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US Innovative Lawyers 2011

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A culture of creativity

Talent and an environment that is conducive to original thinking are key.
By *Reena SenGupta*

THE RECENT DEATH OF Steve Jobs was front of mind for several of the law firm managing partners interviewed for this year's US Innovative Lawyers report. In the context of a conversation about how their firms were innovating, their own endeavours did not appear to bear comparison the efforts of Apple's founder.

But innovation in law firms is different from that in corporations. Compared with a company chief executive, law firm managing partners are rarely inventors or even entrepreneurs. Their managerial functions are different and their roles tend to be more that of leaders or figureheads.

'Every innovative business has to be focused on how to deliver yesterday's solution for less'

In the US, law firm management is particularly light touch. As the business of law section in this report reveals, few top US firms are seriously experimenting with operational or management innovation.

Most US managing partners see their role as enablers of their lawyers' innovations. The two main challenges cited were in the recruitment and retention of top legal talent and allowing individual lawyers the space to solve clients' problems.

Michael Blair, presiding partner of Debevoise & Plimpton, says: "We have many small teams of lawyers working on many different projects, so the creativity has to come out of those teams and be directed into those projects. What you have to do is create an environment that attracts and motivates people who like to think about things in rooms with other smart people."

As the FT report shows, this smart thinking is crucial. Whether it is helping companies survive or helping the banks create liquidity, legal innovation and the efforts of lawyers to be creative plays a central role in the success of US business.

This year's US Innovative Lawyers report received submissions from 53 law firms in the Am Law 200 (American Lawyer's list of the top US firms), or most of the largest 50 US law firms. The research team reviewed 272 submissions and interviewed more than 300 clients and lawyers in the hunt for outstanding innovation.

For the first time, the report includes a ranking of the most innovative law firms: the FT Law 25. This listing – actually 26 firms because two tied for several places – shows those firms who had the highest scoring pieces of work in the report.

The FT's Innovative Lawyers project – which also includes a European report, now in its sixth year – was conceived as an alternative way to measure law firm success. It breaks with the traditional method of looking at fees and profits as the measure of success. As the category rankings are based primarily on client reviews, the FT Law 25 shows firms that were consistently found to be creating transformative solutions for clients.

Heading the 2011 ranking is Davis Polk & Wardwell. It was a consistent performer across the legal expertise and operational categories of the report. Tom Reid, the firm's managing partner, says: "Every innovative business has to be focused on how to deliver yesterday's solution for less today. Today, clients can enforce the truism of 'more for less'. When the advice you deliver is truly unique you can charge premium prices, but it is not all unique – our business model is about driving a higher percentage of the inventive, unique work."

In second and third place, respectively, were Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom and Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton. Both firms were responsible for significant innovations for clients from Burger King, the hamburger chain, to AIG, the insurance group.

BOTH FIRMS TALK ABOUT THE importance of culture and human capital to their ability to innovate. Eric Friedman, chairman at Skadden, says: "We recognised from day one that our culture was our advantage."

The firm has a history of diversity in terms of background, approach and personality, which Mr Friedman believes directly benefits clients. He says new associates are "Skaddenised" and taught the values of the firm, which combine business orientated, client-centric problem solving and a strong public interest focus.

At Cleary Gottlieb, Mark Leddy, managing partner, says the firm's compensation model facilitates and encourages collaboration among partners on a global basis. "The model sweeps away internal competition and tension, and drives internal collegiality so that we can concentrate on being outward-facing to clients."

He adds that Cleary Gottlieb does not perceive itself primarily as a US firm but rather one that operates globally.

For all the firms in the FT Law 25, culture is of the utmost importance to the promotion of innovative lawyering. However, this culture does not have to be homogenous.

The ranking's top 10 contains three firms that originate from the west coast: Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe; Latham & Watkins; and Paul Hastings. All three have cultures that are different from the east coast firms, but are strong innovators in their own right with a growing international footprint. Also notable are the chicago firms of Seyfarth Shaw, Kirkland & Ellis and Mayer Brown, which bring a different but powerful style to their innovations.

