Briefing Leaders

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT LEADERS 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following our November 2019 Knowledge Leaders conference, this **Briefing** report explores exactly who is leading knowledge management (KM) functions in large law firms in 2020, what their priorities are and where firms are positioning them. Our data encompasses 122 law firms, with revenues from £18.5m up to £1.9bn, clearly covering a range of different market positions and strategies.

We set out to answer three main questions about who KM leaders are in this report: job title and consequent seniority (pp6-7), where people are joining their firms from (pp11-12) and how gender-diverse knowledge functions are when it comes to leaders (p15).

The number of top firms reporting that they have a KM leader has risen to 70%, an increase on the 53% in 2013. But 'head of' is still the most common title (38%), eclipsing 'directors' (17%). Firms at the lower end of the market (£18.5m-£50m) had the highest proportion of KM leaders with the more junior 'manager' or less specific 'partner' title (27%) and were the most likely not to have any KM leader (46%).

Little seems to have changed on the mobility front since 2013, however: 75% of KM leaders come from a legal background, and a mere 9% from professional or financial services. While that's a big change compared with the situation before 2004, it suggests law firms still primarily trust 'their own' to run their knowledge functions. In terms of gender balance, the number of women KM leaders has increased from 60% in 2013 to 66%.

We also set out to get a more in-depth picture of other aspects of KM leaders' jobs going into 2020: this includes a number of factors, including what's top of the priority list, remit and responsibilities, who their key collaborators are, the importance of engagement and what skillsets are needed for the future of knowledge.

A top priority was 'client facing KM', with 71% of knowledge leaders reporting this as their focus in 2020, reflecting several firms pushing to productise and sell knowledge directly. However, only 29% reported that 'attending client pitches' was currently part of their remit.

Knowledge leaders feel the need to ramp up the level of internal engagement in their firms, with a significant 59% saying that 'selling' knowledge internally would be more of a discussion topic in 2020 than in 2019. When asked which internal stakeholders they'd be working most closely with in the coming year, the two largest responses were IT directors and marketing and BD directors (both 15%). Yet, technology wasn't the focus when we asked which skillsets KM leaders are looking to hire, with 58% opting for 'something else' from the options we provided. Several knowledge leaders we spoke to suggested this figure was concealing a need for commercial nous and sector-specific insight in knowledge departments. ◣

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PARTNER COMMENT

Catherine Kidd, market development director, global large law, at Thomson Reuters, says KM leaders are increasingly central to law firm strategy – but clarity around what their real priorities should be is yet to be achieved

This report indicates a positive, although steady, change in the direction of KM teams up to 2020. There is a resounding shift towards including a focus on client-facing delivery and client collaboration as one of the many facets which make up law firm KM. That said, there still seems to be a lack of clarity as to what productising KM should look like, with only 53% of respondents to **Briefing**'s survey directly productising knowledge and few actively involved in pitching and business development activities (p8). Arguably, the concept of productisation is a challenge firms are still trying to get their heads around. The disconnect in how to bring this to life, as well as a lack of understanding of the value that the KM skillset can bring to the client conversation, is evident.

It'll come as no surprise that the role of the KM team remains exceptionally broad. The ongoing rhetoric and focus on driving internal efficiency has not gone away, with respondents reporting a focus on core initiatives in 2020 – such as search and document assembly (55% – see p5). This is unsurprising and in spite of longstanding, respected solutions being available in the market, there is still only a small group of firms for whom tackling these challenges has become business as usual. Optimising the experience and activities of fee earners is a challenge the market is clearly still trying to address and selecting and procuring the tech that firms require remains central to the KM remit (94% – see p8). The focus of the tools in question might be an indicator of both the perpetually slow pace of change in basic KM tools, and the fact that KM teams are still facing internal cultural and change management challenges.

The shift to a focus on contribution to client-facing initiatives is evidence of the growing strategic importance of the KM function. The number of KM leader roles has increased across the board since 2013 – in firms of all sizes. Only 30% of firms aren't investing in a knowledge leader role. There is still a weighting towards female KM leaders – at 66%, compared to 34% male (see p15).

Firms remain open to these KM roles being filled by individuals from industries outside of legal. The service-led aspirations of many firms will undoubtedly benefit from both external expertise and lessons learned in other professional services industries – and may help with the challenge of discovering how to productise legal services. However, it appears there is a mismatch between recruitment priorities and stated strategic priorities. Hiring individuals with sector expertise or product-focused knowledge, for instance, is low, at 7% (p16) – and these are the key skills required to fulfil a client-facing remit.

Elsewhere, there is a mismatch in the recruitment plans for 2020 in contrast to the skillsets needed to realise 2020 priorities. Innovation is becoming a critical part of the knowledge role, and this trend goes hand-in-hand with the desire to collaborate more with clients and develop client-facing propositions. However, hiring the traditional PSL role is still the primary driver for most teams. That could reflect a fundamental lack of understanding around which priorities KM leaders need to address, or that there isn't yet a strong enough vision for what KM can contribute in terms of delivering value for clients. Either way, 2020 is stacked with challenges both old and new and, in the case of shifting focus to client-facing delivery, the proof will be in the pudding. It'll be exciting to watch this new focus evolve. ▶

The concept of productisation is a challenge firms are still trying to get their heads around. The disconnect in how to bring this to life, as well as a lack of understanding of the value that the KM skillset can bring to the client conversation, is evident

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01

What are knowledge leaders' priority targets?

T here were few surprises when it came to KM leaders' top priorities going into 2020, as a drive to leverage the resources and knowledge contained in KM departments, and create more commercially valuable relationships, seems to be coming to the fore among many firms, in addition to competing and tackling efficiency. Easily topping the list (p5) was client-facing KM, with 71% of respondents citing this aspect of knowledge as their top priority.

Alex Woods, director of knowledge and innovation at Slaughter and May, believes KM leaders are thinking more about how their departments can link to greater firm objectives. "This is all about KM trying to respond to broader firm efforts to get closer to clients and make their service offerings more client-centric. So, rather than sending clients a series of standard publications – whether or not they're interested – we're talking to them about their real concerns and then tailoring our content to make it as relevant and useful as it can be."

Taking knowledge out of the office and to the client coalface is a theme across several of the people we interviewed for this report, suggesting a shift away from the dominant focus on efficiency-wins that have been higher up the priority list in the past. Sarah Pullin, director of knowledge operations at Baker McKenzie, comments: "There has been a lot of focus on driving efficiency and profitability internally in the past. Knowledge people are beginning to move more towards using client-facing technology and undertaking client-facing tasks now."

Second on the KM hitlist, at 65%, was 'collaboration'. While this could mean many things – technology, processes, communication – in its broadest sense it's surely all about making resources more available to more people inside and outside of a firm – tying in nicely with the push to get closer to clients' needs. Indeed, Woods says that collaboration is being driven by the need to work out how best to work together, on both the client side and inside the firm. But in answering that need for collaboration, she says, firms can deliver better solutions: "Firms are beginning to recognise that one party might have a view on something on their own, but actually the best solution for both parties is one that you arrive at together. That's 'true collaboration'."

