

# Knowledge leaders

STATUS, JOB MOBILITY AND DIVERSITY AMONG THE TOP 100 LEGAL KM LEADERS IN UK LAW FIRMS

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## Methodology

The data was collected and collated between 8 February and 24 June 2013. The main body of the report reflects data as of 24 June 2013, but in places has been adjusted as per the current list of top 100 KM directors, which is correct as of 8 July 2013. Alongside researching director positions in top firms using information in the public domain, we contacted the individuals where possible, or asked a specific knowledgeable contact in each firm, to help us ensure our data on directors is as accurate as possible.

Data collected includes: name, current firm, current job title, year they joined the firm, year they became a director (if different than the year they joined the firm) and the title-holder's previous employer. An individual's gender has been derived from the individual's name except where it was not completely obvious, in which case checks have been made to verify the information with the individual.

### **Top 100 director listing (p14) explained**

Info unavailable: We've either been unable to contact or source the information, or someone has made an explicit request for data not to appear.

Position vacant: At the time of the research (updated 8 July 2013) there was no one in this position.

Role does not exist: This appears where firms have indicated that there is no individual with this specific role in a director capacity.

First employer: Indicates that an individual has not had an employer prior to their current employer.

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## About Legal Support Network

LSN is a publishing, media and events company wholly focused on business services and support staff in law firms, whatever role they're in.

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## Rupert Collins-White

*Head of content, Legal Support Network*



From our work on **Briefing** magazine in 2013, one of the things I've heard the most around knowledge is that it has to become something that everyone does.

Knowledge has to be everybody's business, because the central tenets of KM now pervade everyone's role in legal – from the ability to create legal advice and documents to the way people work as they deliver them.

How, though, will this affect knowledge leaders in UK firms? Will it drive them out of business, or make them more important as the business of knowledge becomes more embedded throughout firms? I think it'll make knowledge leaders evangelists and capability experts – gurus within the firm who peer into every part of the business to help improve it, define and refine processes, come up with ever better ways to surface useful information, and help fee earners, BD people and even finance and other areas create value from knowing more about what the firm does, the information it produces and its clients and their businesses.

Maybe that's already true in your firm – but considering that only just over a third of firms in the second 50 have a knowledge leader, many legal businesses are missing out on the value a knowledge guru can bring.

Our ongoing research into the top 100 directors shows, though, that KM is a growth area in terms of people doing the job and that it's well-balanced in terms of gender – which is, I'd posit, good news for a role that's all about sharing and understanding (because the KM community therefore is a proper societal mix).

I think knowledge will play a central and powerful part in tomorrow's successful corporate and consumer-focused firms, both in terms of people leading its adoption and expansion and the ideas and technology around it. They will define the way the best legal businesses deliver legal services – from inception to delivery and everywhere in between.

To me, this takes KM far beyond a 'support' role – it fundamentally shapes what legal business does. Now we just need to get everyone on board.

## Rob Martin

*Director of software solutions, Thomson Reuters Solcara*



The legal sector in the UK is changing, and the firms that embrace change will be the ones that thrive.

Law firms sell knowledge, whether commoditised, sector-specific or niche. Speed and quality of delivery is essential, and it is this that can help to differentiate one firm from another. Knowing you can deliver a legal service in a certain timeframe, to a consistent quality and a specific cost implies advantage and ultimately benefits both firm and client.

Knowledge is at the heart of addressing these drivers. It is no longer good enough to view KM as supporting the collection and collation of precedents and practice notes to make them easier to access. Knowledge, whether tacit or explicit, produced internally or sourced externally, must be integrated into how lawyers work. The context in which they access and use knowledge resources is key, and the integration of best practice and know-how at the point of use is required – as opposed to multiple ‘point’ solutions. That will make lawyers more efficient, it improves consistency, ensures high quality, empowers junior lawyers and benefits the client.

The slight trend, highlighted in the report, to recruit KM people from outside legal is one that will continue. This will be driven by new entrants to the market, which will expand the range of legal services they offer and look to further commoditise the provision of legal services using business process automation solutions and more effective project management processes.