What is common to all the firms in the FT Law 25 is their commitment, their ability to adapt and to work together in the best interests of business to unusual and important effect. ■

FT LAW 25: MOST INNOVATIVE US LAW FIRMS

Rank	Firm	Corporate*	Finance*	Litigation	Business of law	Total score for ranked submissions
1	**Davis Polk & Wardwell**	21	61	38	18	**138**
2	**Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom**	61	58	-	-	**119**
3	**Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton**	54	44	-	20	**118**
4	**Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe**	58	18	19	20	**115**
5	**Latham & Watkins**	37	38	19	18	**112**
6	**Cravath, Swaine & Moore**	40	40	22	-	**102**
7	**Paul Hastings**	39	19	21	19	**98**
8	**Sullivan & Cromwell**	22	42	20	-	**84**
9	**Seyfarth Shaw**	-	18	-	61	**79**
10	**Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison**	38	40	-	-	**78**
11	**Kirkland & Ellis**	43	-	22	-	**65**
12	**Dewey & LeBoeuf**	44	-	-	18	**62**
12	**Mayer Brown**	-	39	23	-	**62**
14	**Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher**	21	-	38	-	**59**
14	**White & Case**	-	41	18	-	**59**
16	**Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft**	20	19	-	17	**56**
17	**Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld**	35	-	18	-	**53**
18	**Dechert**	16	-	18	18	**52**
19	**Morrison & Foerster**	23	-	21	-	**44**
19	**Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz**	-	-	44	-	**44**
21	**Simpson Thacher & Bartlett**	40	-	-	-	**40**
22	**Jones Day**	-	17	21	-	**38**
22	**Weil, Gotshal & Manges**	-	20	18	-	**38**
24	**Fulbright & Jaworski**	36	-	-	-	**36**
25	**Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer**	16	-	-	18	**34**
25	**Proskauer Rose**	16	-	18	-	**34**

*Includes corporate and finance submissions ranked in the energy and technology, media and telecoms tables

How the report was researched

RESEARCH FOR THE US INNOVATIVE Lawyers report was conducted by RSG Consulting, a specialist legal research group. Each law firm was permitted to submit up to three entries in each category, which were subjected to client and third-party review. Each entry was scored against three criteria:

- The originality of the legal work or business situation
- The rationale behind the work, encompassing strategic input, levels of proactivity, commitment and leadership
- The impact of the work on the client's business, on the industry or on business more broadly, or how it transformed a legal field.

Each criterion was scored out of 10, allowing the firm a maximum of 30 points per submission and a total of 90 points per category.

The FT Law 25 was ranked according to each firm's total score for entries featured in the report.

All 272 submissions received in 2011 were researched and scored, but only 108 submissions are ranked in the report. Where a firm is not scored against a particular category, this does not necessarily mean the firm did not submit in that category, or that it did not perform well in that legal discipline.

Forced to innovate

Tough times have made many firms change their ways. By *Caroline Binham*

IT IS AN IDIOSYNCRASY OF THE US legal market that while American attorneys may be on the cutting edge of advice to clients, their firms are among the most traditional in the world. As a general rule, management style has not changed much in 30 years. But the worst financial crisis in a generation has changed things.

As lucrative mergers and acquisitions work dried up, long-term clients started to scrutinise their legal spending, or even saw their businesses hit the wall. As a result, law firms have had to focus on their business models like never before.

"The economic backdrop did more: it acted as a catalyst for GCs [general counsel] to address latent frustrations with traditional law firms whose goals are often in direct conflict with those of the client," according to Axiom, the firm that avoids using a partnership structure.

The financial crisis brought such peripheral innovations as alternative fee arrangements (AFAs) and outsourcing – once regarded with some haughty scepticism by the legal market – to the mainstream. The firm that innovates has the potential to flourish, even in the hardest of times.

While not a traditional law firm, Axiom enjoyed revenue growth of 30 per cent in 2010, compared with an average of 3 per cent for the firms in the Am Law 100, American Lawyer magazine's ranking of top US firms.

Axiom's new managed services division, which is expected to account for 28 per cent of revenue in 2011, offers general counsel efficiency advice from not just lawyers but also management consultants and technology experts. The team specialises in unbundling legal advice, showing general counsel what parts of work can be sent to onshore or offshore centres rather than law firms.

Bringing non-lawyers to meet clients was also an innovation used by Seyfarth Shaw as part of its efficiency drive that encompasses Six Sigma, the process-driven management technique made famous by General Electric in the 1990s and now enjoying something of a renaissance. Seyfarth has evangelically taken up the Six Sigma message, and has found that it can work: one defence contractor client saw fees fall by 30 per cent.

As part of its Six Sigma programme, Seyfarth has created more than 110 legal process maps – visual checklists that guide attorneys through managing a commercial litigation, for example. The maps create efficiency because if the firm can accurately predict how much work will be involved in even the most complex dispute, it can quote the client a project fee – infinitely preferable from the client's point of view to the billable hour that characterises the legal profession.

"The legal industry has become mired in a focus on hours, increasing hourly rates and the concomitant focus on the law firm needs, rather than that of the client," Seyfarth says.

