

# ALLEN & OVERY

## ANNUAL REVIEW 2016

### WORK IN PROGRESS

*The world of work is changing fast, with many of the old certainties being swept away by technology, new business models and employees demanding greater control of their careers. That, Sasha Hardman argues, could be good news for A&O and the people who work here.*

### IT'S WORK – BUT NOT AS YOU'VE KNOWN IT

**A JOB FOR LIFE; NINE TO FIVE;** permanent, full-time employment; progression, promotion, retirement – the world of work is changing radically and many of these traditional certainties of employment are vanishing fast.

We work in different ways now and all the experts predict that the workplace is heading for further deep transformation in the years ahead.

Already two out of five people believe that traditional employment won't be around in the future, according to PwC's recent Future of Work report, which also found that 46% of HR managers expected around a fifth of their workforce would, in future, be temporary.

More and more people are looking to work anywhere they can set up a laptop and a smartphone, and at times that suit them. The number of people hired entirely online is also predicted to grow rapidly. And as employers try to find smarter ways to match people, their skills, working styles and personality traits to specific jobs and projects, McKinsey has forecast that automated workforce management systems will proliferate, particularly for multinational companies with operations spread around the world.

Welcome to an increasingly agile working world where individuals will sell their skills to those employers who can offer them the chance to build a portfolio of, often temporary, assignments, satisfying both their work aspirations and wider life interests.

It's a world where the balance of power has shifted from the employer to the employee, where old corporate hierarchies are being flattened and where employees are likely to follow a much more varied career path rather than sticking with one employer and slowly climbing the promotion ladder.

And much of this is here, now – or just around the corner.

The PwC report found that 29% of employees are already demanding complete control over their careers and predicted that employees' desire for diversified careers, mobility and greater flexibility will have the biggest single impact on working trends in the next ten years.

Then factor in artificial intelligence, and the strong likelihood that a growing number of more routine or transactional work tasks will be completed by robots. McKinsey has predicted that 40-75 million jobs worldwide could be replaced by robots by 2025.

While that is a scary prospect, many commentators are casting that trend in a more hopeful light. They predict that automation will mean that new jobs, yet to be thought of, will be created, requiring new skills of people in work that capitalise on “the distinctive human capacity for empathy, emotional intelligence and the identification and creation of meaning”, as the European Business Review has put it.

### THE CHANGING FACE OF THE LAW

Sasha Hardman, A&O's Global HR Director, acknowledges that the legal profession – typically conservative – has maintained traditional workplace structures for decades, even as the industry has globalised and grown.

But all that is changing now, driven by a mixture of powerful influences – technology, client demands for more cost efficient legal services – and by employee demands for greater flexibility and choice in how, when and where they work.

And A&O has taken a lead in exploring new ways to organise and resource itself in a bid to make sense of these pressures.

It has launched Peerpoint, its global resourcing platform – now with 150 consultants in London, Sydney and Hong Kong, opened the Legal Services Centre in Belfast, developed aosphere online legal services and created a project management office. Each responds to client demand, and all offer alternative or new ways of working for the firm.

Over the last year, A&O has also launched a drive to encourage flexible working by giving people greater control over how they structure their own working time and integrate it with the rest of their lives. It has been taken up with gusto in some offices; in London, for instance, remote working has trebled in the last 12 months.

## **CULTURE CHANGE**

But underlying those big reforms is a subtler change in culture.

“The boundaries have been blurred and we’re all having to get used to the new workplace dynamics. But, for me, the biggest change in workplace relationships is around trust,” she says.

“The relationship between employer and employee used to be a case of: ‘I’ll tell you what to do, you’ll do the task in these hours and then you’ll go home’.

“Now it has shifted to: ‘We trust you to deliver the results, but when and how you do it, we don’t really mind’.”

But that cultural shift presents some big challenges, she admits. “We’re going to need increasingly sophisticated ways of resourcing what we do across different jurisdictions.

