

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

At Radiant Law, we think of knowledge management as a method to turn tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge and make it available at the point it is needed. These principles underpin our approach:

1. **KM is threatening**

KM systems often fail because people feel threatened by sharing their knowledge – although they want to know what others know. KM is more about power than we often give credit, and incentives and culture are determinative in whether KM efforts will work.

2. **Information dies in documents**

Documents are coffins where information goes to die, and document management systems are graveyards. The cost of opening documents, without being sure what is in them, means that documents are rarely referred to in practice. File structures have the same problem. We try to avoid documents and focus on (curated) links, tags and search.

3. **Ratchets are essential**

The most important thing to do is to specify as few sources for information as possible, which are regularly updated. We call these ratchets. Examples are our wiki, playbooks and automated contract templates.

4. **Top-down systems generally fail**

Although it is tempting to impose discipline and control over what is truth, the reality is that it is better to have higher participation at the cost of more errors (what do you think is happening anyway in your organisation?)

5. **Farming and cattle prods**

We are big believers in wikis but putting one in place is necessary, not sufficient. The wiki will need to be regularly reorganised and weeded (known as wiki farming) and you will need to push for years for your team to use the system (you can choose the best implement for this). This is where top-down matters – consistent leadership from the top.

6. **Data structure**

When we design our systems, we think about a spectrum from structured knowledge (database) to unstructured knowledge (blank canvas). Different types of knowledge fit in different places in that spectrum, but we keep trying to move towards more structure.

7. **It's not about the technology**

We spend a lot of time refining our systems, but that doesn't mean that our systems are particularly important. What matters most is building a culture of shared learning and you already have all the systems you need in your organisation to get going.

8. **It's about individuals**

The reality (that conflicts with what we would like it to be), is that a few people will make the vast amount of contribution and that often single-handed herculean efforts are what make the difference between useful and ignored systems. We encourage everyone to participate, but a few make all the difference. It is worth rewarding this.