

# Helping to reshape the Portuguese legal market

Market changes are impacting not only on the way law firms work but their structures

Clients' preference for lawyers with "grey hair" or who can hit the ground running means that law firms are having to reconsider not only the shape of their practice teams but their entire structures, says Filipa Mendes Pinto, a founder of recruitment firm FIND.

"There is evident pressure on the traditional 'triangular' up and out model that has defined law firms in recent decades. We now see firms having to adjust to lower ratio levels, meaning fewer junior lawyers, in response to client demand which leads also to questions about how they select, train and motivate their next generation of leaders."

It is partners and associates with five to ten years' experience that are now most valuable to firms, she says. "These are lawyers who can generate their own fees and with whom the clients feel comfortable – many are very resistant to the use of large teams and the feeling that there should be a better balance between the complexity of the deals and the number of lawyers involved."

A challenge also is to ensure that senior lawyers are not only technically capable but also able to generate new business. In terms of recruitment, this means that those lawyers who already possess the requisite levels of practice experience must also be willing to develop the necessary levels of client service and commercial awareness.

"The next few years may prove challenging for very junior lawyers who will see the opportunities to move between firms shrink. By contrast, more senior lawyers able to demonstrate the right combination of legal, commercial and business development skills will find greater opportunities opening up to them."

The Portuguese legal market may have seen very few public lay-offs but firms are becoming better focused on managing their lawyers, which also means encouraging some to find new positions.

"Firms are not simply losing the 'bad' or 'unproductive' lawyers. A number are rethinking their entire strategies and the simple fact is that certain practice areas will no longer be considered core areas of expertise. That is not to say that these lawyers may not be equally in demand elsewhere, as other firms look to broaden their practice offerings."

Portugal's law firms are reacting to the economic situation as are the clients they serve, says Mendes Pinto.

"Firms that are recruiting are very clear about the attributes they demand, while a new world is opening up within corporate legal departments. Companies may be less willing to spend their budgets on external lawyers but they are very comfortable bringing more expertise in-house."



Filipa Mendes Pinto

La preferencia de los clientes por los abogados más "senior" y que puedan responder rápidamente a cualquier necesidad, implica que los despachos se están viendo obligados a replantearse no solo el tamaño de sus equipos sino también su estructura en general, afirma Filipa Mendes Pinto, fundadora de la empresa de reclutamiento especializado FIND, en Lisboa.

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