

IDA DE BRANDÃO TRIÃES: "AS STRANGE AS IT MAY SOUND, WE WERE IN MANY INSTANCES CLOSER TO EACH OTHER, EVEN IF THROUGH A SCREEN"

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For this month's in-house interview, Iberian Lawyer had the pleasure of speaking with Ida de Brandão Triães, global associate general counsel & legal lead Portugal and Spain, at McKinsey & Company. McKinsey has a reputation for innovation, seeing the world differently and taking their clients on a journey to achieve greater success. This interview does not disappoint as we get a glimpse into the mindset, culture and legal department at McKinsey. Ida de Brandão Triães took the time to share her own personal journey and legal career to date, as well as her experience of working at a global management consulting firm with over 30,000 employees and more than \$10 billion annually in revenue.



During the pandemic, did the company carry out any emergency/help plan or any action that you would like to share with us?

The safety of our people was paramount: the protection and well-being of our people, their families and their mental health. As a firm, we quickly activated cross-functional teams to manage the multitude of challenges and disruptions that the pandemic brought overnight. At the same time, we were determined to be closer to our clients than ever, navigating together the challenges posed by the pandemic. To help our clients navigate the uncertainty, we established McKinsey COVID Response Center as a way for us to support and amplify the many ongoing and urgent efforts that aim to first safeguard lives and then livelihoods while helping communities that are dealing with the fallout of a global pandemic. The Covid Response Center draws on what McKinsey and others have learned to provide leaders with resources to help reset their organisations and communities. It was clear for us that collaboration and knowledge sharing were and are critical to safeguarding lives and livelihoods amid COVID-19. McKinsey research tracked economic and epidemiological developments around since the pandemic outbreak. We've shared coronavirus-related content and briefing materials documenting the rapidly evolving situation, the economic outlook, the forces shaping the next normal, and the new organisational structures that can help companies keep pace sustainably. We developed a suite of tools to help leaders respond to the pandemic, designed for governments, business leaders, healthcare providers and also for small businesses.

You spent nearly the first ten years of your legal career working as a private practice lawyer. What prompted you to make the move in-house?

Half of my career in private practice was already focused on Commercial Law and already about being close to my clients' businesses and that captivated me enormously. I've spent most of those years advising companies in Portugal but also working with Brazil, China, the Middle East and Portuguese-speaking Africa, which contributed to my desire to be close to an international setting. At some point, I felt that legal expertise wasn't enough and that I needed to have a deeper knowledge of the business so that I could translate legalese into business language and also be a

partner to my colleagues on the consulting side of the business – I sought and found those complementary skills not on legal programmes, but on business and management programmes, and that also weighed on the determination to change my professional course. I was already driven by better understanding and being close to the business, but I was not deliberate in doing it from the inside. McKinsey knew early on that I would be a good fit for the organisation. As we started the conversations, by Q4 of 2016, I immediately felt attached to the many inspirational people I spoke with and by the opportunity to constantly do things better to make a long-lasting impact.

Truth be said, the fact that the invite was coming from one of the most prominent strategic consulting firms globally played a huge part. Then, the international environment, the value-driven backbone of the firm and, most of all, the high calibre intellect of the people I work with, was determinant in convincing me (and it is still what continues to amaze and captivate me until this day). Last but not least – it was a big challenge, and who does not love a good challenge? In-house positions require a combination of both instinctive and learned leadership and judgment skills, which are not exhausted in a single procedural act or in a meeting; it is a daily and constant process. It requires me to network recurrently with assorted audiences, to foster gravitas while being both caring and empathic (and let's not neglect the importance of lightness and good humour – which reminds us of the underlying shared human condition - even when in the context of very serious discussions or negotiations). The dynamics and fast-paced environment of a firm that is always at the edge of innovation pushes me to be my best self constantly and calls out for creative thinking and sophistication when it comes to properly evaluate and weighing multiple inputs, views and outcomes of any decision and in continuously tackling one challenging situation after another.

Can you summarise the last 12 months and the impact that COVID-19 has had on McKinsey & Company's business?

