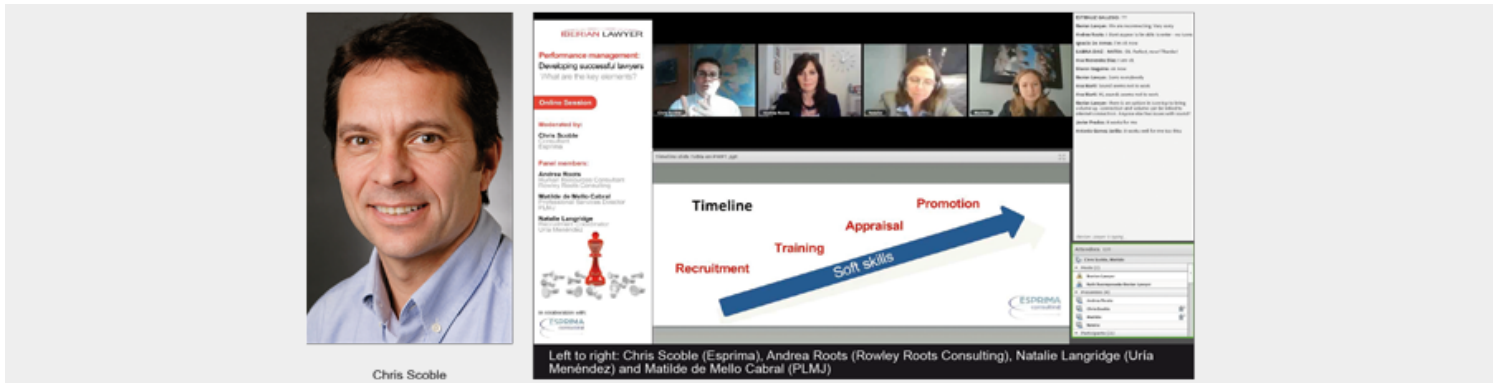


LAW FIRM RECRUITERS SHOULD ASSESS NON-TECHNICAL SKILLS

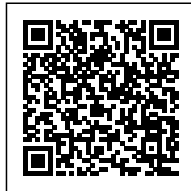
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Chris Scoble

Left to right: Chris Scoble (Esprima), Andrea Roots (Rowley Roots Consulting), Natalie Langridge (Uria Menéndez) and Matilde de Mello Cabral (PLMJ)

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In addition to technical skills, young lawyers should also have the ability to understand how legal advice impacts on their clients' businesses

Law firms should not just focus on generic legal and personal questions when recruiting new lawyers, but should also focus on non-technical skills such as awareness of the business implications of legal advice, according to experts speaking at a recent Iberian Lawyer webinar. Recruitment processes should also involve posing questions to which answers cannot be rehearsed, such as asking about a candidate's strengths and weaknesses, as this allows firms to establish a deeper understanding of the non-technical skills of lawyers, the webinar audience heard.

Matilde de Mello Cabral, Professional Services Director at PLMJ, drew attention to the "old school" approach to lawyering, which she said could still be found in some law firms and has its main emphasis on technical ability. "Times are changing," she said. "Old school lawyers used to get called directly by a client, before then standing in front of the client explaining how great he or she is – that is becoming a rarity because the competition is now much stronger and clients want a skillset beyond just legal know-how."

The consensus of the panel was that lawyers must be able to listen and ask questions. Panelists said clients want their lawyers to be partners who understand the business implications of legal advice rather than simply be seen as an external consultant.

Angela Roots, Human Resources Consultant at Rowley Roots Consulting, said that this needed to begin at the earliest stages of recruitment: "You need to target the right people from the start, at entry-level – they have to be good lawyers, of course, but they have to be engaged self-starters with strong team skills."

The focus on soft skills had to be maintained post-recruitment as lawyers advance from junior associates to partner-level or else they may never fully-develop, the webinar was told.

"The skillset becomes different as you go up through the ranks," Chris Scoble Esprima consultant,

and webinar moderator, said. "At a junior level the focus may be on skills like networking and presentation but then – as a lawyer increases in seniority – they are built upon by management skills, profitability indicators and running teams. It is about developing business people not just lawyers."

Improving soft skills

The panellists highlighted both informal and formal procedures, such as role playing or problem-solving tasks, as ways to continue the on going training. Natalie Langridge, Recruitment Coordinator at Uría Menéndez said trainee lawyers at her firm do ask for training to improve soft skills. "In the first year of training, about 80 percent of the training is technical and 20 percent non-technical, which changes as a lawyer develops," she said. "At junior associate level, between 50 and 70 percent of training is in non-technical and by the time a lawyer reaches senior associate, they will be 90 percent focused on soft skills, like networking and effective presentation."

Training must also be paired with feedback, panellists said. Some firms still focus on the billable hour for junior lawyers rather than non-technical performance – as such, the main indicator for success or failure was whether a lawyer hit a billable hours' target, which can discourage the advancement of wider business skills, webinar viewers were told.

"Law firms are wary of feedback because it is often seen as confrontational but, in reality, it is a way of helping people understand and learn," Scoble concluded. "Feedback should be given on a daily basis as three months or a year later, the moment has gone and is forgotten."

[See the video highlights of the session here](#)