

# Briefing

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SMARTER LEGAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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## *Slice time*

*Michael Castle, UK managing partner, Deloitte Legal, on the strategic plan to offer your clients a potentially tasty alternative*

## TEAM PROFILE

# Faster future forward

The innovation and technology team at TLT talks to Richard Brent about how the firm's Future Law initiative unfolded, and why some things can be stronger divided

**A**s a leading law firm that will only officially be turning 20 in 2020, TLT could perhaps be seen as a firm straddling the worlds of traditional and 'New Law' that are often depicted as facing off. You'd expect it to at least be highly alert to the shifting landscape that might affect its competitiveness in that context – but **Briefing** was still rather pleased to hear about the Future Law initiative when it launched just over a year ago in October 2018. Why so? In our flagship annual Legal IT landscapes research that year, 45% of respondents said they now had a dedicated innovation or R&D budget. Future Law, which is designed to drive change more rapidly in the way the firm delivers legal services and products to clients, involves one such fund, with £500,000 ringfenced for largely client-focused legal experimentation and co-creation.

James Touzel, partner, head of the firm's digital team and overall lead for the new arrival, says: "My role involves overall accountability for Future Law, leading on the work of ultimately deciding what to prioritise for development – and over what time period – to make the business case for the specific resource that's available." However, he adds, clients are also front and centre in building this relatively new pillar of firm strategy.

He continues: "Some of our clients have huge in-house legal teams, others just one or two lawyers, but they're usually grappling with many of the same challenges around efficient and effective delivery. And they're challenging their providers to reinvent aspects of how they work to the same end."

As a 'young' firm, Future Law is a recognition of the fact that TLT needs to take that mission to a more strategic level, says Touzel. "We've spent –

and continue to spend – a lot of time with our clients talking about their real needs, rather than building products we hope they'll want."

Calculating the specific sum set aside is "more art than science", he admits. "But a lot of innovation work isn't typically a very high capital cost. There are the resources and practicalities of partnering with some technology companies, for example."

Strategically very valuable, however, is ensuring the budget is indeed protected from competing business priorities. IT and facilities director Ian Lauwerys explains: "It has proved particularly helpful to have the fund there as a marker, so we can be that much more focused on prioritising and progressing the work, and avoid redirecting resources into what might appear more urgent, such as fixing or replacing things.

"The idea is to enable us to experiment with an increasing number of new things more rapidly – seeing whether they work, and deciding whether that can be turned into something else – rather than that becoming a big bureaucratic exercise."

But Lauwerys does also sit on the 'projects and transformation steering group', which decides just how much money should be allocated to the work

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*James Touzel, partner and head of digital team and Future Law*



of various different initiatives, including Future Law. And in a broad remit, he also leads the project management office, which deploys project managers and business analysts to different work streams firm-wide.

### Client journeys

Our third team member this month is Siân Ashton – who has the title of client service transformation partner, and is involved in the Future Law journey from the perspective of clients.

She underlines: “Not every idea will work, so we need to challenge ourselves to invest the time and money in products or ideas that do work, are useful, sensible and efficient, and meet an actual client need.” In short, there’s also a process of elimination involved in innovation.

Ashton’s focus on the streamlining of legal work began several years earlier, as she was involved in the setting up of TLT’s then-new document-review team (part of the TLT ReSource captive shared services centre). And she stresses that Future Law should absolutely not be seen as just a tech fund. “We’re starting from the point of a specific client problem, rather than innovating for innovation’s sake, and technology is only one

stream that may flow into that.” It could equally involve key elements of process redesign, different or extra documentation, or fresh skills such as those Lauwerys’s unit oversees, she says.

She’ll also often be involved in the firm’s client innovation workshops, which aim to avoid the problem of ‘rush to solution’ without first fully appreciating the various nuances of the real business problem. “Sometimes, even if a great idea is built, it doesn’t get off the ground – because you haven’t done the legwork of breaking down the issues properly,” she explains. So processes contributing to specific commercial arrangements can, for example, be mapped across a ‘wall’ to identify pain points before sense-testing potential remedies. And sometimes that may lead to a product, like “an award-winning franchising solution developed with and for a major UK fashion retailer”, she says.