How does the top 100 respond? They must consider how they improve efficiency and drive down costs, and to achieve this they must access and use the collective knowledge of the firm. Knowledge leaders can help facilitate the change, but to be successful they must be empowered and given the authority to make it happen. Over the next three to five years the KM role will continue to evolve, and in the firms that thrive the individuals in these roles will be invited to the top table. They will also be increasingly focused on process automation and putting knowledge at the heart of every business system – and thus at the fingertips of every lawyer.

As a supplier to the legal sector, Thomson Reuters is working hard to support the changes that are happening through integrating the best content with the best technology.

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## Executive summary



Since LSN's (and surely the world's) first report into the top 100 law firm directors in 2009, the world has changed considerably. There's been a worldwide economic crisis, for one thing, and the legal industry has also seen the largest change it has ever experienced with the implementation of the Legal Services Act.

This year we have added knowledge leaders to our Top 100 Directors research range. It's an area of legal in which there's a very broad range of views and little agreement on its definition, where it fits and where it's going – but there's also a big commonality: in what's becoming a very competitive sector, every law firm must exploit knowledge.

Of all the roles we've looked at, knowledge has perhaps evolved the most, but it is certainly not clear whether it has come of age fully, yet. We at LSN think knowledge should always be seen as a strategic area – it's not just about having a document management system; in fact, it's dangerous to partner it too closely with technology, systems and software. Law firms should be thinking: people, interaction, collaboration. Follow this route and knowledge will deliver all kinds of benefits, from better decision making and the nurturing of innovation, to more tangible cost reductions and quality improvements – and the big one: better client relationships.

Rachel Manser, Linklaters' global head of knowledge and information, hits the nail on the head: "I see KM as a massive growth area, with the potential to affect every area in which a law firm operates. It just makes good business sense to focus on continuous improvement in the quality of the service we provide to our clients and how we can do so efficiently. Knowledge is, ultimately, what we sell."

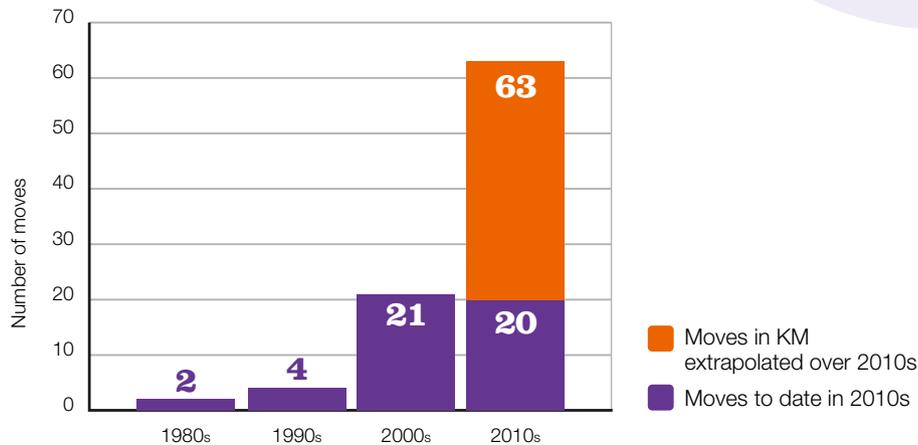
That said, where are the CKOs in UK firms? And why are knowledge leaders not always sitting at the table with FDs and CIO/IT directors? It's great to see so many job moves in knowledge; career progression and sector mobility means a role on the rise. But the number of director-level knowledge positions in the top 100 needs to increase if this promise is to be turned into a more permanent reality.

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# 63

KM leader moves might happen in this decade – has the knowledge role come of age?

Job mobility in KM across the decades



## Key results from the Top 100 Directors KM research

**The legal sector can't decide where knowledge sits, or if it's an area that needs leadership.** Only just over half of the top 100 have someone in charge of knowledge, either specifically or as a key part of their job.

