

**HOW DO YOU THINK THE LEGAL SECTOR WILL ADAPT TO LIFE AFTER COVID-19?**

This essay will consider three issues that will require consideration: practice area capacity, technology and agile working. The implication upon those within the sector who do not adequately adjust seems to suggest economic impacts, and indeed, impacts upon recruitment and retainment.

It is obvious that in economic downturn, practice areas will have working capacities adjusted. Corporate transactions are the first to be negatively impacted, and firms need to respond to the reduction in operations to maximise profits. Restructuring and insolvency practice areas climb in their demand, particularly after the amending of insolvency law, and likewise with employment law with the introduction of the furlough scheme and mass redundancies. Firms operating within these areas will need to accordingly adjust their capacities, by reallocating junior associates and trainees to specific seats to manage the increased workload. Although some firms will use restructuring to maintain profits, other firms have responded by reducing the working legal team, through the furlough scheme, and by reducing the working week. The implications upon the future capabilities of such firms is one that is unknown, and its impacts are yet to be felt.

Legal operations are behind most other sectors, with the failed integration of technology. COVID-19 has almost acted as an accelerant to the issue of technologisation. Conference calls, have increased rapidly in their number, and it seems more than likely that this will continue long after Coronavirus. As a plan to modernise the courts system for online capabilities, COVID-19 has been the catalyst to year-long plans in the creation of virtual court hearings. Law firms have had to match the desire by the courts to modernise and hold urgent hearings, as a way to solve the crisis of global access to justice. This rushed implementation is not without issues, so it seems more than probable that the issues surrounding electronic bundles and its requirement for minimal authorities due to upload speeds, will need to be resolved once the system has been fully enacted.

The legal sector has previously failed to implement agile working into its normal operations. COVID-19 has forced firms to consider full remote operations, and has given lawyers the opportunity to develop a work lifestyle balance. Although a short-term solution to the current guidelines requiring social distancing, the question to be focused upon is whether this is to be adapted as a long-term option. Firms have seen the opportunity to capitalise on quality work that is produced without a large office, leading to the paradigm shift that considers the need of such large offices. Perhaps firms will follow structures similar to that of FisherBroyles, but the economics behind real estate and office space is proving to be unnecessary as firms within the sector are now able to be more efficient in their charging of services, and ultimately more competitive in doing so.

The question asks how the legal sector will adapt to life after COVID-19. I speak on speculation, guess and hope. But the true answer to this question is an unknown.