

## **PwC consultants share KM wisdom with Cilip's ADLG**

**By Elspeth Hyams**

In the mid to late 90s when management consultancy PricewaterhouseCoopers first planned to implement a portal, everyone thought they would 'make money while we sleep,' according to Simon Levene, Head of Knowledge Management, but this turned out to be 'an absolute pipe dream.'

PwC soon discovered that KM was not about technology, but all about relationships, and all about people. 'Personal networks are the most important thing in the organisation because they connect the business together.'

140,000 people work for PwC worldwide, so the role of KM is to help people find things. But the challenge for the firm was not simply to facilitate searching, though they did need a portal 'to bring things together.'

PwC teams are organised by practice sector, and split into territories. Employees all speak the same business language. They create more than 100m documents a year, and before work on the portal project started; there were 31,000 databases and no client files. 'No-one knew half of it,' says Scott Pearson, Knowledge & Communications Leader from PwC Advisory UK.

Cilip members came to London from across the UK to find out how the gurus at PwC keep their own knowledge in order. The seminar was organised by Ben Chan for the Cilip Aerospace and Defence Librarians' Group.

PwC had to bring together 27 businesses, offering similar lines of service. To compete with management consultancies like them, they needed to exploit their own employees experiences - the lessons learned, the protocols, the thought leadership.

The biggest challenge was to put a 'proposition' in place. They wanted a KM tool to have 'high impact for low effort.' But to make things work efficiently, they needed to simplify - to design systems that worked with the people and with the process, and to 'get rid of the noise.' That involved collecting and organising priority information.

To their surprise, they found that the most important element in KM was communication. For distributed teams, meeting face to face is not always possible, so the challenge was to connect everyone through the process - 'it was a workflow thing.'

'First and foremost' was the portal, to 'provide access and act as a springboard to pull things together.' The challenge then was to help users manage information overload.

They found that the quickest way to get access to knowledge was to understand the firm's processes and practice areas, then make it easy to identify who was working there and how to reach them. They use a star tree - a visualisation tool - to show how the organisation is structured internally, then link to internal experts.

'Business development' staff got involved with the information systems staff, working on an architecture of processes that supported projects from research to proposal, signing the engagement, right the way through to closing the project.

The resulting 'solution' is 'a generic project management tool, for a knowledge-centric environment,' says Simon. Knowledge is not three clicks away; it is brought into your environment. It is a needs-based tool that supports processes, and caps risk - 'a universal truss that supports everyone and helps you delegate in a safe way.'

In spite of this truly impressive technology, the essence, according to Simon, is that 'This isn't a tool. It's more an approach that can be used. It is about how we run our business and get the best out of our people and best serve our clients.'

*More on PwC's approach to KM in a later edition of Update*