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SMARTER LEGAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
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▶ BRIEFING TIGER TEAM

In pursuit of new process

Briefing's inaugural Tiger Team exercise, a collaboration with technology consultancy Pinnacle, asks how law firm leaders have tackled the process transformations needed to respond to pressure much more rapidly in a remote-working world

Inspired by a problem-solving method used by NASA, **Briefing** recently began a new programme of bringing diverse teams of law firm operational experts together to address some of their common, but most critical, challenges. This is a Tiger Team – a group that can circle a particular problem with greater perspective thanks to their combined

experience.

As lockdown was only just beginning to ease, our first scenario was perhaps inevitable – how were firms keeping productivity, projects and cash flowing as smoothly as possible in a global crisis?

All firms represented said they'd needed to act much faster than usual in several key respects, and in fact it was suggested this had had something of a

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Kate Bassett, global head of legal project management and process improvement, Ashurst



galvanising effect for the business of change management.

A lot of “questioning behaviour” that had often accompanied transformation projects in the past was no longer in evidence, said Ashurst’s global head of legal project management and process improvement Kate Bassett; perhaps as people could clearly see there was little alternative but to embrace several new ways of working.

Mike Giles, finance director at Fieldfisher, added: “The firm collectively knuckled down with huge goodwill to make things work, and there wasn’t as much pushback as you can experience when trying to introduce change in the office.”

Hogan Lovells chief operating officer Darren Mitchell agreed. However, he said process also needed to change for this to materialise. “The firm would usually have taken longer to engage around such big projects. It’s not a matter of cutting corners, but we’ve needed to be a lot more tactical in getting rapid engagement.”

Bassett also found a need for speed within her department: “It has been necessary to be clearer about how people will work together, about who owns what, and roles and responsibilities.” Processes that previously tended to be “assumed” based on “natural hierarchies”, or were allowed to grow organically, now really needed mapping to mobilise teams quickly.

Process priorities

But things can rarely happen as fast as you’d like if they all have to happen at once. Have firms also needed to re-evaluate their project priorities at speed?

Mike Bailey, managing director at Pinnacle, said he’d seen both IT projects suspended and deliverables brought significantly forward in the past 15 weeks, but cautioned: “Putting things down

and picking them up again can ultimately prove more costly. When you have the momentum, it can often be more efficient to complete them.”

However, Allison Scanlan, director of business intelligence and finance and practice management systems at Herbert Smith Freehills, said priorities can also change within a project. “We’ve had to work very closely with those at the coalface to understand which functionality they most need elevating up the roadmap. Do the legal ops and LPM teams have the data they most need right now? Listen, understand the blockers, and then juggle the priorities.”

Giles said many firms will have found they still relied on some “pieces of paper” for a process or two. In his case, it was straightforward cheque signing: “However sophisticated your process, someone will be scribbling something somewhere. We’d been gradually eliminating instances of that, and this has brought some efficiencies to a head very quickly.”

And at Ashurst, Bassett says some areas of legal work have had more process improvement focus than others – dispute resolution, for example, getting ready to operate in a world of virtual courts. The pricing balance of efficient delivery for clients and firm profitability can also expect more scrutiny. “Pressure on the model to provide a mutually-beneficial outcome will become even greater in the next 12 months,” she predicted.

The data today

The way data is delivered to people across the organisation – to help deliver those outcomes – has also needed thought, and some swift action.

Giles said Fieldfisher accelerated a stream of work on its dashboard-based business intelligence: “We’ve needed greater emphasis on the very short term, such as value-of-work and cash collection



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However, more frequent updates needn’t mean more information overall: “Business information can get lost in the data. You need it to highlight the things that are going to make a difference if people do them today.” He said more pictorial visualisation wherever possible can help to build “clearer, concise messages and get rid of the clutter.”

Bassett agrees, and recommends a parallel focus on upskilling people in data interpretation. And although the moment of action is precious, don’t forget to “link it back to process” for continuous improvement over time, she said. Overseeing a similar move at HSF, Scanlan added: “We need to help people to make the best use of their own time every day, including the executive.”

Firms could also consider the breadth of data that feeds reporting. Bailey said Pinnacle is seeing high demand for its expertise in expanding sources of business intelligence: “Basing insight solely on the finance or practice management system is only looking through one lens.” Bassett said linking data use for more innovative pricing and longer-term scenario planning is a particular challenge with systems as they stand.

And Mitchell at Hogan Lovells said striving for more real-time and meaningful data also helped with that ‘all in it together’ mindset we’ve seen: “If people follow some basic process disciplines, we can offer news – good or bad – in 24 hours. There’s a duty on the business to be transparent with people, and when they’re informed people also feel more responsible for being part of the business solution.”

**Watch the full video at:
www.briefing.co.uk/tiger-team**



For further information,
visit: www.pinnacle-oa.com

What is a Tiger Team?

The Tiger Team is a problem-solving approach used by NASA to investigate, and hopefully solve, highly critical and complex issues. Most famously, it was adopted to bring the astronauts safely back to Earth when a module malfunctioned during the Apollo 13 mission. Experts in a range of areas, such as engineers and scientists, are brought together from different centres as required by a specific work project or programme.

Briefing decided to try the concept out on our hunting-ground of law firm strategy. Could the perspectives of multiple functions, all operating in different firms, perhaps make greater sense of a given business management challenge? ▶



Introducing

Briefing[^] Tiger Team[^]

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In partnership with
pinnacle 

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