Likewise, Bryan Cave's practice economics group has created a dashboard for the firm to better project manage its instructions – and keep them to budget – as well as a similar application for clients to track projects they are involved in.

More than anything else, the financial crisis has underscored the old tensions and opposing objectives of clients and firms embodied by the billable hour. General counsel now demand predictability (and affordability). Only the firm that really knows its business can offer clients a realistic AFA. Crowell & Moring, for example, has been pursuing AFAs for more than four years. One-third of its $327.5m revenues in 2010 came from such arrangements. Over the past year it has introduced a computer program to refine the process, which suggests AFAs based on client demands.

The crisis underscored opposing objectives of clients and firms embodied by the billable hour

THE CREDIT CRISIS HAS HAD OTHER repercussions for clients in the form of regulation as policymakers worldwide have tried to redesign the architecture of the financial system.

In the US, 2010's Dodd-Frank Act was a sweeping reform of the financial system, designed to fetter banks "too big to fail", creating a Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and bringing derivatives and credit-rating agencies into the regulatory fold for the first time, among other goals. The Volcker Rule, meanwhile, aims to limit proprietary trading and investments in hedge funds and private equity firms by banks that benefit from federal deposit insurance.

The European Union embarked upon its own regulatory overhaul, while global standards set under the Basel accords now require banks to hold more capital and liquid assets.

Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton put together an interactive database to help clients to track regulatory reforms, while other US firms such as Davis Polk & Wardwell saw the regulatory overhaul as an opportunity to offer alternative forms of advice. The firm created a regulatory hub, an online platform with advice on a fixed-fee basis.

Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft developed a database to give standardised tracking and analysis of derivatives, financial documents and broker-dealer regulations. ●

BUSINESS OF LAW

Firm	Innovation	Originality	Rationale	Impact	Total	Description
STAND-OUT						
Seyfarth Shaw	Client service model	8	8	8	**24**	Using the Six Sigma management process to revamp the firm's business model in a way that is unique to the profession. In some cases, the firm has been able to reduce fees by 30 per cent.
Bryan Cave	Structural approach to innovation	8	7	7	**22**	Creating teams dedicated to improving process and innovation. One of them, the client technology group, develops technology solutions.
Axiom	Managed services	7	7	7	**21**	Employing an advanced process and technology-based efficiencies to improve legal functions or workflows.
Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton	Regulatory reform initiative	6	7	7	**20**	A customised interactive database that tracks financial regulatory reform for clients, is customisable and meets a pressing business need.
Crowell & Moring	Alternative fee arrangements (AFAs)	6	7	7	**20**	Wholesale adoption of AFAs that encompasses 25 of the firm's top clients, representing a third of its revenue in 2010.
Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe	Talent model; alternative fees and innovative client relationships; alternative metrics; global operations centre	7	7	6	**20**	An overall approach to being innovative, the firm has tried to become more efficient, manage its people and clients better, and has attempted to measure success differently.
HIGHLY COMMENDED						
Fenwick & West	"Flex"	6	7	6	**19**	The technology licensing practice offers experienced attorneys the opportunity to become part of their clients' legal teams to help with fluctuations in resourcing requirements.
Paul Hastings	Providing market intelligence in the commercial lending sector	6	7	6	**19**	Addressing the lack of data in secured loan transactions, built a database to identify market issues for clients.
Seyfarth Shaw	Facilitating a multinational transaction for Royal Bank of Canada	6	7	6	**19**	Brought the use of Six Sigma to its client's transactions, thereby transforming the bank's experience of legal services.
WilmerHale	Alternative fee arrangements	6	7	6	**19**	One of the first to go to market with a comprehensive AFA programme, the firm has instituted a "matter management" programme. It stresses relationships, strategy and team management alongside billing arrangements. Some 15 per cent of the firm's fees are now under AFAs.
Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati	Supporting West Coast business	7	6	6	**19**	Through information technology tools such as the term sheet generator and document automation through to its entrepreneurs college, the firm supports its clients through cutting costs and training.

For the full business of law table, and details of the panel of experts who assessed the entries in this category, go to www.ft.com/usil11

Buying time

Refinancing has been critical since the credit crisis. By *Telis Demos*

AMEND AND EXTEND" MAY not be the most glamorous-sounding legal manoeuvre; more than a few cynics have called it "amend and pretend".

But with a financial crisis of the magnitude of the one that hit the markets in 2008, the after-effects are long felt. For many lenders and investors, amending loan agreements to give borrowers more time to sort out their affairs was the only option as they waited to see if the deep recession would abate.

