

CHANGING CORPORATE VALUES

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The development of full service law firms in Portugal has, in recent years, helped contribute to a reduction in the size of in-house legal departments but it is a trend that looks likely to change as Portuguese companies rediscover the value in building a strong in-house team, say Filipa Mendes Pinto and Maria Brito Goes of specialist Lisbon recruitment consultant, Find.

La creación de despachos de abogados en Portugal que ofrecen un servicio integral ha contribuido, en los últimos años, a la reducción del tamaño de los departamentos jurídicos internos aunque es una tendencia que es probable que cambie porque las empresas portuguesas están redescubriendo el valor de formar un equipo jurídico interno fuerte, según afirman Filipa Mendes Pinto y Maria Brito Goes, ambas especialistas de la consultora de recursos humanos en Lisboa, Find.

"Company legal heads report that they are now playing a more strategic role in decision-making with input from the inception to the conclusion of matters. They are able to offer a deeper knowledge of the business, which facilitates a more considered approach to each question," says

Mendes Pinto.

The prevailing economic situation will further encourage such a trend as will the need for tighter cost management, believes Brito Goes. "We sense that we will see more internal and external control, much more focus on corporate acts and a greater emphasis on compliance procedures – regulation, it seems, will be the main future concern of political decisions."

As regards the other areas of work in which company legal departments are placing greater emphasis they note an evident ongoing need for internal commercial and corporate expertise, but also for labour and public law.

"Legal heads still expect to seek outside help in matters that require large teams or deep specialism, but it is very important to distinguish between a company's on-going business needs from extraordinary events," believes Mendes Pinto.

Strong legal knowledge will always be a mandatory requirement for any lawyer, but an in-house lawyer must also have a strong business sense and understanding of the concerns and strategies of the company Board, adds Brito Goes.

"Company lawyers must also be pragmatic and keep up-to-date with the relevant information concerning economic and financial trends to offer preventive advice. These skills will, naturally, be more in demand with seniority, but companies will always be attracted to lawyers at any stage that show such potential."

The result they suggest is that perhaps the best expanding legal teams in the current economic crisis will be those that carefully invest in recruitment criteria.