“As a manager and a leader, how do you bring together a team – which in future may include lawyers, IT specialists, process efficiency experts, and project managers working across the world – and inspire, motivate and create a vision for them?”

## **LOOKING CHANGE IN THE FACE**

Addressing those questions has involved taking a long hard look at changing working patterns and aspirations – and the answers are not always easy.

“Take the issue of loyalty,” says Sasha. “How do we engender a sense of loyalty when actually there’s no guarantee of partnership for lawyers, and when many people don’t actually want it anyway because they want a wider range of work experiences which may well involve A&O being just one part of a varied career plan?”

So what are the new reasons why you would want to come and work here? What else about A&O’s culture binds people together?

She is clear that three things in particular stand out. “Firstly, we’re a community of likeminded people working together for the common good – we’re collegiate and collaborative. Secondly, we share a desire to challenge the status quo and change what’s gone in the past to create new ways of solving our clients’ challenges.

“And, finally, we are all looking to the future – both in terms of making sure we meet the future needs of our business, but also being prepared to ask everyone here, openly and honestly, what is your future and how can we help you equip yourself to achieve your career goals, whether that’s here or somewhere else?”

“It’s about creating an environment where people can develop not just the legal skills, but the resilience, the emotional and cultural intelligence, the versatility and agility to meet the changing demands of a very unpredictable world.”

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*Global HR Director, Allen & Overy*

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# THE PEERPOINT EXPERIENCE

**A&O'S PEERPOINT INITIATIVE** – set up three years ago – is a platform for progressive lawyers to do high-end legal work for clients on a consultancy basis. A Peerpoint consultant may be seconded to a client's in-house team, or work within A&O to see a particular project through. It takes people with particular skills and personal qualities to make a success of being a consultant lawyer.

But what's the experience really like – from the client's and the consultant's point of view?

Allison Brown, who heads Google's employment law team in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, brought in Sarah Banatvala, a Peerpoint consultant, to cover a maternity leave.

Here they talk about how the assignment is going.

## ALLISON BROWN

"Innovation is at the heart of what we do at Google and the way we deal with people," says Allison Brown, Director of Employment Law, for the group's Europe, Middle East and Africa region.

"We've grown really fast as a company since I joined in 2007. It's a very different organisation today in terms of size. But innovation is still at its heart."

Google is not a traditional client and that makes it an unconventional place to practise as an employment lawyer.

"It doesn't just make you think about things purely in terms of legal risk and mitigating legal risk. Google puts its people first and that really is essential to all the work that my clients do and how I work with them," she says.

"You're not necessarily called upon to advise on just your typical employment legal scenarios, because Google does unconventional things in unconventional ways," she says.

It was one of the first tech companies to start a conversation on inclusion. It does a lot of work on people analytics and uses data to help drive decision making.

"That approach can lead you down unexpected pathways and can create lots of interesting work for an employment lawyer."

It also means you are looking for particular skills and personal qualities in any consultant you bring in to cover a sabbatical, a maternity leave or a special project, as Allison did with Peerpoint consultant, Sarah Banatvala, in April.

"You're not just looking for someone who can do the work, but someone who can represent you in front of clients. They have to be a good fit culturally – not just technically, but personality-wise too," she says. "I think we were lucky with Sarah and got it right in that regard."

Preparing the way for Sarah to join the team involved some careful work, she says. "We did a lot of work before she joined in terms of putting together an on-boarding programme, because at first the way we work at Google can be quite difficult to adapt to."

There were some important days of overlap between Sarah's arrival and the departure of the colleague she is covering, and they worked diligently on the handover. There was a lot of help too in learning the systems.

"We were conscious we wanted to set Sarah up for success, so the on-boarding programme was really helpful, but also it was helped by Sarah being really open, willing to learn and eager to get into the work quickly. So the transition was made easier by the preparation we had done, but also by the kind of consultant Sarah is."

Allison has a busy, five-strong team. In the past she has relied on her outside counsel to offer secondees to provide cover when members of the team take extended leave or when there is a lot of work on – a solution that's not always cost effective.