Three years later, the US economy has stabilised, and spending by businesses and consumers is much stronger than it was. Yet growth is not assured, with companies beset by uncertainty in new forms – for example, government loans to guarantee private loans threatening to create sovereign debt crises. As a result, restructurings that began during the financial crisis remain complex and difficult.

"There were so many restructurings in the crisis, when a lot of companies were just doing amend and extend," says Harvey Uris, global head of the real estate group at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom. "We were able to push a lot of them out and avoid liquidiation. Now they're just coming back to really get refinanced."

'We were able to push a lot of them out and avoid liquidiation. Now they're just coming back.'

He adds: "that creates a lot of fights. But if you fight, the risk is you'll lose even more value."

Among the most visible examples of these restructurings was the reintroduction of AIG, the insurer, and General Motors, both of which had received state support, to the public markets.

GM's initial public offering – one of the world's largest at \$20.1bn – was by some measures a wild success. The offer price was above the initial value sought by the US treasury, which along with the Canadian government and United Auto Workers owned the equity in GM. "There have been big deals, but this was a colossal transaction," says Richard Drucker, a corporate partner at Davis Polk & Wardwell.

A global marketing campaign was critical to getting that price, but the underwriters faced another challenge, too. GM's business would still face a difficult economy and, in representing the underwriters, Davis Polk needed to preserve the government's ability to return to investors to sell its remaining 27 per cent stake.

The law firm had to keep underwriters abreast of risk disclosure practices in the many jurisdictions where the deal was being marketed. "We had to be conscious that GM is now going to become a public company, and had to live up to the valuation," Mr Drucker says.

Uncertainty was even sharper in other corners of finance, such as real estate, which suffered some of the biggest dislocations as a result of the weak underwriting standards and deep leverage across the industry. "It's still a ways away from any way to recovery," says David Dubrow, partner at Arent Fox. "And it's not just the housing market itself – it's the state of the banks. It is a question of how do you keep it going and how do you keep it working."

Ongoing engagement defines the work of Mr Dubrow and Les Jacobowitz, also a partner at Arent Fox. The firm has worked Fannie Mae, the government-backed housing finance group, since 2009, as it stepped into the role of providing liquidity in the market for low-income housing underwritten by state, local and federal housing finance authorities, with banks no longer able to provide that funding.

It was a complex engagement that required Fannie and Freddie Mac, its competitor, to work together for the first time, along with the US Treasury, the White House and several other agencies. But with the housing market still not providing private funding, the programme needed to be restructured to continue. The US Treasury's statutory authority to buy new loans expired in 2010, forcing the creation of an escrow account.

"There was no template, no playbook, other than Apollo 13," says Mr Dubrow, referring to the failed lunar landing mission. "We had a circle, trying to figure out how to make it into the box."

Restructuring has come in many forms: negotiating with creditors, selling assets and raising fresh capital. Mr Uris at Skadden – along with restructuring partner Jay Goffman and members of the firm's mergers and acquisitions and tax teams – employed elements of all of those tools when they were called in to restructure the US holdings of Centro Properties, the Australian shopping centre developer.

Like many banks, Centro had been funding its business before the financial crisis in the short-term debt markets, until that financing dried up in late 2008. The next two years were spent doing short-term extensions with investors in the US, Europe and Australia. As the crisis receded, many of those investors eventually sold to distressed debt hedge funds.

"We had a new mentality and a commonality of thinking with opportunistic lenders looking to make a profit and to find a way to have a liquidity event," says Mr Uris.

The funds wanted to avoid being forced to liquidate in a difficult market. So they agreed to extend the loans while Skadden worked out an unusual out-of-court restructuring in Australia, which does not have a prepackaged bankruptcy proceeding like the US Chapter 11.

The restructuring was successful, clearing the way for a $9.4bn sale of the US properties to Blackstone last year. "They say the US doesn't export anything – but we exported the prepack concept," says Mr Goffman.

The carrot-and-stick approach was similarly employed by Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison as it aided the restructuring of the Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami, which had recently undergone a renovation in an attempt to restore the glamour it enjoyed in the 1950s and 1960s. The firm was hired in 2009 as the joint venture that controlled the hotel ran low on cash. The goal was to avoid a bankruptcy at all costs, with the lenders fearing that the hotel would have little value if potential guests cancelled bookings.

"Lenders were motivated to try to amend and extend the loan so that they can hope that with time, values can improve," says Brian Hermann, partner in the bankruptcy practice at Paul, Weiss.

While investors were willing to invest in new equity, the dozens of local contractors who had worked on the hotel were not as patient. Paul, Weiss took the unusual step of employing a mediator who had already been engaged as some of the larger contractors sued the hotel, using the mediator to bring other contractors into restructuring plans. Eventually, enough agreed.

