

Chronique Site Web

Reconciling performance and the pleasure to be working in a law firm.

The crisis years that are currently being experienced in the legal profession show to what extent the quality of work and the human aspect of the legal profession have been affected over the course of this decade at a number of business law firms on grounds of performance management.

Both Partners and associates show signs of this malaise which can be summed up quite simply as less attachment to law firms and rejection of some of the methods of practicing the profession.

Several essential conditions will have to be met to make the next decade one where the requirements of performance and the pleasure of working in law firms are reconciled:

- Thinking once again on a long-term basis by providing for the development of law firms over time and by refusing the “short-termism” of performance measurement using the simple yardstick of partner remuneration.

Over the last few years, the main aim of the major international law firms has been to maximize remuneration for Partners which has spiralled upwards. This particularly narrow conception of the role of law firms in society risks bringing them to a standstill due to the crisis.

- § firstly, because concentrating on providing maximum remuneration is not a mechanically viable solution in the new environment;
- § secondly, because in law firms, this approach has strained to a worrying degree the relationships between the various stakeholders:
 - Partners and Management;
 - Partners among themselves;
 - Associates and Partners;
 - Partners and Clients;
 - Partners and Administrative Staff.

The development of a law firm and the execution of a strategy take time. In this regard, too much idealism is placed on financial success, as the

increase in partners' remuneration cannot be the only barometer of success of a law firm and its partners.

- q Calling into question top-down performance management which has not been handled with enough flexibility over the last few years by making sure the following are taken into greater consideration:
 - § partners' aspirations for a better balance and a friendlier practice model;
 - § the specificities of local markets by giving the partners' more responsibility in their approach to their own specific markets;
 - § collective performances rather than simply individual performances;
 - § the desire by partners to be consulted more on issues related to the development of their firm.

- q Put human values and other requirements rather than mere profitability back at the centre of law firm projects by enhancing values such as solidarity, loyalty, confidence and the pleasure for partners to work together.

Without casting aspersions on their management model, I fear that a large number of structures, which tend more and more to resemble technostructures without human qualities, will have more and more difficulty in retaining their talents or in attracting new ones...

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