The pandemic had harsh, disruptive effects on business and society. We went from either being at client sites or in the office to fully remote. For me, personally, this was quite challenging as I used to spend time between Spain and Portugal (I still haven't set foot in any of our Spanish offices since the pandemic started). Although technology has allowed many of us to do most of our work remotely, when it comes to negotiating complex agreements, there's nothing as effective as doing this in person (I think this is especially true for us southern Europeans). Both Spain and Portugal were deeply affected by the pandemic – these were uncharted waters we were navigating, but one thing we knew at the legal department: it demanded us to act effectively and, more than ever before, to be a valued strategic business partner and totally immersed in the business. Throughout this process, a great part of our energy was devoted to McKinsey's operations – there were days where we had to make critical decisions nearly every hour. It required a lot of discipline in organising work and being effective while balancing it with whatever challenges we were living in a personal arena (in my case, with two small kids at home – it was a constant juggling). We went above and beyond to stay in touch, support and take care of one another. Work was as fast-paced as ever and our workload just as intense, so we needed to mitigate this somehow – with breakouts, remote gatherings, team lunches to give ourselves some sense of normality. As strange it may sound, we were in many instances, closer to each other, even if through a screen. Like most companies, we cope by working harder and collaborating more on crisis management. If we look to the last twelve months, I would say that, during the pandemic outbreak, we learned to cope; and as we move towards a post-pandemic world, we are learning together how to thrive. It has been inevitably a challenging journey for all, both professionally and personally, which overcoming is mainly a result of the impact-driven and sense of mission' mindset of the high-performance professionals we have in our team.

How many people work in the legal department you lead today? Have you grown the team?

We are a global firm with operations across 65+ countries and offices in 130+ cities. The firm, and

thus our department, is designed to operate as one. Our global team is comprised of approximately 200 lawyers and legal professionals across nearly 50 countries; a best-in-class team lead globally by our GC in the US. The team has grown substantially over the last two years. I am primarily focused on our operations in Spain and Portugal, where we have three offices, +55 Partners and +570 people. My role is about being a trusted advisor (trust being the keyword here) to the firm's leadership across their entire agenda, and doing so by bringing compelling legal perspectives and state-of-the-art solutions to connect the dots in complex situations. It's a permanent symbiotic dance with all dimensions of the business, as we are constantly evolving and upgrading our client service while enhancing risk management. For this to happen, I need to be fully immersed in the business and be an integrated partner in its advancement. We combine local insight and global expertise. In Portugal and Spain, my team has three people, which I augment by pulling in expertise from across the globe in order to bring the very best of McKinsey Legal's global resources to the service of our stakeholders in Iberia. We provide assistance on both client arrangements and internal legal matters, and we do it in a holistic manner, i.e. end-to-end, strategic, and tailored advice, where expertise also plays a key part in enhancing the quality of our client support while managing the firm's potential legal exposure. It's not just about being enablers of "speed-to-contract" through contract design, process design and creative use of technology to support the business' priorities, but also about managing risk, reconciling both economic and legal interests of the firm at all stages of the contract: planning, formulation and execution. We understand the need for local legal expertise, so we have legal leads across geographies, which we balance with a consistent approach to recruiting and skills development regardless of where our people are located, so that we can quickly deliver the right team, with the right experience and expertise, to every client, anywhere in the world.

How do you select your external legal advisors? Do you have panels/have lawyers pitch regularly for work? How much do you value sector experience?

When external legal advisor support is needed in Portugal or Spain, we select mainly by expertise and proven track record on the topic matter. We do have external counsels with whom we've worked historically in Iberia, but we also engage with new ones if we deem it appropriate – whatever best serves the firm's needs.

What changes have you seen in the legal market in the way law firms communicate with GCs?

We've witnessed significant changes here as in-house roles grew into being actual strategic business partner inside organisations. We need our external advisors to walk by our side in such a journey. Our work encompasses being strategic at all instances, not only to provide solid legal advice but to anticipate issues and estimate risks, including the reputational one. Because our role is far beyond providing technical expertise, law firms need to communicate in a manner that translates into business language the pros and cons of the various legal scenarios of the case at hand, so it can be quickly presented and discussed with our stakeholders.

How is the legal tech evolution impacting your organisation and your relationship with external advisors?

We have a global footprint and team, so legal tech serves us as an enabler of knowledge sharing across different longitudes and latitudes. It allows us greater proximity, eliminating redundancies and promotes efficiency. Moreover, McKinsey more broadly tries to stay at the forefront of collaboration technology and software, which enhances the effectiveness of our legal department. We are able to apply these insights to create tools and frameworks to support innovation and collaboration with our clients.

What is your biggest frustration when working with external law firms?

It is frustrating when external counsel disregard there's a lawyer on the other side, and there's the assumption to teach me on the complexity or justify the time-consumption of the analysis. That said, we seek external law firms for expertise in certain fields of local legal frameworks, so we expect bespoke advice, fit to the specific situation, knowing that their interlocutor is also a lawyer, but it is ultimately aimed to be put in front of stakeholders for decision –it needs to be concise and clear, with clear options/paths and laying out the weighed outcomes of each of the proposed paths.

What do you value the most when working with external counsel?

The capacity to have a responsive, pragmatic, balanced and business-oriented approach.

When was the last time a law firm really impressed you?

Very recently, actually. It was with a law firm we were engaging for the first time in Spain, and I was really impressed by the way they quickly understood how we operate and our way of working and adapted theirs to ours.

To read the interview in full please download issue [N.105](#)

Interview by Michael Heron.