**If you want a job in knowledge management, look to the top 50 firms.** Nine in 10 of the top 25 and three-quarters of the top 50 have a knowledge leader position. Compare that to the next 50 – just 36% of those firms have someone in post.

**Knowledge leaders are increasingly coming from outside legal or professional services.** As law firms cast their nets wider to fill knowledge roles, they're pulling in capability from outside the sector.

**Knowledge is a well-balanced role in terms of gender equality.** However, this may merely stem from the historical link with the PSL element of a firm being a popular choice for women reluctant to devote their whole lives to a firm. But it's a stat to keep your eyes on.

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# Who's in charge here? Which firms have knowledge leaders and what they're called

Knowledge is a role that has come of age – but there are still surprisingly few knowledge leaders in the business of law.

Just over half of the top 100 firms have someone in charge of knowledge (53, with an additional two roles vacant). While 88% of the top 25 have knowledge positions, and a respectable 76% of top 50 firms have one leader, just 36% of the bottom 50 firms have someone looking after KM.

Why are there so many more knowledge positions in the top 50? The statistic begs the question: is KM a growing or declining discipline? It's hard to say whether this percentage penetration of the role in the top 100 will increase – will firms of all sizes embrace knowledge as a discrete and important business function as market consolidation strengthens? Or will industry murmurings turn out true, and the elements of KM disperse into different parts of a firm?

David Halliwell, director of knowledge, risk and legal services for Pinsent Masons, says it's an uncertain future. "In the larger firms, KM has been established long enough that it is now a relatively mature discipline, with processes, technology, programmes and documentation set up. The more sophisticated firms are now developing knowledge programmes into being more focused on working practices and resourcing models, which means that in those firms the KM role is developing into something else." But, he says, "in the larger firms I can see the knowledge roles developing more broadly and dedicated knowledge roles becoming fewer". In smaller firms he predicts a third, very different trend: "Smaller firms, which

haven't been large enough to afford a dedicated role, may bypass the KM role altogether and move straight to people working on efficiency of working practices." They will still, in essence, be knowledge, but it will mean something else.

Lucy Dillon, director of knowledge management at Berwin Leighton Paisner, "The top 50 firms have had the scale to make KM a business priority and I do not think the balance will change, but more firms will see KM as offering an opportunity to increase efficiency."

Jane Bradbury, head of knowledge and information at Slaughter and May, explains that knowledge might always only be a top-firm role. "Appointing a leader in knowledge management is a significant investment for a law firm, which is probably why more of the leaders are in the top 50 firms.

"That's not to say knowledge management does not have a strategic direction in other firms. It's just that the work may either be being done at a different level – often at partner level – or in a smaller organisation there might be less coordination required and individual fee earners, support lawyers and information professionals will still be working away in the area with great success.

"As the KM community grows, there is also an increase in the numbers of external KM consultants who will work with firms to help set a strategic direction or deal with specific issues. For a smaller organisation, this can be a very effective way of engaging specialist and targeted assistance when required."

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Firms in the top 100 with someone in charge of knowledge

### 1.1 Where are all the CKOs?

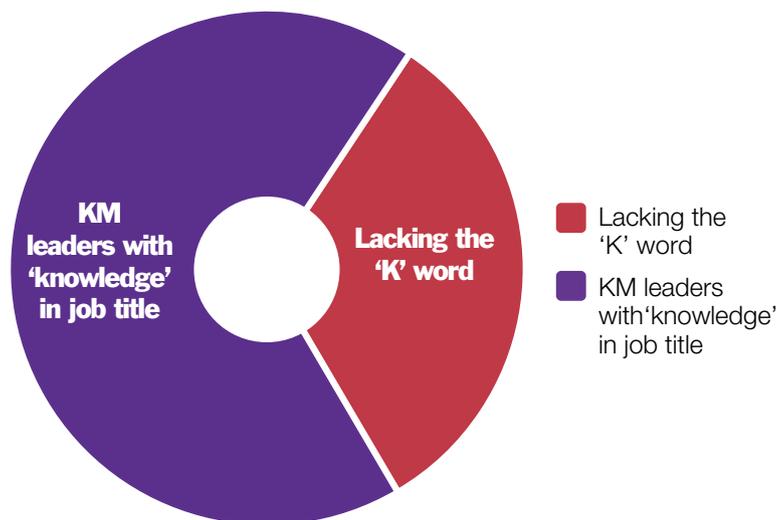
There is very little consistency in knowledge leader titles, and there are so many of them – 44 from a sample of 53. One-fifth are called ‘head of knowledge management’ and the remainder each have different titles. Just over two thirds (68%) have the word ‘knowledge’ in their title, but this of course means that a significant 32% are not specifically knowledge management people. And, compared with more traditional functions such as finance and IT, there are very few ‘directors’ and ‘C-levels’ in knowledge – only 21% have both ‘director’ and ‘knowledge’ in their titles. There is but one lonely C-level in knowledge – a CTO.

