

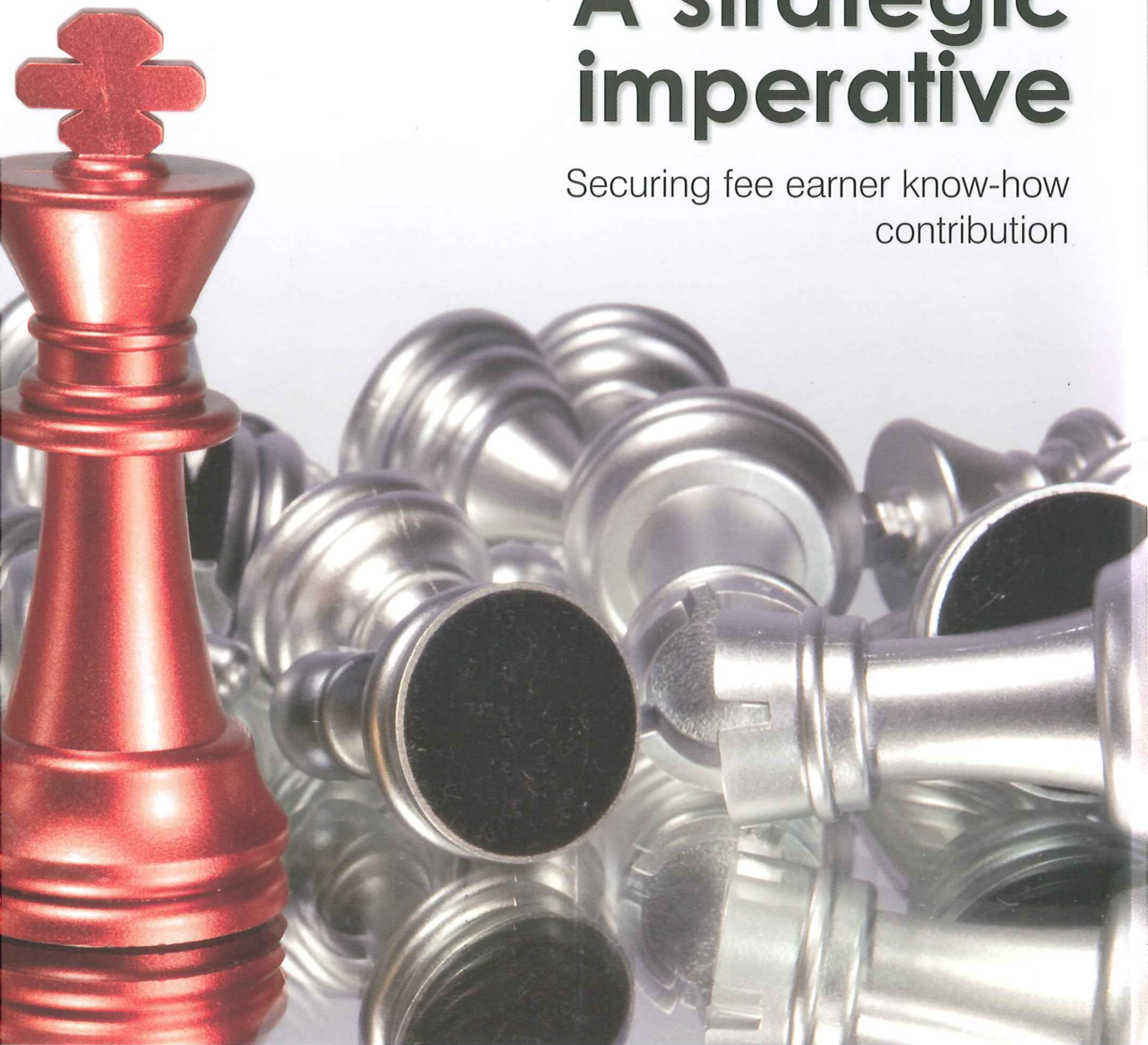
KIM *Legal*

Essential guide to knowledge and information management in law firms

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Helena Hallgarn discusses key themes from this year's Knowledge Management in the European Legal Profession event, in Amsterdam

One of the main themes at the conference was that we are in a new legal landscape, partly due to the economic crisis and also because of so-called 'Tesco Law', in the case of the UK. Therefore, we have to look at possibilities to outsource work, make even better use of our knowledge management (KM) technology and perhaps buy more from external content providers, such as PLC, then try to integrate that information into our own systems.

Considering all these issues, we need to analyse how we can secure the right KM focus so that it isn't a non-essential part of the business – something that is 'good to have' – but is considered as an integral part of our strategy in gaining competitive advantage.

If contributing know-how is considered to be important, the knowledge team could provide assessments of lawyers with regards to their KM engagements. One way to clearly demonstrate the importance of KM work is to make time spent on know-how work count as billable hours – although this seemed to be a little controversial.

Another interesting way of promoting know-how contribution was to connect this responsibility to web presence, promoting the partner responsible for KM as the key contact within that area of law (see the cover feature on page 13). Also, by sharing knowledge with clients, the KM work will become more client-oriented and, therefore, the know-how work considered more important.

It was stressed that we also have to question the use of technology. There has to be a true business case which addresses a problem first, rather than just focusing on technology. For example, finding the right know-how and locating the appropriate people more efficiently, which can be supported by the implementation of a search engine.

Within the conference there was a case study demonstrating the importance of analysing information and the way it should be categorised in order to make the most efficient use of the search tool.

Another problem in a lot of law firms is keeping information about our clients up-to-date, which is crucial in truly supporting our client-focused efforts. This can be enabled by implementing a client relationship management (CRM) system.

A case study from IKEA taught delegates about the importance of knowledge sharing. When discussing different approaches to KM, we sometimes forget some of the obvious ways of really supporting a knowledge sharing culture. This can be done through mentorship – connecting experienced lawyers with young associates and in that way teaching the 'fresh' associates the business of law.

Returning to the question of how to focus your KM efforts and resources, knowledge technology is becoming more and more important. Therefore, having dedicated IT people within the KM group is one good example of how to manage the knowledge-based resources. These IT focused personnel can support the KM group in streamlining IT related projects right to get even more out of the technology.

The key for the modern law firm and also for the KM group, is to focus on those activities that will gain competitive advantages. Are your standard documents really the crown jewels of your firm? Or are they merely the base level, the basic documents that could be shared with other firms? We heard about Allen & Overy giving its litigation material to PLC as a way of outsourcing the basic documents and their updating process. In this way the KM group now has the opportunity to switch its focus to those areas that will gain more competitive advantage for the firm. In the future, maybe we will have external content providers providing all the basic standard documents, while the internal KM group focuses on such issues.

If we want to remain competitive for the future we must support innovation. Our clients will not accept us doing nothing in this area. We have to look into new ways of delivering legal advice, develop new fee structures and find ways to easily share new ideas around how to solve legal problems. Please feel free to participate in my LinkedIn group, 'Legal Innovation' for further discussions on this subject. **KIMLegal**



Helena Hallgarn is head of knowledge management at Vinge. She can be contacted at Helena.hallgarn@vinge.se, or via her LinkedIn group, Legal Innovation, at www.linkedin.com