In joint-third place with the ever-crucial and challenging 'search' function, document automation is also high up the list of respondents' priorities. It looks as though firms are recognising the need to get to grips with this aspect of digitalisation in order to leverage their existing assets, but some might feel it's perhaps surprising that it wasn't higher up the list. Woods thinks that's because many of these priorities are no longer new. "Search, document automation and the rest of the choices are perennial – they've been there forever."

That may be so, but these are areas of work that continue to be important for many KM departments. Coming third would seem to suggest that some KM leaders are successfully conquering these recurring challenges, with other priorities taking centre stage in those organisations. Christopher Tart-Roberts, chief knowledge and innovation officer at Macfarlanes, says that document automation is not a priority at his firm for a simple reason: "We've been focused on document automation for a number of years – it's widespread within the firm now, so it's more business as usual." Are those firms which rated this area as a priority perhaps still playing catch up?

What's your remit?

Although priorities, job title and seniority level (pp 6-7) can tell us quite a bit about what KM leaders are doing in law firms, another route to getting the full picture is to dig into their responsibilities. It would of course be
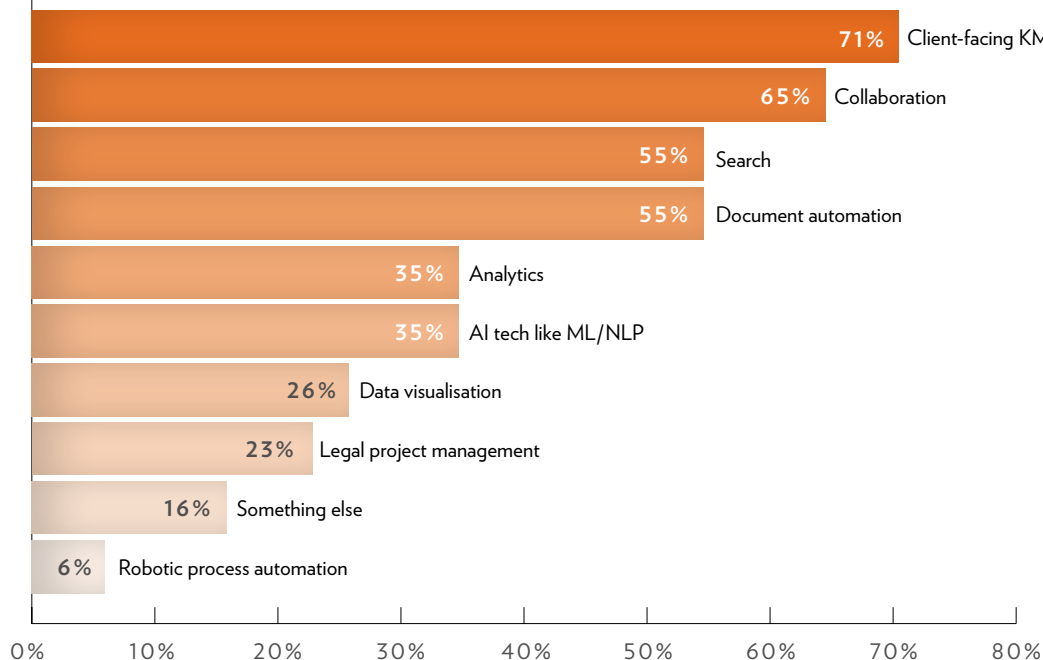
02

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES FOR 2020?

Priority	%
Client-facing KM	71%
Collaboration	65%
Search	55%
Document automation	55%
Analytics	35%
AI tech like ML/NLP	35%
Data visualisation	26%
Legal project management	23%
Something else	16%
Robotic process automation	6%

quite worrying if any of the KM leaders we spoke to didn't say that knowledge management came under their remit – so no surprises that 100% of respondents said it did (p8) – but that was the only area that was unanimously reported as falling under KM leaders' auspices. The next most prevalent areas were 'information services procurement' and 'facilitating collaboration' (both 94%). So far, so normal – with so much talk of internal and external collaboration, it's hardly surprising that practically every KM leader we surveyed had a key role in collaboration efforts at their firm.

But, 'selling knowledge as a product to clients', one pillar of the new strategic directions that many firms appear to be taking, polled halfway down our list (53%). Are only half of firms actively selling their knowledge resources to clients?

On the one hand, as many KM leaders have joint or composite roles and titles, KM leaders' remits may simply have become highly varied across the market. Pullin, at Baker McKenzie, says: "Some hybrid roles include pricing, for example, and some include risk. But being in an operational role in knowledge isn't
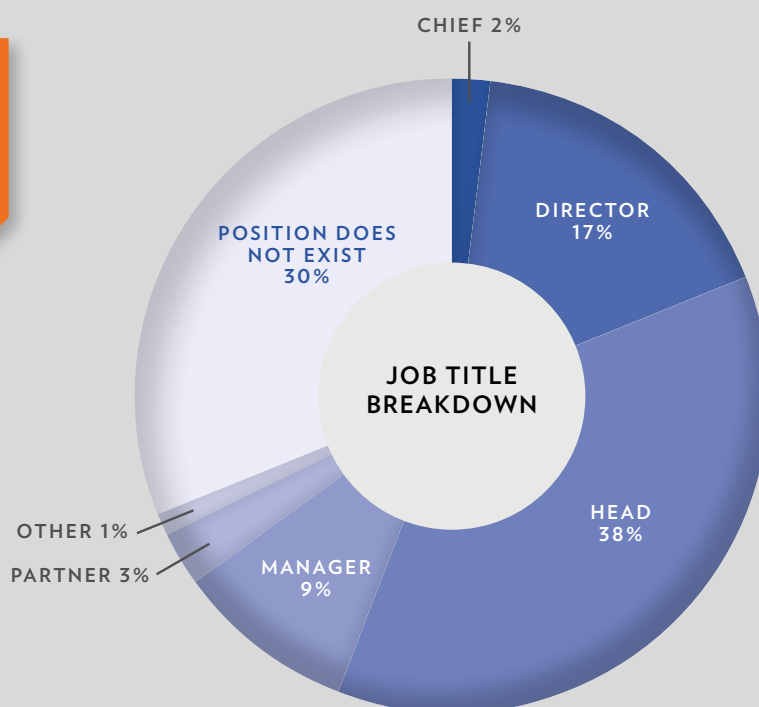
> ## "We've been focused on document automation for a number of years – it's widespread within the firm now, so it's more business as usual."
>
> *Christopher Tart-Roberts, chief knowledge and innovation officer, Macfarlanes*

particularly common. KM involvement in selling services to clients may depend on the maturity of a firm's knowledge function, but selling and productising knowledge is still relatively rare."

Still, our figure is a little lower than she would expect. "Whether KM is sold as a package deal, panel of commitments or as a standalone service or product, there might be more opportunities for selling knowledge to clients in future – they are asking for more support on the KM governance and strategy side now, as well as for the standard KM support."