This variation perhaps highlights a lack of consensus on what the knowledge role means within the legal sector, and where it is going. It might indicate that knowledge leaders aren’t sitting at board level, making decisions alongside IT directors and FDs. Does this make KM the poor relation?

David Halliwell, director of knowledge, risk and legal services at Pinsent Masons, describes a pretty unsatisfactory scenario: “Law firms have never been clear where KM fits in. It’s been part of risk, IT, BD, HR and facilities in different firms. To that extent, it can be seen as a junior function if firms don’t appreciate the important impact it can have on winning and delivering work.”

But considering the power that great KM can have on a firm, perhaps knowledge leaders and the function need to be given higher levels of seniority and status within firms. Rachel Manser, global head of knowledge and information at Linklaters, sits firmly in that camp (with an important caveat). “KM leaders will be increasingly

**Titles of KM leaders**



1

## Who's in charge here... cont.

more senior and more valuable, so long as they are seen to turn KM ideas into results," she says. Today, everyone has to show and prove their value – especially those not issuing bills.

Lucy Dillon, KM leaders will be seen as more senior and given more status, "By those at the head of the function demonstrating that KM has earned its place at the highest level."

Lucy Dillon says that, rather than highlighting a lack of agreement, within the legal sector, "it ties in with the recent emergence of KM as a management function. It also indicates that there is some uncertainty about where KM belongs (ie is it a subset of another business function?), whereas it is a discipline of its own".

Sam Dimond, group director of knowledge at Norton Rose Fulbright, says knowledge is now about how a firm works, not just its knowledge assets.

"As clients place ever more importance on value and efficiency, there are bound to be more senior roles focused on working smarter and using the firm's experience to differentiate it from the competition. Many of these roles will have the KM badge but many will also be doing similar roles but with different titles, for example, head of quality standards, director of services

delivery. Those firms in the bottom 50 and elsewhere that neglect this area probably won't exist for much longer because they are falling behind clients' demands.

"I don't think the inconsistency in titles is a reflection on the maturity of the role within the legal sector; I think the same variations exist in other sectors as well. It's just a relatively new role for organisations to

### What kind of firms have KM leaders?

#### TOP 50 FIRMS

**60%**

Have someone responsible for KM at director level

#### BOTTOM 50 FIRMS

**36%**

Have someone responsible for KM at director level

have at that level, in contrast to CFOs and CIOs which are pretty much standardised wherever you work.

"Knowledge leaders should be just as senior as those other roles, but shouldn't expect to be granted a seat at the board unless they show they have something strategic to offer – in other words, it has to be far more than a back-room role."

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## Gender in legal knowledge

At the top of legal KM, 60% of knowledge leaders are women and 40% are men, and that balanced picture is roughly held across the top 100 – in fact it's bang on 50:50 in the bottom 25 segment.

That's great news for equality when you consider that female legal IT leaders account for just 17% in IT, and men make up a scandalous 96% of the legal FD mix. Rachel Manser, global head of knowledge and information at Linklaters, attributes some of the balance to history. "I suspect this is the case due to the early adoption of KM by women. As with any role, I hope to see gender equality at all levels in years to come." In the last five years, 47% of moves (hires and promotions) into KM have been by men – so perhaps the status quo really is shifting?

