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Ranked in the top hundred law firms in the world, Pinsent Masons LLP is an international firm which specialises in the energy, infrastructure, financial services, real estate and advanced manufacturing and technology sectors. Pinsent Masons LLP has over 400 partners, a total legal team of around 1,800 people and more than 2,500 staff, with 24 offices globally.

While the firm is experiencing strong growth, in a world of rising fixed fee work, the requirement for efficient delegation increases. Every law firm is aware of the need to review their operating models to improve internal efficiency and ensure staff are maximising their skillsets to deliver value and develop in their roles.

Administrative Services: the need for visibility

For Pinsent Masons, a review of the way PA administrative support was being provided to the business revealed a number of challenges regarding both capacity and consistent quality. While partners were generally being well served, junior fee earners were not always able to access the support required, especially after 5.30pm. With no way to share work between teams, and no process for monitoring the types of tasks being completed internally, the firm had to rely on their outsourced legal support services provider to supply statistics for reporting purposes.

One of the key drivers for Pinsent Masons was to gain control over its Management Information (MI), to better understand capacity issues and improve task allocation.

In addition to the above many PAs did not feel their skills were being utilised effectively, with many routinely undertaking low-value tasks; while the outsourced legal support services provider was also not being maximised.

Tara Layman, Head of PA & Administration Services, explains, "While there were a large number of motivated, engaged, high performers who were actively looking for the value-added element of the role, there were also others with the same job title who were just as busy but being utilised for more mundane tasks that did not tap into their skills, motivate them, provide job satisfaction or offer opportunities to grow."

Alastair Mitchell, Chief Operating Officer, says: "The decision was made to redesign the way Pinsent Masons' PA administrative support was provided to both improve the service to fee earners and improve motivation and skills utilisation of PAs."

Robust Task Management Solution

Traditionally, Pinsent Masons had relied on lawyers to make the judgement regarding allocation of specific tasks and in 90% of cases or more these tasks ended up with the PAs. In addition to addressing the administrative structure, the firm also needed a way to better route tasks and improve capacity management.

In tandem with the review of PA administrative support, Pinsent Masons needed to implement a fit-for-purpose task management platform to help streamline processes and foster a 'right task to the right place at the right time' approach. The fact they were upgrading BigHand dictation workflow anyway meant implementing BigHand Now and BigHand Capacity Manager at the same time was a logical choice. The alternative option of choosing a more generic workflow tool or other Business Process Management (BPM) product would have negated the benefit of having dictation and voice tasks combined into one unified list for all administrative staff and taken a lot longer, with a bigger investment to rollout.

Tara says, "The adoption of BigHand Now and BigHand Capacity Manager provided Pinsent Masons with the perfect opportunity to change the structure, reroute work almost automatically, and maximise the use of our external legal support services and our PA skills."

Staff familiarity with BigHand was a key factor in the transition, as Tara explains, "PAs and lawyers have used BigHand for years, the upgraded interface was similar and intuitive which was a key consideration in a time of significant cultural and operational change."

The Implementation

While Pinsent Masons undertook small workshops and initial studies to model the new structure, business pressures and time constraints encouraged the firm to go for a wholesale adoption across the firm within a very short time scale.

The most significant change was the introduction of a new structure, with the creation of a layer of Team Administrator (TA) support alongside PAs, all overseen by ten PA Service Managers. Analysis of the workload informed the decision to operate on a 'six to one' ratio of lawyers to admin resources, plus a 70:30 split between PAs and TAs. The firm also increased its in-house document production team and looked to expand its use of their external legal support service.

With TAs undertaking some of the more administrative tasks such as scanning, filing, printing, the new model releases the more experienced PAs to focus on added-value work that leverages both client knowledge and legal experience. The combination of the new structure and the rollout of BigHand's task-delegation technology created a model that enables Pinsent Masons to deliver the right task to the right person at the right time, in a more cost-efficient manner.

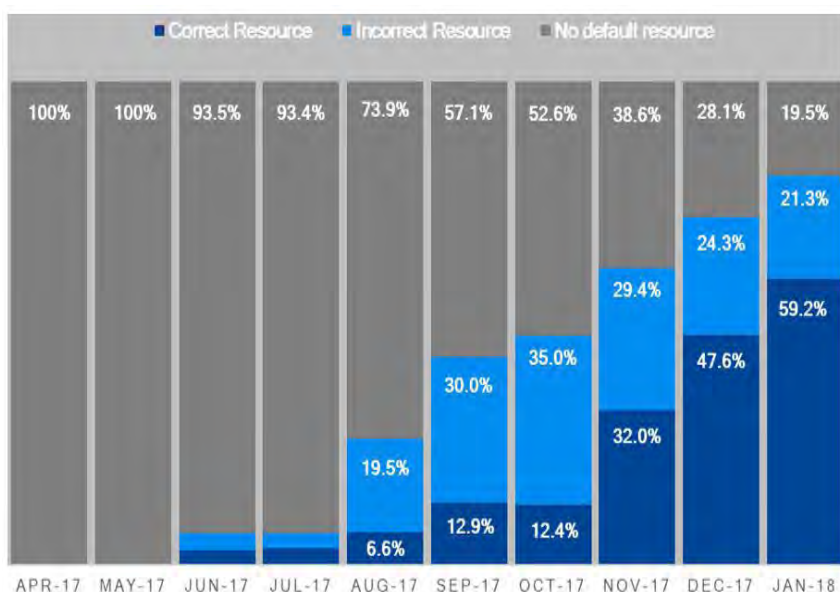
BigHand supported the firm throughout the implementation, from training to the provision of floor walkers in all offices when the software was first rolled out to on-going input into the cross-office BigHand user group. This assisted with user adoption and getting users, including fee earners, on-board from the start. Tara adds, "BigHand also helped to create the MI reports we required to better understand task allocation and resource utilisation. It was a very positive experience."

