**The Chief Innovation Officer Role**

The term “Innovation” may be considered a buzzword of sorts and defined in a myriad of ways within law firms and legal organizations. It can encompass large scale projects (what I term Innovation with a capital “I”) as well as everyday simple tasks (innovation with a lowercase “i”).

Most people think technology is the foundation of innovation, and while technology is often part of the process, it isn’t always—sometimes innovation is simply looking at an existing process in a new light. Other factors are integral to innovation success: namely, understanding and analyzing the business and having strong, clear communication skills.

To me, innovation is fairly simple at its core. Innovation is providing a solution to a business problem that an attorney or client had not thought of previously, hence creating value in the process.

The current knowledge management team at Fox Rothschild, which includes research analysts, practice support admins, and technologists,
expanded its focus this past year to include innovation due to both client industry trends and attorney needs. We strive to be more proactive rather than reactive, regularly attending practice group meetings and liaising with management about strategic plans. We also participate on client calls to offer perspectives on collaboration and to demo solutions. Our goal is to foster a culture of continuous improvement to create efficiencies. We also work with an Innovation Committee that includes partners in a variety of practice areas and senior management from information systems and marketing.

Recent project successes include insights gained by attorneys using artificial intelligence-based research tools, such as Casetext, intelligence about clients/competitors using data analytics dashboards, and applications developed for clients that create efficiencies and transparency around legal services (e.g., document automation and workflow). And yes, workflow efficiencies can even include converting an Excel spreadsheet to a SharePoint list.

For innovation to work well, you need team members with diverse backgrounds (e.g., legal, business, and tech), and complementary skill sets (e.g., practice knowledge, industry acumen, and coding/development). Success also depends on having the curiosity and tenacity to tackle a problem and create a research and development culture to brainstorm ideas.

Innovation presents opportunities for our profession. My focus is on developing creative solutions and processes to improve efficiency and enhance the quality of service for our lawyers and clients. In many cases, this will involve evaluating and implementing transformative technologies, including artificial intelligence and machine learning, but it will also include engaging with clients to better understand their needs, and advancing solutions that provide greater transparency and collaboration. We will be seeking opportunities to better optimize our litigation and transactional workflows, as well as leveraging and analyzing data to understand where we can drive value and identify opportunities for our clients.

Promoting an innovation mindset is an important part of this role. Developing a strong communications plan to explain the benefits of developing new workflows and business solutions is an important first step for our team. We are talking to practice group leaders and other key stakeholders to better understand their business plans and make certain that our projects align with their objectives.

Knowledge professionals will be familiar with the process of finding partners who are willing to experiment with a new process or technology and, hopefully, becoming your evangelists.

As change agents, we come with the requisite skill set needed for a CINO role. Most of us have spent a good part of our careers introducing lawyers to new ways of working, whether it is integrating digital resources into their workflow, developing the firm intranet, understanding case analytics, or developing process mapping for complicated research problems. The intensive training and promotion required for these programs will mirror that of innovation projects.

Many of my knowledge professional colleagues already wear many hats in their organizations, in areas such as conflicts and records management. Our research, competitive intelligence, and knowledge management efforts intersect with lawyers at so many critical junctures throughout the life cycle of a matter, taking a more expansive view of these intersections is the next logical step. Knowledge professionals aspiring to a senior innovation role should take deep dives into areas where they connect with the rest of the organization and exploring outside of the legal industry is also important. The healthcare and science fields can provide inspiring case studies, as can law schools that are now offering programs focusing on innovation, such as Suffolk University or Michigan State’s LegalRnD, among others. (Learn more at bit.ly/MA20innovationcenters.) Local incubators (e.g., Pennovation) can also be inspirational.

The key is listening to the “client” to understand their business issues, having an open mind to analyze different options, and translating that knowledge to develop the best solution—whether it be tech based or otherwise.