Touzel points out initial ideas can flow into Future Law from several directions, however – workshops involving large teams from a single client, several clients with a common need or challenge, or observations and engagement internally that identify options for doing things differently. “It’s a work-in-progress to keep

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Ian Lauwerys, IT and facilities director; Siân Ashton, client service transformation partner; James Touzel, partner and head of digital team and Future Law, TLT

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#### ▲ FIRM FACTS

##### TLT

Offices: 7  
 Revenue: £87.6m  
 Headcount: 1000+  
 Ratio, total fee earners to business services employees: 2:1

improving those levels of engagement, ensuring great ideas are captured, and correctly identifying the ones to prioritise.” He can see merit in the recent move of apportioning some ‘innovation hours’ – although TLT doesn’t have such a policy as yet – and Lauwerys is trialling some internal collaboration tools that may facilitate proactive idea exchange and subsequent shaping (ideally getting rid of some email overload in the process).

“A quite significant change is having some groups of people at the firm who are that much more exposed to clients’ realities than they were in the past,” he adds – meaning even more potentially valuable perspectives to harness. Another of his current projects is also collaborating with lawyers as well as the business development team on bespoke client digital strategies – again avoiding the industry’s default position of “here’s some technology that everyone uses – so let’s buy that ...”.

### Product partnership

Almost inevitably, given that last line, tech does continue to generate headlines. In TLT’s case, for example, there’s its multi-year partnership, plus minority stake, with machine-learning contract management tool LegalSifter. Preceding Future Law by around a year, this arrangement was “something of a catalyst” for the new ways of working around product development, explains Touzel. “And TLT’s technology partners really like the firm’s approach.

“There was first improving how we identified changing client needs around contract review – and then market-engagement exercises to identify technology providers that could potentially address those challenges. Now we’re LegalSifter’s partner for development and going to market with a new, even more valuable, version of the product for clients in the UK.”

Partnering with the right technology providers to deliver real value that solves a specific client need is something that TLT has really focused on, he adds. “We’re not a technology developer. Our clients don’t go to their law firm for a quote for software development, just as you wouldn’t buy legal advice from a tech company.” And although a little computing nous and evangelism is important within law firms to see off technophobia, he says

he can’t see coding coming up on lawyer colleagues’ job descriptions any time soon. “The law firms saying they’re getting all lawyers to do coding – it looks like a bit of fun, but I’m not sure it offers that much benefit to clients.”

Ashton adds: “There are always lawyers with a special interest in getting into the more technical areas of IT. They can often usefully be the ones driving some of the application and innovation from that side. But I don’t believe we’re anywhere near a place where everyone needs some programming ability,” she agrees.

The business of contract automation, on the other hand, is right up there: “We can help clients with contract creation, review, negotiation, signature and management, as well as data extraction and analysis,” says Touzel. “They find this combination of expertise really valuable, and we can offer it as a whole solution or just the elements they need.”

And what about work out in the wilds of business-as-usual? Lauwerys joined the firm with a very different remit – getting the firm “fighting fit” for where it needed to be from a platform perspective within five years. There’s already a new document and template management system on the way (where client input has again been key), some transformation of time-recording, the aforementioned collaboration options, managing costs, business continuity, and continuing the journey into the cloud. “We’re planning to move our main email platforms to the cloud shortly before 2020,” he says.

“A separate budget for innovation and client focus is a very good thing, as it would be very, very easy to spend all your money simply on ‘keeping the lights on’ – and some IT directors might very, very easily be persuaded to do just that,” he laughs.

And although admittedly lights and the like need some focus too, the big lesson of Future Law from Touzel is to be “bold” in trying something a bit different. “You need the confidence, as well as ambition, to be more experimental. If it doesn’t quite go as planned, that’s a learning for you, and so you do something differently again next time. Absolutely key is learning the lesson, but everything doesn’t need to be 100% perfect before you’ll consider having a conversation with a client.” ▲