So, what about those other, lower figures? Following that same thread of bringing KM to the clients, only

JOB TITLES IN LEGAL KM LEADERSHIP

CHIEF 2%

DIRECTOR 17%

POSITION DOES NOT EXIST 30%

JOB TITLE BREAKDOWN

HEAD 38%

OTHER 1%

PARTNER 3%

MANAGER 9%

DEDICATED KM LEADERS ARE INCREASING – BUT NOT ACROSS THE BOARD

Back in 2013, we hailed the coming of age of the knowledge management (KM) leader role, with a majority of the biggest law firms nominating someone, somewhere, as leader of the knowledge function – whether the word 'knowledge' could be found in their job title or not. What we couldn't tell, however, was how KM would develop in those firms in the future. We wondered whether KM was a growing or declining discipline, and asked the question: "Will industry murmurings turn out true, and the elements of KM disperse into different parts of a firm?" David Halliwell, then director of knowledge, risk and legal services at Pinsent Masons (now director of client solutions at the same firm) thought in 2013 that the overall number of knowledge leaders might drop, as KM evolved beyond its traditional bounds: "I can see the knowledge roles developing more broadly and dedicated knowledge roles becoming fewer," he said.

Broadly, that doesn't seem to have come to pass: 70% of all firms **Briefing** surveyed in 2019 now have a KM leader, a significant rise on the 53% in 2013, with that proportion growing to 86% of firms in revenue bands 1 and 2 (£200m+). Even in band 5 (£20-50m), where we might expect to see budgets constrain

spend, 54% of firms have a KM leader – although the seniority of those leaders is more likely to be below director level at those smaller firms (see bar chart p7).

So, it looks like KM leaders are, broadly, here to stay – or are they? Richard Gaston, head of knowledge and research at Addleshaw Goddard, says that KM has been a very cyclical discipline historically. "Organisations can end up in a mess around the way they manage and share knowledge internally; they recruit somebody senior, then that activity will become steady and the value of the role will be questioned. It might be sacrificed to cost savings, but later the problems that were addressed will re-emerge.

"Over the last few years firms have been creating and investing in those roles more. If we have a financial downturn, perhaps post-Brexit, we might see them questioned again."

There might have been a kernel of truth in the theory that KM leaders could be distributed among other departments, however, as innovation and process management or resourcing functions develop – especially in the largest firms. More firms in the middle group of our three cohorts, bands 3 and 4 (£50-200m), reported having a KM leader of some description, at 91%, than those in bands 1 and 2, at just 86%. You'd probably expect those percentages to be the other way around, as greater resources would

imply more investment in KM. Although the larger firms report having a higher proportion of directors than the middle, might this be a sign that the topmost tier of law firms have taken the more strategically significant aspects of knowledge and placed them in other business areas, leaving behind a knowledge 'rump'?
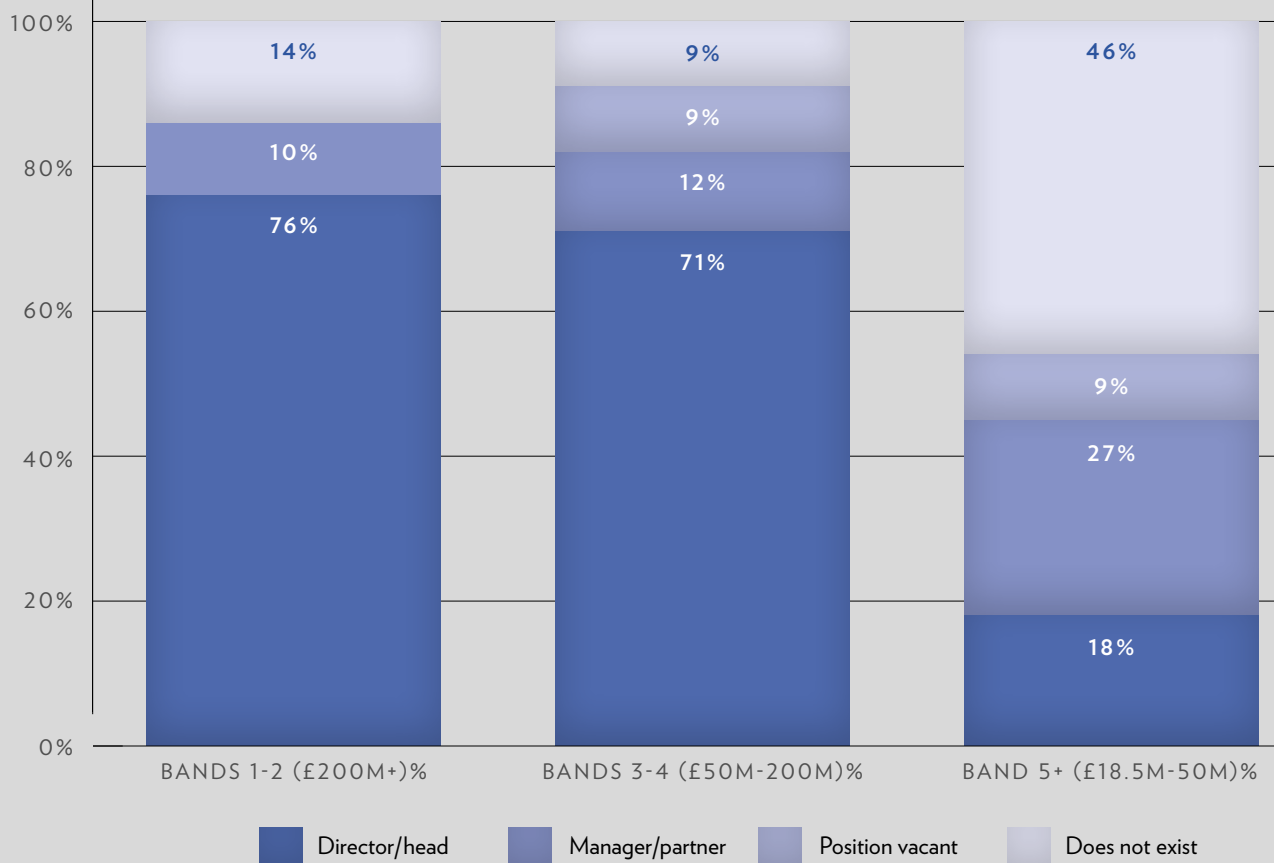
However, many of the leaders **Briefing** spoke to for this report suggested that the opposite has happened – that knowledge leaders have evolved and come to encompass areas like innovation, resourcing and productisation. Christopher Tart-Roberts, chief knowledge and innovation officer at Macfarlanes, says that in recent years more of his role has been focused on client-facing projects than might traditionally have been the case. "A director-level title emphasises the strategic importance of that function, which helps with external-facing client work. Having a job title commensurate with the significance of the role reinforces, in the eyes of clients, the importance the firm places on that expertise, the function and your seniority."
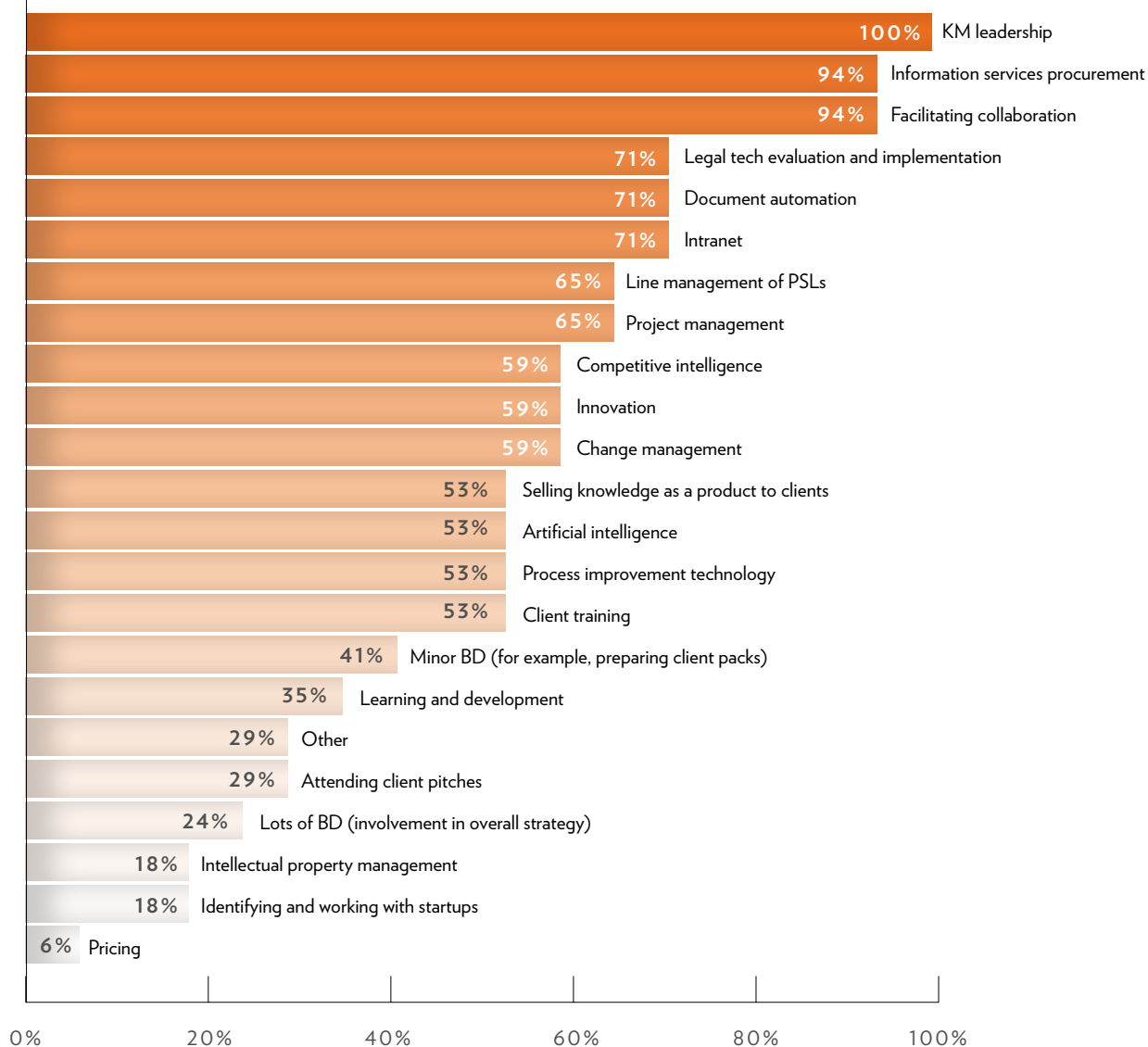
What's in a name?

