, context, and culture. "Each organization will have a different approach, and people with different backgrounds will have different ideas about what is important for a KM program," DiDomenico writes [p. 52]. To help guide readers, he provides advice for finding out what your organization's needs are and developing a KM mission, vision, and strategy that suit those needs. He also offers guidance on building a KM team and such concerns as where in the organizational structure a KM group should ideally be situated. Importantly, the book also addresses how KM relates to legal project management and to the rise of practice/professional support lawyers (PSLs).

More than once DiDomenico acknowledges that implementing a truly successful KM program can be challenging: "In one respect, sharing or transferring knowledge is simply a matter of setting up systems or processes to enable it to happen. But on another – more fundamental – level, sharing and transferring knowledge is a cultural challenge" [p. 9]. DiDomenico addresses the element of organizational culture at various points throughout in the book as well as strategies to help foster and achieve a KM-friendly culture. Change management, specifically with respect to implementing KM in a legal environment, is also given its own dedicated discussion in chapter eight.

Although he does briefly discuss the ever-dominant SharePoint, DiDomenico avoids advocating for specific software or products in his book. In fact, he repeatedly stresses that KM is about much more than a technological solution, explaining early on that "KM is not about technology, software, or the next fancy app," [p 34] and emphasizing again later in the book that "KM is not about technology; in fact, it is more about people and processes than it is about technology" [p. 131]. His chapter on technology tools is therefore more an overview of categories and types of KM-related technologies, such as intranets, wikis, extranets, enterprise search systems (ESS), and search enhancement applications. DiDomenico explains the role and value of category and provides advice and tips on their features and design but does not recommend specific tools or software solutions.

DiDomenico does not discuss the role of libraries at length in his book, but he does devote a brief section in chapter four to the role of libraries and librarians in KM, in addition to mentioning libraries or librarians from time to time in other areas of the book. I'm sorry to say that, while there were a few highlights, overall I found his discussions of libraries dissatisfying. He notes that "library integration with KM is common" and admits that the skills of librarians are often shared or "very similar" to those of various KM professionals, that "many of the skills [librarians] possess are directly transferrable to knowledge management," and that "librarians are not only willing to assist with KM initiatives,



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but many welcome – and even pursue – the opportunities” [pp. 83-85]. Yet he somehow defines librarianship as distinct from KM for the reason that the former is “focus[ed] on external resources,” whereas the latter is concerned with “internal content” [p. 82]. Surely this is an overly simplistic conception of what a great many law librarians actually do for their organizations.

He also writes that there is “potential” for librarians to be involved in administrative functions outside of KM (such as data analytics and others) [pp. 85-86], without seeming to realize that librarians already can and do collaborate in many contexts outside of what might have been traditional ten or twenty years ago. While DiDomenico frequently advocates for a fluid, flexible, and evolving conception of his own field, his understanding of the work of librarians comes off as quite limited and penned in by outdated notions.

As I read, I could not shake the feeling that he was painting librarianship as a sinking ship from which a few enterprising practitioner-passengers may be able to find a lifeboat in KM or other departments, rather than seeing our field as fluid and evolving, inherently overlapping with and complementary to KM and other firm efforts.

DiDomenico spends a good portion of his second chapter refuting claims that “KM is dead” by arguing that this pronouncement stems from a misunderstanding of KM, that “a reason for premature reports of KM’s demise is that some confuse death with an identity change

or makeover,” that “KM is an amorphous field” whose “borders are not bright lines” but rather “are blurred and ooze into and blend together with other fields” [pp. 33-35]. These arguments will no doubt sound exceedingly familiar to us, and I found it disappointing that DiDomenico did not seem to bring as much nuance to his understanding of librarianship or find kinship in our similar struggles to help others understand our value.

Having little to no familiarity with KM prior to reading this book, I did find it accessible and useful in providing a foundational understanding of the role KM can and, I was convinced, should play in the legal field. The book will be particularly useful to those who are interested in advocating for or spearheading a new KM initiative or who may perhaps be ready to reevaluate or re-design an older or stale KM system. Although it pained my curmudgeonly heart a bit to see so many footnotes consisting merely of a copied and pasted URL, throughout the book Domenico does refer the reader to additional resources that will no doubt be useful in developing a deeper, more sophisticated understanding of KM.

Despite my personal disgruntlement at his understanding of libraries, the topic of this book is, after all, not our profession, but rather KM. And as to KM, DiDomenico provides clear, actionable advice that *should* be of value to librarians, attorneys, and current (or aspiring) legal KM professionals, as well as to those who find themselves in hybrid roles. ■

