

The Role of the Law Firm Partner, Second edition

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PUBLISHED BY **ark**  IN ASSOCIATION WITH **mp**
GROUP managingpartner

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Executive summary

'In these matters the only certainty is that nothing is certain', Pliny the Elder, AD 23–79

MOST LAWYERS select the law as a profession without realising that, at some stage in their career, they could find themselves leading 50, 500, or 5,000 partners and lawyers. For those at the top of their game and those on the way up, the traditional pathway to becoming a partner referred to that proprietary facet that distinguishes the employee from the owner. Yet ownership did not mean having to be competent in leading and winning business from major institutions, government bodies, and multi-nationals. Nor did it involve having to develop a brand, or focus on business development as a business discipline (rather than advertising in a local telephone directory) and be compared and measured according to highly demanding financial performance criteria – to say nothing of having to manage people and be nice to clients. Therefore, the role of a partner is fast-changing, based on:

- The senior lawyer's competence and incentive to fulfil the role required and to meet the firm's expectations to generate business and the profits forecast;
- The career choices partners and lawyers now have within a partnership, limited company commoditised business, in-house roles in industry, the public sector and government, or internet-based businesses; and

- Portfolio career path options with roles to be run concurrently both in and out of practice as a lawyer, applying and developing the individual's wider business skills at board level.

Innovative roles are evolving to deliver legal services to the market, purchased by evermore diverse client groupings. The market place already has exciting new legal models with significant benefits to clients, including lower costs, improved services, greater efficiencies, and a more client-centric culture based on relationships and adaptive selling skills.

Factor in the relentlessly uncertain business environment that law firm leaders face both locally and globally following the global recession, ranging from spectacular growth, Euro instability, and now potential deflation. In turn, this is creating opportunities for emerging economies from the Asean Economic Community (AEC) and BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) to be fleet of foot and leapfrog traditionally dominant western firms. Dealing with such a swiftly changing legal environment can be tough for a firm that resists change by burying its head in the sand: wake up!

This report provides insightful analysis and conclusive guidance for lawyers on the following key issues and challenges:

- The plethora of economic, regulatory, and technological changes affecting the global legal sector which are driving firms

towards devising different legal service delivery structures.

- How firms are responding to globalisation, market consolidation, and commercial and client requirements within traditional partnership and LLP structures, as well as the impact of web-based and commoditised firms.
- The variety of partner skills and expertise required in private practice, in-house, and the public sector, in the UK, continental Europe, the US, and AEC.
- New entrants to the legal sector are using new structures. This affects current leadership and decision-making vehicles across multiple offices, impacting future organisational culture and ethos.
- The impact of these new structures on the role of the partner, in terms of expectations, responsibilities, and key skills required; and how this will affect all legal departments in firms from small high street practices through to large commercial firms.
- Critical to the shift from one set of responsibilities to another is how partners are supported and successfully developed beyond what is now perceived as the blunt instrument of performance-management, with competency frameworks and KPIs. Individuals must be provided with a mutually rewarding climate where they have fulfilling careers and firms are successful and profitable.
- Firms continue to develop blended/modified lockstep remuneration systems. This report analyses how these systems will evolve in the context of different business structures, cultures, and competitor trends.
- Potential and interchangeable career paths for partners might be broadening the range of skills and attitudes required.
- How partners now need to need to self-drive their careers more strategically

from the beginning, for example, investing five to ten years to get it right, to ensure smooth transition post-equity into retirement, well into their seventies.

- Critical behaviours, relationship skills, and emotional intelligence trends will provide a variety of benefits to globally astute lawyers.

Data has been drawn from firms with 500+ partners, through to sole practitioners, with case studies and illustrations to provide the widest possible guidance and creative thinking. With a focus on the UK, additional ideas are provided on how firms in the US, continental Europe, Asean, and Australasian markets are influencing current developments. Thought provoking contributions and case studies from the following leaders and commentators in the legal profession are also provided:

- Jo Ayoubi, managing director, Track Systems;
- George Bull, head of professional practices, Baker Tilly;
- Bryony Bullard, associate, The Co-operative Legal Services Ltd;
- Henry Goodwin, partner, Taylor Vintners, Singapore;
- Ian Jeffrey, managing partner, Lewis Silkin LLP;
- Charlie Keeling, global HR director, Clyde & Co;
- Torgny Leberberg, managing partner, Leberberg Advokatbyrå AB;
- Giles Murphy, head of professional practices, Smith & Williamson;
- Clive O'Connell, managing partner, Goldberg Segalla LLP (US);
- James Parsons, director, Untapped Talent Career Coaching;
- Alistair Roberts, consultant, Trafalgar – The People Business;

- Simon Steadman, ex-chief executive officer, Francis Wilks & Jones LLP;
- Ben Tidswell, Chairman, Ashurst LLP; and
- Richard Wyatt, consultant, Cambridge Blue Square Management.

Optimism is the only way forward, and if the profession can grasp the challenges being presented and embrace current opportunities, the legal profession will continue to thrive wherever the law is practised in the world.