But are all KM leaders' being given the senior job titles they need? While a minimum level of seniority is probably a necessity for the leaders of forward-looking knowledge functions, Gaston, at Addleshaw Goddard, feels KM leaders' remit and scope have become more diverse, making simple seniority assumptions based on titles redundant. For instance, the distribution of staff across a firm may affect the likelihood of KM leaders having a director-level job title: "If you have a law firm that manages its PSLs centrally within the knowledge department, rather than spreading them across the firm, it's more likely that their leader will have a director title."

He adds that job title is perhaps not the be all and end all when it comes to seniority – some KM leaders may have a great degree of authority despite the lack of a director title. "You need to look beyond job title to reporting line: if that person reports into the managing partner, chief operating officer or directly to the exec, that might give you a better idea of their actual seniority." ◢

DEDICATED KM LEADER ROLES BY FIRM REVENUE BAND

	BANDS 1-2 (£200M+)%	BANDS 3-4 (£50M-200M)%	BAND 5+ (£18.5M-50M)%
Does not exist	14%	9%	46%
Position vacant	10%	9%	9%
Manager/partner		12%	27%
Director/head	76%	71%	18%

Legend: Director/head · Manager/partner · Position vacant · Does not exist

WHICH AREAS CURRENTLY FALL WITHIN YOUR REMIT?

Area	Percentage
KM leadership	100%
Information services procurement	94%
Facilitating collaboration	94%
Legal tech evaluation and implementation	71%
Document automation	71%
Intranet	71%
Line management of PSLs	65%
Project management	65%
Competitive intelligence	59%
Innovation	59%
Change management	59%
Selling knowledge as a product to clients	53%
Artificial intelligence	53%
Process improvement technology	53%
Client training	53%
Minor BD (for example, preparing client packs)	41%
Learning and development	35%
Other	29%
Attending client pitches	29%
Lots of BD (involvement in overall strategy)	24%
Intellectual property management	18%
Identifying and working with startups	18%
Pricing	6%

29% of our leaders said their remit included attending client pitches. Perhaps this low figure is connected to the reason client-facing KM is such a high priority with KM leaders: if they're going to be increasingly working with and selling knowledge to clients, it may help to be more routinely involved in the pitching process, which may first require working to improve client-facing skills and opportunities. Richard Gaston, head of knowledge and research at Addleshaw Goddard, has another potential explanation related to broader structural reasons, but still thinks KM leaders should be in those pitches. "It might be a scope issue: if clients talk most about innovation, and that sits outside of knowledge – like automation of documents or processes – then they're perhaps less likely to get involved in client pitches. That 29% probably should be higher though – it might also be a result of knowledge teams failing to push themselves with client relationship partners and

WILL SELLING KM INTERNALLY BE A 2020 DISCUSSION TOPIC?

59% — Yes, more than in 2019

34% — Yes, to same extent as in 2019

6% — Yes, but not as much as in 2019

0% — Neutral/don't know

0% — Not at all

0% — Not really

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%

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their BD teams."

So, for all the collaboration efforts, it looks like firms are not yet joining their KM people up with other stakeholders as much as they could. Looking at a similarly external-facing area, the role of 'identifying and working with startups' scored just 18%. Innovation, which can include both internal- and outward-facing elements, scored a more respectable 59%, suggesting KM leaders are gradually being given the chance to leverage their resources and skills in this key area. That's surely a good thing, as doing so seems likely to generate benefits across law firms.

