

Consultants at Work

Specialist Services

Since 1998, Sonia and some of her colleagues from Consultants At Work have been involved with three City law firms, Linklaters, CMS Cameron McKenna and Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer. In the latter two, work is continuing. In recent months, work has begun with the Chief Executive of a Jersey law firm which has become incorporated in order to implement a major change programme affecting its diverse businesses.

Examples of the assignments undertaken

The repositioning of a Marketing Department from an inward looking, almost entirely reactive function to one which understood and was capable of being committed to its new role as a key influence in shaping the firm's strategy led by its recently appointed Director of Business Development.

Following a strategic review of the fee earning practice, (undertaken by another consultancy) Consultants at Work designed and undertook, with six of the Directors, a review and evaluation of the Practice Support function. The aims of this were to align the business support activities with the commercial and cultural changes to which the fee earners had committed themselves in a strategic repositioning.

The implementation of these recommendations is currently underway.

As the change management advisor chosen by one of these firms to advise the external technology consultants they appointed to undertake a piece of work, we have taken part in diagnostic consultations in London, Europe and Asia on behalf of the firm.

The successful retention of lawyers who have been so carefully and expensively hired is, from time to time, a challenge for all firms. Consultants at Work has undertaken a survey on behalf of one of the firms which seeks to determine why female lawyers do not appear to fulfil their career aspirations in the same time frame as male lawyers and why so many of them leave.

Sonia contributes to a Directors Development Programme in which Directors individually and collectively reflect on their role as heads of their functions and seek to improve the effectiveness of the services delivered to the fee earners.

We provide individual consultancy services to Partners who may choose to use this on ad hoc basis or more regularly, two or three times a month.

The successful transition from Senior Associate to Partner represents a challenge to each individual who is fortunate enough to progress this far and yet; few resources are allocated to help people make the change in the most effective way. We have been involved in a programme which addresses some of the challenges.

Law firms of all sizes continue to face strategic change - change which challenges the traditional ways of thinking and of doing things and in particular, makes new demands on the relationship between individual practice areas and the central management of the firm.

This is further complicated by the increased size and sophistication of the business support functions which are capable of making a significant contribution to the success of current and future fee earning activity.

For us, three important issues worth thinking about emerge from this. The first is that where multiple strategic developments are begun within law firms, there is often no clear attempt to link the change processes together – not through the change concepts, not through the champions of change, and not through the learning which is waiting to be captured.

We believe that there are important opportunities which could be grasped because many give the chance to build some significant competitive advantage by marshalling internal resources more effectively and at the same time reinforcing the strategic themes.

The central management of the firm, those who head the practice groups and the business support functions seem to us to remain far too loosely engaged with each other to take advantage of the knowledge, skills and experience contained within their separate ranks. Our second issue is that the three major planks of the social and technical system which comprise a professional service need to move towards a more explicit and purposeful stance in the leadership and management of such firms.

The third issue is that the senior associates as a group represent the future and yet, in a highly stratified law firm where time is the currency in which status is traded, associates often cannot make a significant contribution to strategic thinking until they have become partners and maybe not for several years after that. We think that making connections between the present and future through the associates has the potential to offer real added value.

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