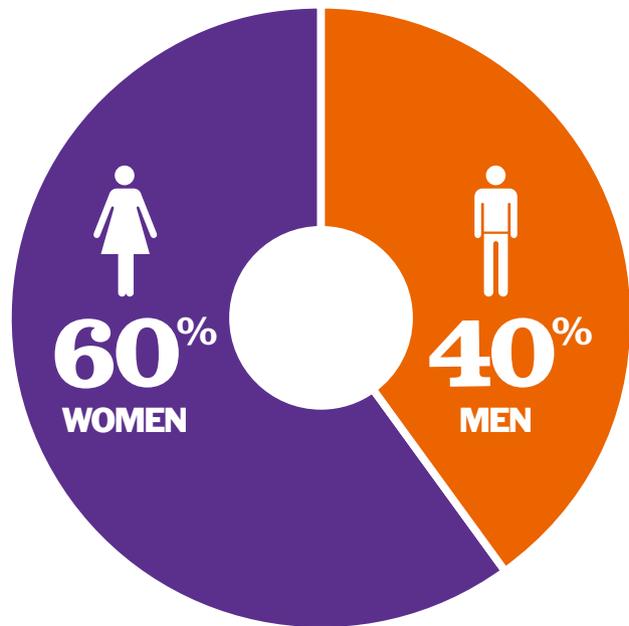
### 2.1 History, not equality?

The seeming KM gender equality may well be rooted in how the discipline has evolved over the years, but it may be that the KM role is not necessarily as well balanced as it seems. David Halliwell, director of knowledge, risk and legal services for Pinsent Masons says there are still areas of male imbalance in it.

"Heads of KM are often appointed from the professional support lawyer community. Traditionally, the PSL role was dominated by women returning to work after maternity leave, wanting more flexible (or just more regular) working hours than as a fee-earning lawyer. That position has

changed over the last 10 years, and many more people, male and female, are taking on the role as a full time alternative career in law in its own right.

"Having said that, KM overall in law firms is still dominated by women, [but] actually there is a greater proportion of men in the top roles than in law firm KM generally. If



it's to be truly reflective, there should be more than 60% women!"

Lucy Dillon, director of knowledge management at BLP, agrees the reason is partly historical, but that's changing.

"KM originally attracted women looking for more work-life balance after starting a family, so women moved into this branch of legal first. I suspect that those applying for KM vacancies today are more evenly balanced from a gender perspective."

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## On the move: job mobility in legal KM

Knowledge might be about to become a great place to look for a career – if it hasn't plateaued as a role.

The number of moves (hires or promotions) in knowledge in the top 100 has increased significantly, and the volume from non-legal or professional services is increasing along with that trend. Knowledge came of age in the 2000s, with 20 moves, but since 2010 there has been a riot of moves – 21 already in just the first third of the 2010s. Extrapolated, this could mean 63 moves by the end of the decade.

Rachel Manser, global head of knowledge and information at Linklaters, says there are good reasons why the trend might continue: “The more KM is seen as an integral part of the business, the more competition there will be for the most valuable KM leaders and hence more activity in this market.”

Sam Dimond, group director of knowledge at Norton Rose Fulbright agrees. “As firms realise that a focus on quality and innovation are critical to their survival, they will increasingly look to people with a proven track record of delivering the significant change programmes that are required. For the few who have demonstrated an ability to deliver, there will be an increase in job opportunities – it's an exciting time.”

### 3.1 Finding the knowledge leaders

Knowledge leaders generally come from a legal background or from other professional services firms. Currently, 61% (from a sample of 44 responding)

come from legal – 68% when you add in all professional services as a background. But this has been changing – the number of moves is trending towards people being recruited from outside legal, though mainly still from within professional services (PS).

From the 2000s to the 2010s, moves from outside legal including PS rose by 100%; moves from other law firms in the same period rose by 87%. Over the same timescale, moves into legal KM from outside PS rose by 40%. Those in legal KM who come from other PS businesses now make up 40% of all non-legal KM people – there were none in our sample in the 2000s, or before.