At Macfarlanes, which has combined innovation and knowledge for several years, Tart-Roberts agrees that firms that are not combining knowledge with innovation, or areas like working with startups, are missing a trick. "Having knowledge and innovation/legal tech teams aligned has brought a lot of benefits, so I'm a bit surprised the results are that low. Knowledge specialists bring a lot to those areas – we've seen significant synergies from offering knowledge, innovation and legal tech in a joined-up way."
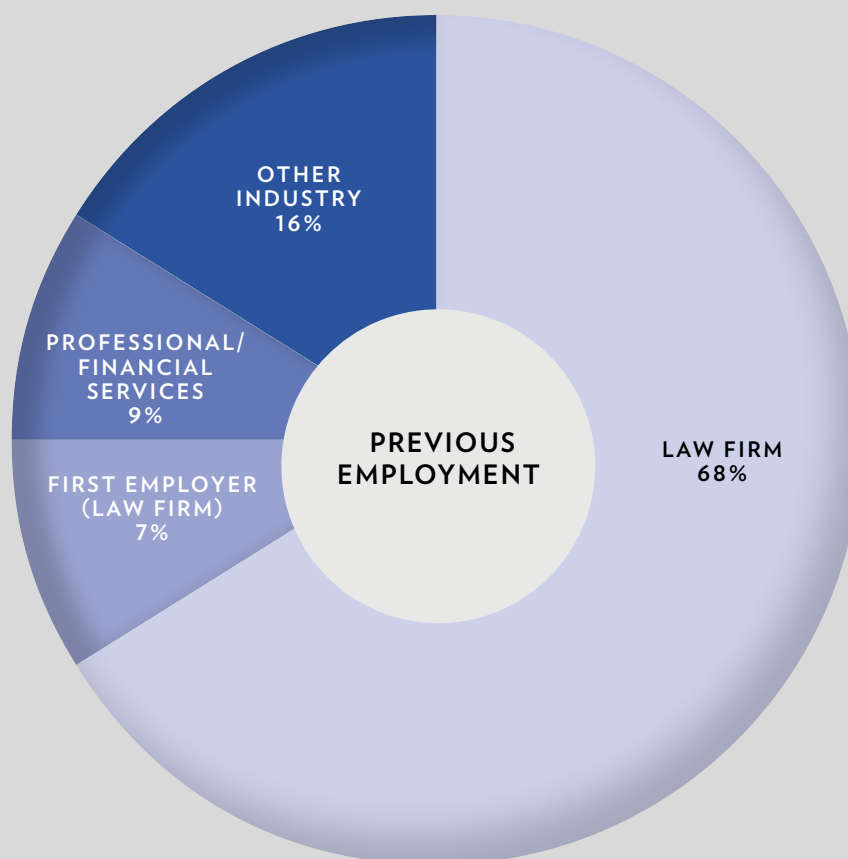
How are KM leaders collaborating internally?

03

While many of the leaders **Briefing** interviewed said that KM professionals could perhaps do more to champion their department's value, most thought firms did understand the value of knowledge. However, 59% of those we polled said yes, 'selling KM internally'

"People understand the value of knowledge but maybe haven't understood how much it relies on everyone at the firm contributing. I doubt there's a single firm where that's not a challenge."

Mark Ford, chief knowledge officer, Baker McKenzie

KM LEADER MOBILITY – WHERE DID KM LEADERS WORK PREVIOUSLY?

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT

OTHER INDUSTRY 16%

PROFESSIONAL/ FINANCIAL SERVICES 9%

FIRST EMPLOYER (LAW FIRM) 7%

LAW FIRM 68%

LITTLE CHANGE IN KM LEADER BACKGROUNDS

Knowledge might seem like a function that requires its leaders to have a lot of in-depth, technical 'knowledge' of law. But there are many other skills and areas of expertise that KM leaders from outside the legal profession can bring to the table, if only law firms have the appetite to bring them onboard. Back in 2013, when we last looked at these metrics, we noted the huge expansion of KM leaders without a legal background coming into law firms in previous years – the number of KM leaders entering legal from other industries doubled between 2001 and 2013 – we wondered whether the trend would continue. So, have law firms been reaching out for some new sources of knowledge?

Our results suggest that firms have continued to draw from outside, but the pace at which external expertise has come into legal has remained steady, rather than accelerating. Looking at our 2019 snapshot of firms (pie chart, above), we found that 68% of KM leaders today previously worked in legal, with 7% saying they had no previous employer before their current law firm – effectively placing them in the same group. Whether you count only the 68% or the combined 75%, that's either a steady-state

situation or a slight increase on the overall trend from 2015 onwards (bar chart p12), which had 68% of KM leaders coming from legal. It's also an increase on the 61% in 2013.

The story is a little more encouraging for 'outsiders' when we look at the trend across a longer time period: from 2015 onwards, 16% of entrants to legal KM have come from professional services and the same again came from other industries entirely – not enough to dislodge KM movers staying in the legal sector, but by no means an insignificant proportion.

Sarah Pullin, director of knowledge operations at Baker McKenzie, says that although most KM leaders tend to come from a legal background, it does feel like the attitude is beginning to change. "There is generally more openness to recruiting from outside the legal circle now. The diversity you have in your knowledge team is a strength."

Simply having an outside perspective can be a boon to KM, agrees Christopher Tart-Roberts, chief knowledge and innovation officer at Macfarlanes. "It's about different perspectives and food for thought – bringing in people who are willing to challenge things is useful because they don't have baggage – they don't simply accept the status quo. It can be harder for a lawyer to think

of new or different ways of doing things when the existing way is well ingrained."

A number of respondents to **Briefing**'s survey suggested that firms in which KM is more geared towards service delivery might be more inclined to hire KM leaders from outside legal. Mark Ford, chief knowledge officer at Baker McKenzie, thinks there might be something in that idea, and agrees that legal has something to learn from other industries. "Service delivery as a discipline is more developed in other sectors than legal, and it requires perhaps a different approach that's not innate to lawyers."
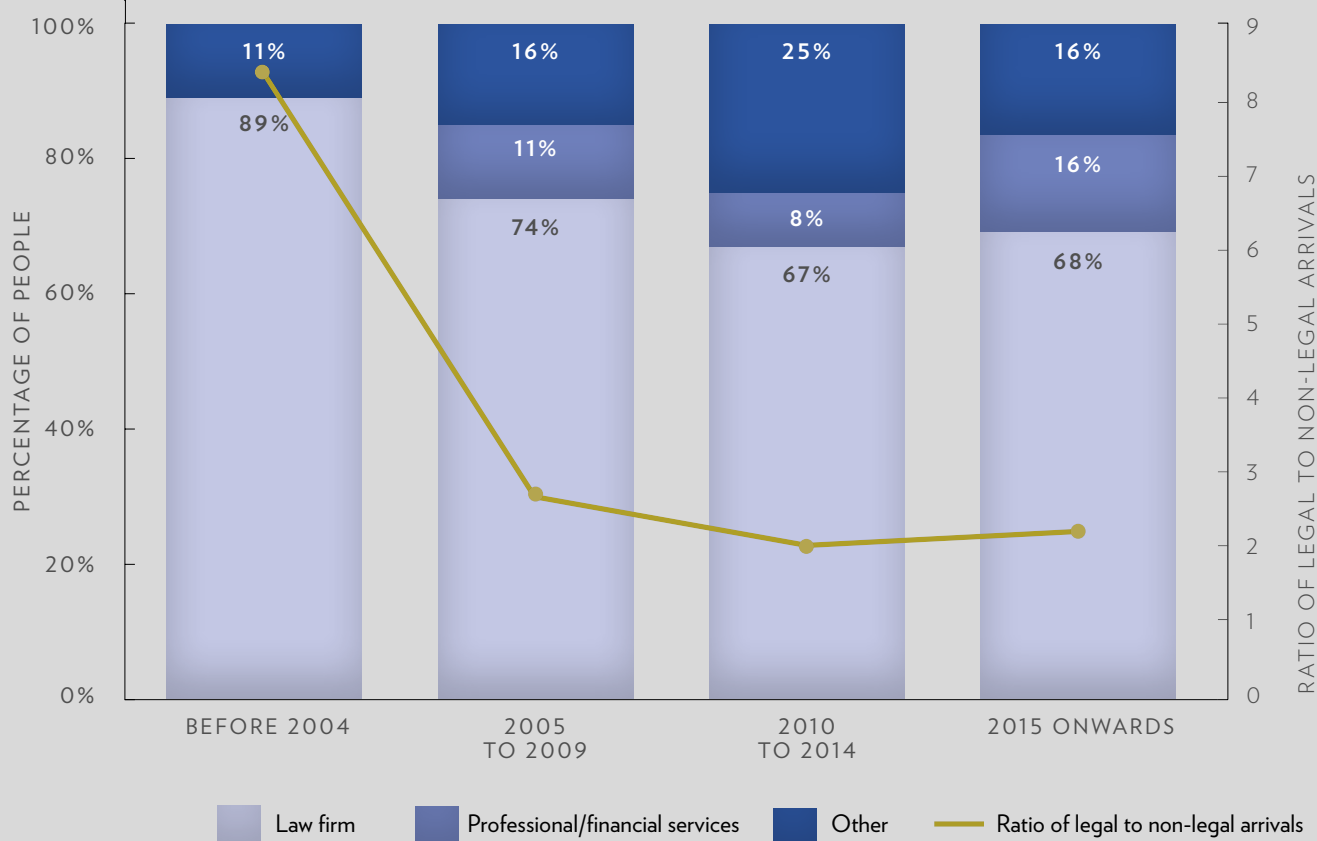
What's more, firms are adopting more process re-engineering and design thinking, he observes – prompting the need for outside expertise to help lead it. "It's possible firms are accepting that a lot of what they do on major projects is process-type work, and if you have people with a service mindset you can deliver it more effectively."