The Benefit

The new PA Administrative Services structure had an immediate impact on the quality and cost-efficiency of how work was turned around. Within two months, the number of jobs being sent to their outsourced legal support service provider increased from 700 per month to 1,200 per month, an increase of 70%. Notably, while the level of dictation has remained the same, the increase has been in the number of manuscript pages, rising from 20,500 to 35,000 per month.

Getting work to the right resource

The results of implementing BigHand Now



Within six months BigHand Now can generate significant return on investment by ensuring work is done by the right person at the right time.

As Kirsty Russell, Workflow Product Owner, says, "We are utilising our outsourced legal support services provider far more effectively, for both manuscript amendments and typing from scratch."

At the same time, the firm has adapted fast to the new TA resource, with tasks routed to TAs rising from 1,800 in the first month to 3,000 in the second, and then 4,500 in the third. Kirsty adds, "We are seeing a real rise in the number of tasks being automatically routed to TAs via BigHand, from 20% to 40% and 43% month on month. The business is really coming on board with the new structure."

Routing more work to the outsourced legal service provider and newly appointed TAs means that the right people are doing the right level jobs at the right cost to the business.

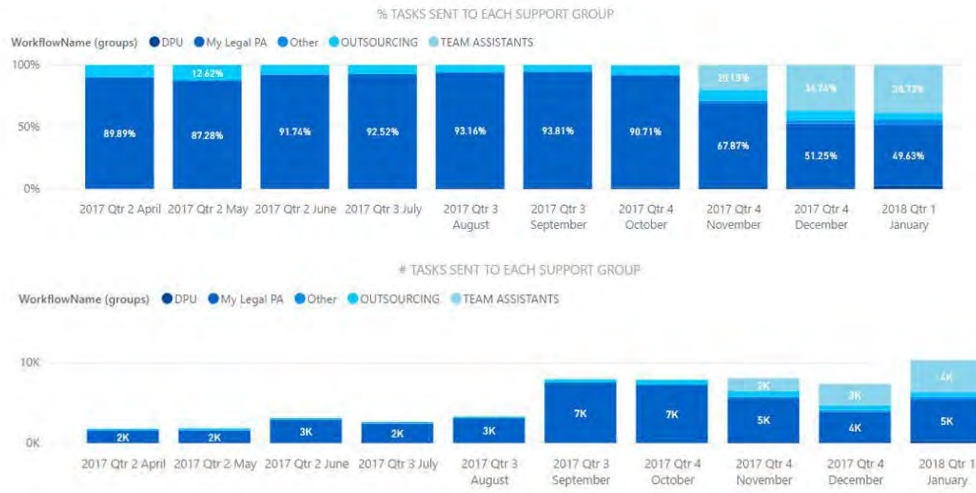
The information provided by BigHand Capacity Manager is enabling Pinsent Masons to monitor quality, with the data providing deep insight into who is submitting work, where it is going, what has been completed on time, what is overdue, even if work has been sent back for amendments. Any problems are immediately flagged, enabling Pinsent Masons to actively pursue concerns, including missed deadlines or service delivery issues. Armed with this data, Pinsent Masons are able to make informed decisions when it comes to resourcing and future process improvements.

1) The data in April and May was the first time this was ever reviewed by the firm, and indicates limited control over who completed what work.

2) The data for June and July, during the pilot phase, highlights that work was being sent to the incorrect resource.

3) From August to October, the introduction of BigHand Now to all teams means work can now be routed automatically to the best resource.

4) Following a full roll-out of BigHand Now, seen in November to January, lower-value work is now being done by the right resource at a lower cost, with no impact on customer service and management have data to improve this further.



Conclusion

While the key objectives for this PA administrative service restructure was to improve internal service to the business and ensure PA expertise and skills were being effectively utilised, the change has also delivered significant financial benefits, with a direct recurring cost saving of £1.4 million, due to work being completed at the right level and right cost to the business.

Fee earners also report that work is being completed and returned more quickly, enabling efficient service delivery to clients.

Alastair confirms, "While we do not charge for PA and Admin services, this lower cost, more efficient model will enable Pinsent Masons to be more competitive in our ability to review fixed prices."

More importantly for the firm, however, is the added value PAs are now providing in supporting the client relationships. Tara explains, "PAs with good client relationships are in a very strong position to influence outcomes. It is their relationships and rapport with clients and client PAs that is often essential in securing appointments, obtaining documents, even winning new business. Freeing up the PAs from mundane tasks ensures they have the time to build on that vital client service relationship."

Looking ahead, the firm will leverage the insight delivered by BigHand to undertake continual service enhancement, tracking capacity and resource utilisation to further improve agility and flexibility, both in the UK and across its international offices. The use of BigHand and the external legal support services provider will be of benefit to international offices, in particular in terms of how out-of-hours document production is managed.

Tara confirms, "We are already seeing huge benefits in the way we use our resources; BigHand's analytics will reveal where we can be more efficient and cost effective."

The speed with which Pinsent Masons has embraced the cultural change has been impressive and the immediate impact on both capacity planning and quality has confirmed the value of the new PA administration structure. However, as Alastair concludes, this project was all about people, with the change underpinned by technology.

"In addition to delivering the improvements in resource utilisation, the biggest benefit of this project has been Pinsent Masons' ability to focus on the continuing professional development of our TAs and PAs, ensuring their skill sets are used effectively, improving motivation and job satisfaction."

Contributors



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