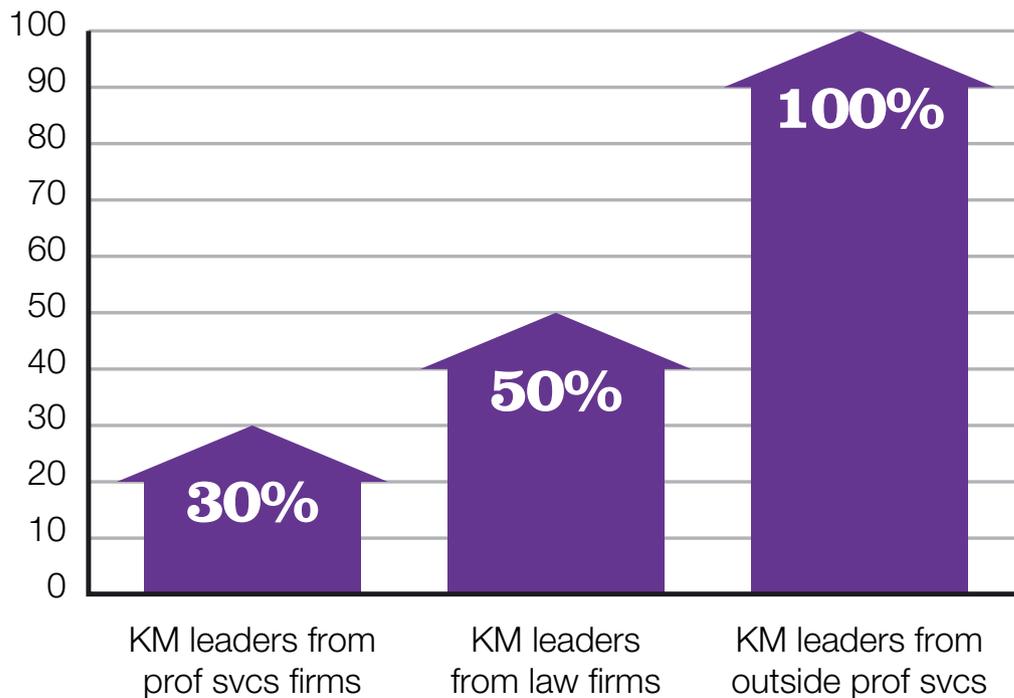
Law firms could be looking outside legal for KM leaders for a number of reasons, says David Halliwell, director of knowledge, risk and legal services for Pinsent Masons. “Law firms have been slow to embrace topics such as process improvement and project management. Both have been embedded in other professional services organisations, manufacturing and others for decades. Law firms are bringing in people with experience from other sectors, as there are few lawyers with a great deal of experience in these areas.”

Yet Jane Bradbury, head of knowledge and information at Slaughter and May, offers a different view: “Law firms were relatively early adopters of KM, because knowledge and the constant need to disseminate information and knowledge is at the very heart of how we operate as a business. As KM has spread out to other industries and sectors over the years, there is now a larger talent pool from which to recruit and a firm will often welcome a fresh

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## Where do KM people come from?

% change over decades 1993-2002 / 2001-2013



perspective, whether from someone with a legal or PS background, or from someone outside of professional services.”

