

A time for transparency - Vieira de Almeida

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With partner performance driving the revenue of law firms, making sure everyone is working at their best is top of the agenda

Law firms are increasingly under pressure to be more commercial and transparency is becoming paramount – something that is still lacking in many Portuguese law firms, says João Vieira de Almeida, Managing Partner at Vieira de Almeida. His firm has responded by equitising all partners and introducing a partner evaluation system, based on the three main drivers of alignment, motivation and, of course, transparency.

“Everyone was in line with the firm’s strategy and objectives,” he says, “but we now have everyone economically aligned as well.” The introduction of an evaluation mechanism also works to motivate people, at a time where growth is no longer automatic or guaranteed.

What they’ve effectively created is a gate system based on points, says Vieira de Almeida. From the most junior lawyer to the most senior partners, every category has a specific competency profile and knows what their careers could look like – but now everyone is also evaluated.

“Before the gate you are learning what being a partner means, and there’s more flexibility to go up or down,” he explains. “Once you are through the gate, your progress becomes steadier, and losing points becomes more of an exceptional circumstance.”

VdA has introduced an evaluation committee, including partners from all levels so as to make it an inclusive and fair system, he says. “I think culturally it’s going to be demanding because partners aren’t used to being evaluated by their peers.” But he doesn’t expect a revolution. “We’ve inserted mechanisms that make it progressive. But it is going to happen.”

There are risks, of course, to everything being out in the open. “But I think that’s also the opportunity,” he says, “because you can tackle the issues instead of pretending that they don’t exist.” For Vieira de Almeida, setting clear career objectives and evaluating progress is the way forwards in terms of the sustainability of a law firm through the economic crisis and beyond.