Knowledge management originates from the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is therefore surprising that these are the only two books currently covering knowledge management (KM) specifically within law firms. Increasingly, firms are dispersed across different cities and countries yet need to organise effectively what they know and who within the firm has the requisite expertise to deal with new matters and they would therefore apparently be perfect beneficiaries of KM. Both books clearly identify their only product is knowledge and their only sustainable advantage is how effectively they exploit that knowledge. Both identify the same barriers to that exploitation such as hourly billing rates, but each takes a slightly different approach to discuss and resolve the issues.

Rusanow approaches KM in a very practical and easily readable style based on her own experiences and illustrates the book throughout with fictitious but credible short case studies. Parsons takes a more theoretical approach to the issues based on both obviously wide reading around KM as part of an overall trend in management strategies, and on his personal experiences. Both give similar definitions of what KM is, its central role in managing firms’ profitability and both emphasise that it is not IT and it is not information management, but it is essentially a cultural issue. The two authors stress the importance of capturing knowledge and of nurturing an environment conducive to disseminating firms’ collective wisdom to maximise leverage of that knowledge.

The main advantage of Rusanow’s book is its practicality. It satisfies its intention of being a workable guide to applying KM to the practice of law. Each chapter starts with a case study illustrating a problem, which the chapter then discusses and suggests sound solutions to. This story-telling style fits well with Rusanow’s approach to KM. Checklists are included at the end of most chapters to recap issues covered in that chapter and forming a useful quick toolkit to refer back to. The overall style is very readable and the book can be enjoyably read from cover to cover, with later chapters recalling earlier case studies to expand on. Chapters cover how and why KM should be introduced in firms, the types of knowledge lawyers use, deciding which knowledge to manage, overcoming cultural barriers and developing a strategy. Rusanow discusses strategies not only for law firms, but also for sole practitioners and in-house lawyers. The latter two areas which other works on KM assume do not face a problem or need a strategy. The chapter on resources including personnel required is particularly good and provides personal qualities and brief job descriptions, although the number of personnel is probably over optimistic except in the largest or most committed of organisations. Rusanow over-simplifies the difficulties of changing the traditional culture of billable hours to alternatives such as total matter costs, as the culture will vary enormously in different firms.

Parsons emphasises the business case for KM and the need for organisations to avoid expensive mistakes, particularly in IT purchases. He has a clear understanding of why law firms need KM and the various barriers such as billable hours making time to informally acquire and disseminate information scarce and the marketability of individual expertise making sharing unlikely. He starts from the premise that all firms already have some form of KM without identifying it as such, but they may not have either articulated a strategy nor fully developed one for where the firm wants to be. He advocates using business goals to illustrate how KM can make a difference in achieving these and providing the consistent quality of service clients expect.

A recurrent theme of Parson’s book is the recognition that IT is not the only answer. Management and the behaviour of lawyers will have to change as no systems work if the people do not want to change. He places much more emphasis on creating a sharing environment for human interaction, as knowledge itself cannot be managed because it is inside people’s heads – only the culture of communication and learning can be managed. He uses a recap format at the end of each chapter, which is as effective as Rusanow’s checklists. A major difference is his use of exercises or questions to encourage readers to consider their firm’s strategy and practicalities of implementation in a much more thought-provoking way, which is likely to lead to a more tailored solution. One of his key strengths is his knowledge of how lawyers and finance directors think and work, and how the politics of law firms operate. Chapter 8 provides a visionary case study of an imaginary firm in the near future to illustrate how a comprehensive approach to KM could achieve a clear market differentiation, which remains more vividly memorable than many of Rusanow’s shorter case studies.
Again the book logically progresses from what KM is and how lawyers work, to developing and implementing a KM strategy, taking into consideration such issues as market position and the type of work the firm covers.

Both provide excellent glossaries, particularly Parsons, which gives some quite detailed explanations ideal for novices. Both recognise the pivotal role of a consistent taxonomy in future retrieval. Rusanow’s book, whilst very thorough, disappointingly lacks a bibliography or suggested further reading and Parsons gains a significant advantage in providing notes of resources mentioned in each chapter and recommended further resources including guru websites. Most of his URLs do still work or items can be found from home pages but a few links are broken and his own website intended to complement the book unfortunately also has some broken links. The Parsons book uses top tens, which mainly seem to be taken from 2002, which is rather dated for a book published in 2004. The books are both published in the USA and although the language is slightly different this does not pose any major problems of understanding e.g. Rusanow mentions “Fortune 500” companies that most people would understand to refer to the top 500 US based companies.