Perhaps a little surprisingly, other professional services firms and financial services businesses – including the competing Big Four – have supplied only 9% of today's legal KM leaders. While that is a small increase on the 7% in 2013, it's not quite the explosion we were thinking might happen.

The perception that KM leaders need a legal background might still be affecting these figures. Claire Fox, head of knowledge and information services at Kingsley Napley, thinks the nature of law firms can make it difficult to affect change in a leadership role. "People from outside can sometimes struggle to establish credibility at law firms. That's truer in knowledge than in other fields, because the knowledge management area is so closely connected with legal practice. I think there can be the perception that 'if you don't have a legal background, how could you really understand or do the job?'"

Nonetheless, law firms may be starting to recognise the fact that they potentially have a lot to learn in certain areas, and that knowledge requires more than just a technical understanding of the law. Richard Gaston, head of knowledge and research at Addleshaw Goddard, himself a lifer in knowledge and information across various sectors, says that legal may be looking outside its own borders in some places because it needs innovative thinking. "I would expect that people are recruiting more from professional services because that's where innovation has already happened, and those people are more likely to have the skills that we need."

TREND IN LEGAL V NON-LEGAL ENTRANTS

	BEFORE 2004	2005 TO 2009	2010 TO 2014	2015 ONWARDS
Other	11%	16%	25%	16%
Professional/financial services		11%	8%	16%
Law firm	89%	74%	67%	68%

Legend: Law firm · Professional/financial services · Other · Ratio of legal to non-legal arrivals

would be a topic of discussion in 2020, and require more emphasis than last year (p10). Crucially, not one respondent answered with any of the 'no' options – that's a pretty clear vote for more internal buy-in. But, if the value of KM is beyond doubt at the majority of firms, what's driving that need to continue to champion knowledge?
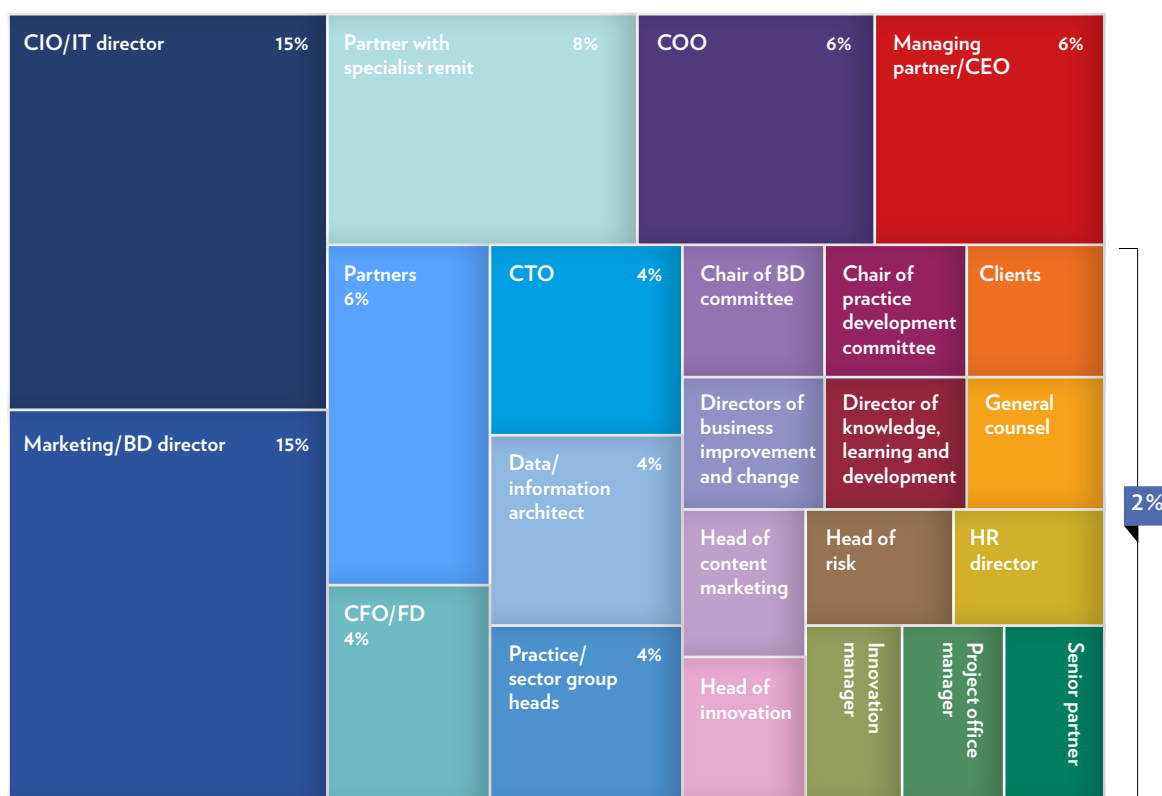
Tart-Roberts says the push comes from the need to fulfil KM's increasingly important client-facing remit. "It's about being proactive and cross-selling capabilities as you would with any area of practice or expertise. Historically, some KM teams have been more reactive and inward-facing. Now, it's the opposite: we're more proactive and go out and engage with people," he says.
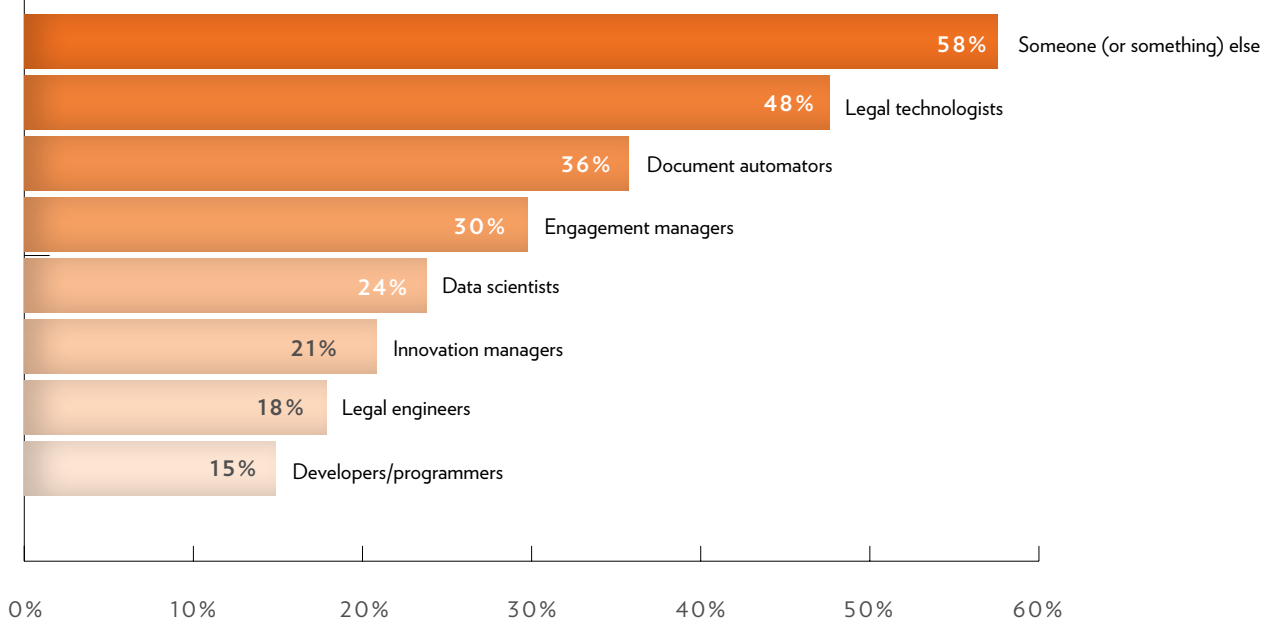
However, several KM leaders we spoke to wanted to refine the terms of the question – Mark Ford, chief knowledge officer at Baker McKenzie, suggests the term "engagement" instead of 'selling'. "My sense is that people understand the value of knowledge but