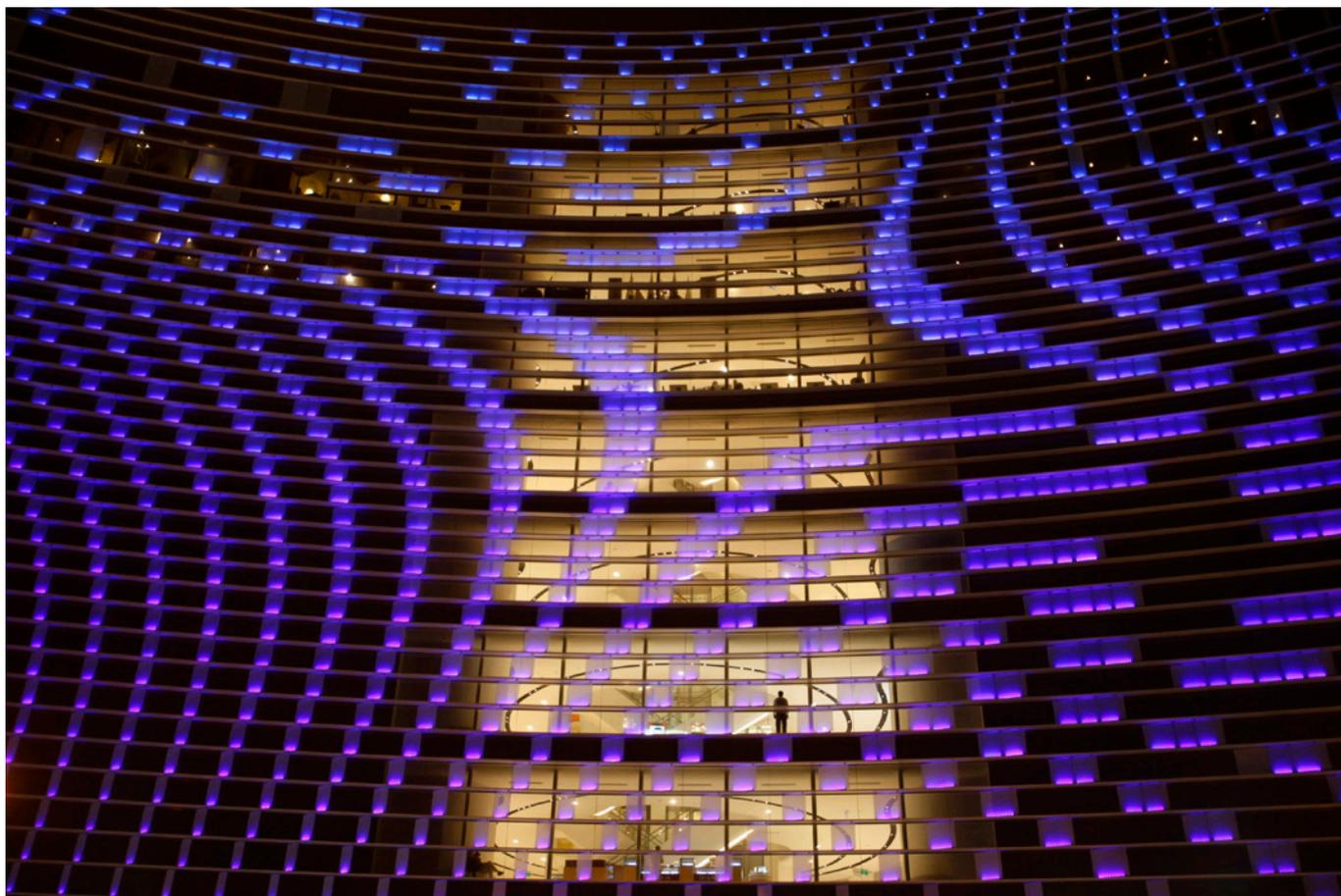
Perhaps the world of business does have a lot more KM talent now – or perhaps firms are just growing more used to outsiders. Manser at Linklaters says KM “is transferable, and law firms can benefit from experience outside of the sector”, but “the challenge lies in its application to the knowledge most relevant to a law firm and the culture we operate in”.

But we’ll have to wait to see how the 2010s play out to understand, or even verify, this trend, says Dimond.

“It’s hard to know how significant a trend this is without knowing what figures are involved. It doesn’t surprise me though; the head of knowledge at a large engineering firm wouldn’t necessarily be from an engineering background.

“It’s probably because management is waking up to the fact that knowledge is not all about precedents, training and databases – KM in other sectors is far more focused on learning from doing, collaboration and innovation, so it makes sense not to restrict the role to those who have practised as PSLs. It will always be a challenge for someone who doesn’t have a legal background to command credibility with partners – but that will change.”

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