Rusanow offers businesslike ideas that could be easily adapted and implemented. Parsons guides readers to think through what their firm needs and how to achieve business goals through using KM. In an ideal world it would be possible to have or at least read both books but if a choice has to be made it will depend on the reader’s preference for practicality based on experience or thought provoking insight and direction to further resources.

Rook and Ward attempts to bring this patchwork together so that practitioners, academics and students who need to access the law relating to sexual offences can find it brought together in one place. The second edition was published in 1997 meaning that it became quite dated allowing, for example, Cathy Cobley’s Sexual Offenders: Law, Policy and Practice (Jordans, 2000) to squeeze into the market. Cobley’s book does not cover the substantive law but does focus on the procedural issues and as it is now itself out of date it will be very interesting to see whether Jordan’s attempt to produce another edition of the book as it would be a worthy competitor to Rook and Ward both in terms of price and style for those wishing to discuss procedural issues.

The third edition of Rook and Ward is divided into 24 chapters. The first 14 chapters are substantive law, the next eight relate to evidence and the remaining two focus on sentencing and related issues. This is a good mix but it may have been more useful to the reader if the book was more formally divided into these three parts although this is just a minor point.

The substantive law chapters focus, naturally, on the new law introduced by the Sexual Offences Act 2003. However there is also a brief historical account of the law. This recap of the previous law is necessary (not least since victims of sexual attacks frequently do not disclose until many years later so it is quite possible that the old legislation will be used for some decades yet) and is also written in a professional and succinct style. The first chapter on rape is particularly good and does demonstrate firmly that this new edition is keeping with the style of a general book of authority and not a mere guide to the law. The chapters contain reasoned analysis, including relevant quotations from cases where they will add to the reader’s knowledge, and they are clear and easy to access. As a professional text it does not include any real academic commentary which is something that is perhaps missing. Cobley’s work, whilst also primarily a professional text, was not afraid to refer to academic work where it was thought necessary and I believe that this is increasingly accepted within the professions and so this is something that may need to be reconsidered for future years.

The chapters on evidence are similarly well done and cover a wide range of topics, including the “special measures” and an informative chapter on the use of DNA evidence. The chapters are all clear and highlight key decisions of the appellant courts to demonstrate how the relevant legislation has been interpreted. It is pleasing to see that the authors have made reference to the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and thus the reader is in an excellent position to know how a case will be dealt with next year.

Given the shelf-life of these books this is an important look as though it is a guide. The book does not, quite correctly, restrict itself purely to the Sexual Offences Act 2003 because it is a book on sexual offences per se and although the 2003 Act is, to an extent, a partial codification of the law on sexual offences it is certainly not complete and there remains an element of a patchwork coverage of sexual offences law within England and Wales.

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This is a welcome return of one of the leading texts in the field. Rook and Ward on Sexual Offences used to be part of the Sweet & Maxwell library of texts but it appears to have branched out from this to become a text in its own right. The size of the text has also increased, although this might be, in part, due to the fact that the book includes a copy of the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

Dealing with the inclusion of the Act to begin with, I am not convinced that this was either necessary or desirable. Rook and Ward on Sexual Offences has never attempted to be a guide to legislation, nor should it be. The guides to legislation are generally quite modestly-priced books and give an early indication as to what the law may be. This text has been treated in the past as a book of authority, something noted by Lord Justice Rose in his foreword to the book, but the inclusion of the Act almost makes it

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factor and one that does add to the professional nature of the text.

The sentencing and offender management chapters are dealt with briefly but they do still provide sufficient knowledge to someone needing to know what the sentencing provisions are. More could have perhaps been made of some of the difficulties that have arisen recently in terms of sentencing sexual offenders (in particular the definition of ‘sexual offence’ within s.161 of the Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000) but this should not detract too much from its coverage, which prefers to concentrate on the substantive and evidential issues.

To summarise, Rook and Ward is an excellent book and no library should be without it. I am confident that this book will quickly recapture its reputation as the leading book in the field and thus all readers will find it very useful. That is not to say, however, that there are not vulnerable aspects of the book and as this area becomes increasingly relevant and popular it will be interesting to see how it stands up to competitors which may appear in the future.

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