maybe haven't understood how much it relies on everyone at the firm to contribute. I doubt there's a single firm where that's not a challenge, because fee-earning lawyers are under pressure to bill however many hours a year – and even today that's primarily what they're measured on. Anything that takes them away from that takes them away from their core responsibilities," he said.

So, who are those leaders 'selling' to or 'engaging'? It might be a testament to how varied knowledge work has become in law firms that there was such wide a spread of responses to the question of who KM leaders would be most closely collaborating with in 2020 (below). The two most obvious winners were CIO/IT directors and marketing/BD directors (15% each) – which is perhaps the most logical area for KM leaders to prioritise for their bridge-building. The former speaks to KM's growing function in connection to innovation, as well as its traditional purpose, and the

WHICH KEY STAKEHOLDERS WILL YOU BE WORKING MORE CLOSELY WITH OVER THE NEXT 12-24 MONTHS?

CIO/IT director 15%
Partner with specialist remit 8%
COO 6%
Managing partner/CEO 6%
Marketing/BD director 15%
Partners 6%
CTO 4%
Data/information architect 4%
Practice/sector group heads 4%
CFO/FD 4%
Chair of BD committee
Chair of practice development committee
Clients
Directors of business improvement and change
Director of knowledge, learning and development
General counsel
Head of content marketing
Head of risk
HR director
Head of innovation
Innovation manager
Project office manager
Senior partner
2%

WHO WILL YOU BE HIRING IN 2020?

Role	Percentage
Someone (or something) else	58%
Legal technologists	48%
Document automators	36%
Engagement managers	30%
Data scientists	24%
Innovation managers	21%
Legal engineers	18%
Developers/programmers	15%

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%

latter ties in with commercial and client-facing work. But many other areas were pinpointed, too, with answers spread across business services, operational and client-facing areas.

More respondents than might be expected (but still just 6%) said they'd be collaborating most with their CEO or managing partner in 2020, likely reflecting the more strategic contribution those KM leaders will be making, but potentially also demonstrating the growing importance of KM in commercial relationships. Tart-Roberts says this is true at Macfarlanes: "The senior partner and managing partner roles are, and will continue to be, important connections for us, as they link into the client-facing and external aspects of the KM role – particularly as we're increasingly introducing new products for clients," he says.

And firms at the smaller end of the **Briefing** spectrum might agree with Claire Fox, head of knowledge and information at Kingsley Napley, who echoes the sentiment of the 2% saying their key collaborators will be business improvement and change leaders. Not all firms are necessarily embracing these disciplines, and the largest firms may have already subsumed them into knowledge, but Fox says they'll be a crucial factor at her firm. "We'll be working

very closely with our legal processing improvement specialists for the next few years, because there's so much overlap between knowledge management, business process improvement, business engagement and project management. They determine which projects we focus on as a firm and have the skillsets to help us find solutions to firm-wide problems."

Which skillsets do you need to hire?

04

This report is focused on KM leaders, but the people they're leading is naturally a big part of the picture – which skillsets they're most eager to acquire, whether hiring or through internal 'borrowing' of employees from another area, is another way to get a handle on what KM leaders are prioritising in 2020. So, it was quite a surprise that the biggest response to our question was the – to put it mildly – ambiguous 'something else' option (58%). What was behind that response? Was our question-formulating flawed?

Pullin, at Baker McKenzie, suggests KM's shift in focus to clients and external collaborators might be part of the story and offers a simple explanation for the lower numbers saying: "KM is moving towards being more client- or externally-focused. The other options are all internally-focused and centred around efficiency

FEMALE 66%

MALE 34%
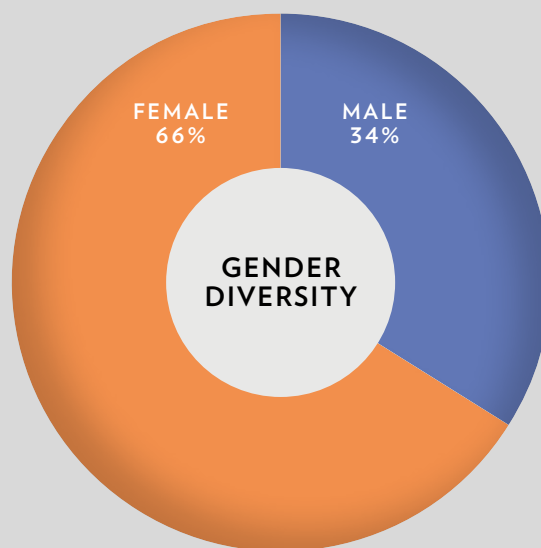
GENDER DIVERSITY

GENDER DIVERSITY AMONG LEGAL KM LEADERS IN THE UK'S TOP FIRMS

UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITY? NOT TO OUR KNOWLEDGE

Generally, knowledge management has had a higher proportion of women than men, at all levels. The theory goes – a career in knowledge has been the route to a healthier work-life balance and a potential springboard back into the world of work after parental leave. Given that the direction of travel across all professions is meant to be one of encouraging flexible and agile working, and law firms are aiming to do more to support all parents and improve diversity, might we expect to see a change in this trend?

