

High performers are not superheroes: bridging exclusive and inclusive talent management approaches for law firm sustainability

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What is Talent Management?

Systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement/retention and deployment of those individuals who are of particular value to an organization, either in view of their 'high potential' for the future or because they are fulfilling business/operation-critical roles. In law firms they are called the 'A' Players, the high-performing lawyers who will make partner in the future.

Talent Management Fairy Tale: Once upon a time, there was a firm living in a "new normal" context...



Firm

Economic downturn: new competitive cut-throat business environment
Up-or-out linear career model settled
Less opportunities to access partnership
A broad range of attributes required from lawyers



Competitor



Job Offer

Clients were pressuring for quality and lower fees
Competitors had a magic mirror and were aware of the firm's 'A' Players
Job offers were made to 'A' Players
Some 'A' Players bit into the 'apple' and therefore left
Hard to recruit 'A' Players



All Lawyers

Ideal career is set in linear terms (climbers)
Prefer secure employment relationships
The majority aim is access the partnership
Not engaged in career self-management



'A' Players

High-performers who will make partner in the future
The most technically inclined lawyers
Beheld as an elite supporting business sustainability



'B' Players

Capable, steady performers, grounders for charismatic 'A' Players
Beheld as non-core
Up-or-out career model let them go, as they will not make partner

Competencies and Abilities framework from Saville Consulting portfolio

Solving Problems	Evaluating Problems Investigating Issues Creating Innovation
Influencing People	Building Relationships Communicating Information Providing Leadership
Adapting Approaches	Showing Resilience Adjusting to Change Giving Support
Delivering Results	Processing Details Structuring Tasks Driving Success
Reasoning at Work	Working with Words Working with Numbers Working with Logic

Participants & Method

12 European and Latin American countries

N = 358

Stakeholders of the lawyering role

Evaluate critical attributes for career success

Lawyers

Competencies and abilities
online questionnaires
'A' and 'B' players' profiles



Research Questions

Mirror, mirror, on the wall...

1. Which attributes are required for career success in new-millennium law firms?
2. Which attributes distinguish 'A Players' from other lawyers?
3. Do 'A Players' have the attributes required for law firms' business sustainability?
4. How to manage 'A' and 'B' Players' career?

Critical attributes for Career Success

All competencies and abilities of the framework were considered important for career success in the new-millennium law firm by stakeholders



Results

Creating Innovation
Investigating Issues
Evaluating Problems
Driving Success

'A' Players Profile



Giving Support
Structuring Tasks

'B' Players Profile

Conclusion

Stakeholders' evaluated a broad range of attributes as critical for career success. 'A' Players do not fit this broad profile: they are creative, analytical and driven, but individualistic players, who lack critical skills. 'B' Players are reliable teamwork players. Therefore, complementarity is required to assure business sustainability. Talent Management encourages forecasting talent needs and defining different competency profiles for lawyers, thus enabling the contribution of different talents. Bridging the exclusive and inclusive talent management approaches is upheld: identifying both the most talented as well as each one's talents. Different career paths from the up-or-out linear model and career self-management are crucial for the future. Readiness in the new-millennium will come from combining the talents of the entire workforce, because superheroes only exist in fairy tales.



Talent Management