

A VIEW FROM LONDON - COLLABORATION, COSTS AND TECHNOLOGY SHARING

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Legal heads should emphasise the efficient use of technology across their own departments, businesses and with law firms, says Christopher Barnard, General Counsel Coca-Cola Europe

La presión existente dentro de las asesorías jurídicas para sacar el mayor partido posible a sus presupuestos, no comprende sólo la obtención de servicios legales más económicos o la búsqueda de diferentes

formas de facturación, sino también trabajar de manera más productiva, eficiente y efectiva – obteniendo así más resultados con menos recursos, dice Christopher Barnard, Director Jurídico de Coca-Cola Europe.

The pressure on in-house legal departments to extract the most from their legal budgets is not just about obtaining legal services more cheaply and looking for different forms of law firm billing, it is also about working more productively, efficiently and effectively – getting more from fewer resources.

Maximising internal efficiencies requires not just the right provider of legal advice but also the right mechanisms and internal structure. It used to be simple. In-house lawyers were dedicated to a single business unit and were fairly self-contained. Not anymore.

Lawyers now may advise more than one unit and there may be less of them doing it. At the same time in-house practice has caught up with the profession and become more specialised. But not every business unit can justify employing the specialist lawyers it needs. Consequently, many specialists are now employed centrally and shared among business units, operating as if they were part of the business unit legal team.

This requires a matrixed organisational support structure. For a global company like Coca-Cola this can be across geographies as well as legal specialisms.

To make this work effectively collaboration is essential. If the legal function is to operate in true partnership with the business it needs to operate without barriers.

Collaboration for us is all about facilitating, teamwork and co-operation, sharing information and developing common values. In our organisation this

occurs at multiple levels, even within the legal function itself. It can be within one business unit, a geographic group or across the globe. Then there is the need for collaboration with the business for which the lawyer is responsible – colleague (client) collaboration if you like.

And finally, there is external collaboration with law firms.

We realised that wherever and with whomever we were collaborating, including external counsel, technology would be the key to facilitating the necessary productivity and efficiency.

Our work starts with a matter – standard practice for private practitioners if only for billing purposes. This is where technology should start. In-house we open a matter because this is the start of the collaboration process. Multiple lawyers in different locations may be working on the same matter, but opening only one combined file to which everyone has access, is more efficient than many separate files. This also facilitates future collaboration by archiving the matter so that it becomes part of the knowledge library. Should the need arise there is also only "one file" for discovery purposes.

Collaboration with business colleagues can also be facilitated, for example, through the use of a contract management life cycle system. It also helps manage costs and free-up resources. It allows business managers to prepare their own agreements from templates accessed online, but it also helps the legal function to manage and balance the risk/value equation when deciding the best use of its own resources.

Finally, there is collaboration with law firms, which will generally have more advanced technology than in-house teams.

For example, we receive many law

firm updates and bulletins. These are directed to individual lawyers' email boxes but as well as overloading them, the relevant subject matter may not always reach the right lawyer. One solution could be to establish a virtual information room, into which panel firms could deposit their updates organised by subject matter and jurisdiction. In this way it becomes part of our institutional knowledge and can be managed accordingly.

Law firms I am sure can think of many other ways to collaborate with us by leveraging their technology, which many take for granted. The technology needs of the in-house legal function is often the lowest priority for the IT department, with funding for technology difficult to secure. Anything a law firm can do to help their in-house clients become more efficient, by sharing their technology, will be seen as real added value.

If we are to be successful as an inhouse function, collaboration is essential – not only in managing and containing costs, but also in maximising our effectiveness. The way we are organised and the way we work demands collaboration and technology is the key to making this happen.