"It didn't make sense to me to hire a lawyer on a 12-month temporary contract to cover this maternity leave," says Allison.

"You're looking for someone with a certain expertise and you want a lawyer who can hit the ground running. It's much, much easier to go to an organisation, like Peerpoint, that has a pool of potential candidates – much easier and much quicker."

Although Allison hired Sarah initially for six months, she hopes she will stay on for a year to cover the complete maternity leave. That would give her and the team a sense of real continuity, she says.

Has she ever had times when it has gone wrong?

“If it doesn’t go right I think it’s about personality, the type of consultant and the level of experience.”

“We’ve been lucky with Sarah because she’s got experience in other sectors like banking. Working in this sector is very different, but she’s been able to adapt kind of seamlessly. Someone with less experience might find it more challenging to go from one environment to the other,” she says.

“Picking the right consultant, I think, is the key.”

## **SARAH BANATVALA**

After ten years in private practice with Pinsent Masons and 18 months in-house with Barclays, Sarah Banatvala thought it was time to seek a different balance in life. But making the leap from permanent, full-time lawyer to consultant didn’t come easily, she admits.

“Taking myself out of permanent employment in order to become a consultant without any real indication on when or where I would work next was daunting. It’s a path that is actually not very ‘me’ in terms of my career to date,” she says.

“But actually it’s turned out really well – I’ve managed to find a way of working that is more suited to what I want out of my career and what I want out of life. I wish I had done it sooner.”

She’d been harbouring a dream to spend six to nine months a year working and three months living abroad. And although it hasn’t really worked out exactly like that yet – most assignments end up getting extended, she says – she likes the new rhythm in her working life.

“I like the fact that I can pick where I work, what clients I work for and always know there’s an end in sight – so when my current assignment with Google ends I’m definitely going travelling.” Destination: three months in either Spain or Latin America and a determination to learn Spanish.

The chance to work with Google – covering a maternity leave in the employment law team – was one she leapt at, having already done some work as a consultant in A&O’s employment team for the tech giant, and she was eager to work in a new sector after a long time in financial services.

But how easy was it to fit in? “Really easy – although it’s strange saying that given my last two roles were in financial services. It’s a mixture of me being used to coming into a team and getting on with things, knuckling down and picking up where someone has left off, and the fact that they made sure it was as easy for me as possible.”

Google made sure she was able to spend time with the person she was covering, giving her the chance to talk through ongoing matters and the helpful new starter deck. A legal assistant also spent dedicated time with her to get her settled. “That was key because there was a whole new system to get used to.”

While Sarah is not an A&O alum, that has not affected the support she gets from the firm. A&O has a strong sense of culture and, in matching consultants to clients like Google, always works hard to help them blend in with that culture easily. Regular contact with the Peerpoint and Employment teams, including the Google employment relationship partner Sarah Henchoz, have really helped. “They keep me looped in and I feel very supported in this role.”

There are things she doesn’t miss: “In the past there has been a focus on what’s your ‘brand’ to distinguish you from colleagues, and are you going to make partner, whereas this isn’t about getting promoted or being a brand. This is about coming on board, getting up to speed quickly, understanding and adapting to how the client works and doing the best job possible in the time they need you for,” she says.

Do many of her peers, working in private practice or in-house, envy her new role and aspire to the same kind of flexibility?

“Some of them would like to do it, but I think there’s often an element of fear about where the next job is going to come from. I’m at the stage where I feel comfortable that something I am interested in will come up and, if there isn’t anything right away, I’ve got other things to pursue until something comes up.

“You enter this knowing it’s going to be competitive and that there are a lot of people out there looking for roles,” she says.

“But equally having two consultancy roles under my belt – at RBS and now Google – I feel it should be relatively easy to find another role. And I have met supportive people along the way who I hope would introduce me if they knew of a role that was going.”

She would never rule out going back into permanent employment later in her career. First, though, there are some travel plans to firm up.

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*Director – Legal, Employment, Google*

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*Legal Counsel, Employment, Google*

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