The data doesn't yet bear that theory out – in fact it might even suggest the opposite. There's been little statistical change in the proportion of male to female KM leaders since 2005, and what change there has been is an increase in the number of women heading up KM departments (who, as we've said, were already in the majority) – increasing from 60% in 2013 to 66% in 2019.

Mark Ford, chief knowledge officer at Baker McKenzie, thinks we may see a shift away from as many women in KM leadership roles in the future if remaining as a practising lawyer/partner becomes a more attractive prospect for parents. "We may see a rebalancing of the practising lawyer population – which, at the moment, is weighted in favour of men as you get more senior." That won't happen quickly, however. "These are very long-term goals – it's not going to happen in the next couple of years."

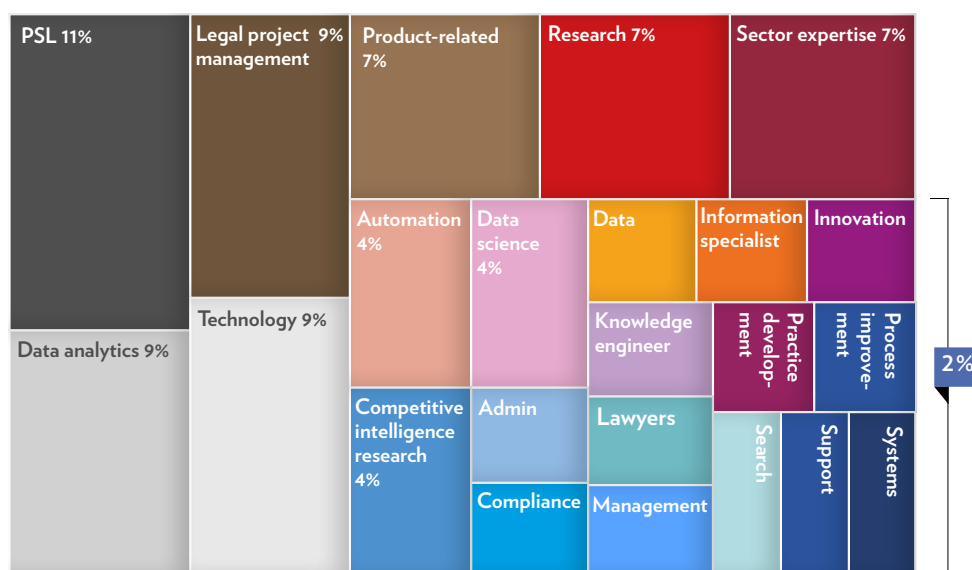So, could it be that the results we're seeing now are more representative of the general situation occurring in law firms several years ago, with a potentially more promising picture emerging once the current crop of KM leaders have made way for the next generation?

However, Sarah Pullin, director of knowledge operations at Baker McKenzie, thinks the leadership figure of 66% is not quite representative of the teams they manage. "I would have expected KM to have a higher percentage of women leaders."

Elsewhere, the picture is more complicated. Christopher Tart-Roberts, chief knowledge and innovation officer at Macfarlanes, who himself did not come into knowledge for the traditional, flexible working-related reasons, says his department, which encompasses innovation and technology as well as traditional knowledge functions, does not reflect the historic division. "My team is roughly split 50/50. Knowledge, as a career path, is potentially more attractive to a wider group of people than in the past. The lion's share of where I spend my time is in client-side activities now, and the strategic importance of knowledge, innovation and legal technology within the firm generates a team with a greater diversity of skills, expertise and career aspirations."

So, is a slightly larger proportion of women in KM leadership positions a success story? Are women achieving welcome influence and senior status in a department that they've always been a large part of at more junior levels? Or does it coincide with a failure to promote women in other, typically less accessible areas? And does the expanding remit of KM appeal to a broader range of legal professionals – meaning men? Perhaps only time will tell. ◢

WHAT ARE THE TOP SKILLSETS YOU'LL BE HIRING INTO KNOWLEDGE IN 2020?

PSL 11%	Legal project management 9%	Product-related 7%	Research 7%	Sector expertise 7%

Data analytics 9% · Technology 9% · Automation 4% · Data science 4% · Data · Information specialist · Innovation · Knowledge engineer · Practice development · Process improvement · Systems · Competitive intelligence research 4% · Admin · Lawyers · Search · Support · Compliance · Management · 2%

and profitability – so this could be more about needing skills that facilitate services, products, connections and communication with clients. Plus, quite a lot of firms might already have gained the benefits of those skillsets by having roles with those skills in place."

So, might that 58% be hiding a need for more client engagement, or even 'hard' commercial skills and knowhow? Gaston at Addleshaw Goddard agrees that commercial insight is not just a necessity for lawyers, but for anyone working in the professional services environment performing client-facing tasks, potentially trumping tech skills as a recruitment priority. "Like many of our competitors, we go to market on sector-based lines – so, we're still focused on recruiting people based on market insight, such as retail and consumer or financial services. In future, we'll increasingly see business services people as part of a team of client-facing professionals – from facilities, HR, business change, IT, and knowledge. So, there's a need for commercial sector awareness in those teams."

We also asked leaders who they wanted to hire in terms of specific roles. The largest single response was professional support lawyers (PSL), at 11% (see above) –why are knowledge leaders still prioritising the most traditional role in a KM department when looking for staff? Pullin thinks this is a default response: "PSLs are everyone's go-to when they say they need more resource in knowledge. That's traditionally been the route and people have just continued down it."

Things have changed a little though, she suggests. "Law firms used to just look for the roles they want to fill, whereas now we might think more about what really needs to be done by a knowledge lawyer and what needs they are trying to address."

On the surface, the low result for our 'innovation' role type (2%) might suggest that KM leaders aren't, in fact, thinking about new ways of doing things. But firms may simply already have those roles, or have integrated them with KM to such a degree that it's no longer a game of introducing 'innovation' into a firm or KM department – it's more a matter of sorting out what that actually means. Tart-Roberts feels that 'innovation' alone is perhaps not the magic bullet that KM leaders need now: "'Innovation' can be quite a vague term. As we already have a solid team in place, when recruiting we're much more interested in bringing in people with specific skills and expertise."

Seeing as many firms have been pushing themselves down the 'productisation' route for some time, perhaps to compete with alternative legal service providers offering 'outcomes' rather than 'lawyers', it should come as little surprise we might be looking at that in KM, too. After PSLs, the most popular responses were 'data and analytics', 'legal project management' and 'technology', all at 9%, which were closely followed by 'product-related' skills at 7%. Tart-Roberts says product design and development is an area of high priority at Macfarlanes. "I'd like to develop those skills, whether by bringing in people or building on existing skillsets in the firm. Increasingly, we're offering clients solutions or products based on the capabilities within innovation and technology teams teams – those are products and can be quite different from the services we've offered historically." ◢

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