The process was further eased by having the national Football League Super Bowl in Miami last year, bringing a lot of business to the hotel. "As in all restructurings, you need to get a little bit lucky," says Mr Hermann. ■

FINANCE

Firm	Innovation	Originality	Rationale	Impact	Total	Description
STAND-OUT						
Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton	Helping to stabilise AIG	8	8	8	**24**	Going through what amounted to doing a "Rubik's cube" in the dark, the firm acted on a spate of transactions to enable AIG to re-access capital markets. Lawyers were praised for their ability to anticipate and deal with issues in a highly unusual and closely scrutinised situation.
Davis Polk & Wardwell	Advising the underwriters on General Motors' $20.1bn initial public offering, the largest in history	7	8	8	**23**	Took the initiative in numerous complex decisions including setting the final price and size of the offering. Lawyers protected the client from "gun-jumping" concerns, while balancing the interests of government and other stakeholders. The deal provides a model for offerings involving sovereign wealth sources.
Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison	Out-of-court restructuring for Miami's Fontainebleau Hotel	7	9	6	**22**	Demonstrated a steely intent to prevent Chapter 11 proceedings through setting up a board of directors and working directly with the hotel's contractors. Combined creative ideas with a highly communicative and proactive approach to keep the business out of court and ensure its survival.
Sullivan & Cromwell	Fighting off a hostile bid for General Growth Properties in the middle of its bankruptcy proceedings	7	8	7	**22**	To prevent a fire sale, the firm created a structure to enable GGP's main creditor and stock holder to retain its interests in the face of a hostile bid. Created a structure to bring in an alternative bidder and engineered the inverse of a takeover.
Arent Fox	Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac initiatives to stabilise housing finance market	6	7	8	**21**	Negotiated parameters of the new bond issue programme to support lending by local housing finance agencies, and implemented the temporary credit and liquidity programme for housing lenders.
Mayer Brown	Barclays' $10bn collateralised commercial paper programme, a first for the industry	7	7	7	**21**	After being presented with a "data dump" from its client, Mayer Brown helped develop a new way for the bank to borrow money from money-market funds. The model combines the benefits of the repo and commercial paper markets and has attracted attention from other borrowers.
HIGHLY COMMENDED						
Cravath, Swaine & Moore	A refinancing solution for CB Richard Ellis	7	6	7	**20**	Representing Credit Suisse, the firm developed a solution to amend the company's credit agreement with only 51 per cent approval of other lenders. This allowed individual lenders to extend the maturity of their loans and has laid the groundwork for "amend-to-extend" transactions.
Debevoise & Plimpton	Representing the Carlyle Group in emerging markets expansion	7	7	6	**20**	Established first of their kind funds in China, Brazil and Africa that are set to become templates for future investment in these jurisdictions. Reconciled varying local and international legal requirements, and smoothed the way for the client to set up in new markets.
Sullivan & Cromwell	Sale of AIG's Alico life insurance unit to MetLife	6	7	7	**20**	Structured the sale of Alico for a combination of cash and stock to allow AIG to immediately begin repaying its bailout debt. Deal involved regulatory considerations in more than 50 jurisdictions and was key to the company's strategy to regain financial independence.
Weil, Gotshal & Manges	General Growth Properties Chapter 11 restructuring	6	7	7	**20**	Developed a strategy that resulted in the successful restructuring of GGP and several hundred subsidiaries. In an unprecedented move, GGP's stock was relisted on the New York Stock Exchange during the Chapter 11 case.
Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft	New deal structures in the commercial mortgage-backed securities market	6	7	6	**19**	Represented JPMorgan Chase in the first "conduit-style" CMBS securitisation for three years, worth $716m. The firm has since represented a string of financial institutions and has crafted many of the template documents in the sector.
Davis Polk & Wardwell	Winding down of Credit-Based Asset Servicing and Securitisation (C-Bass)	6	7	6	**19**	Enabled JPMorgan Chase to structure and implement an override agreement and consensual wind-down of C-Bass, avoiding litigation and a free-fall liquidation.
Paul Hastings	Capital Trust restructuring	7	7	5	**19**	Engineered a unique transaction structure and series of equity instruments and secured endorsement of creditors to achieve an out-of-court deal.
Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom	New precedent for Australian insolvency law	6	6	7	**19**	Restructuring Centro Properties Group, which involved translating US restructuring practice for use in an Australian context, where insolvency law favours liquidation.
Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom	Representing BankUnited in the largest bank IPO in US history	6	6	7	**19**	This 2011 transaction, coupled with BankUnited's subsequent acquisition of Herald National Bank, capped Skadden's role leading one of the most remarkable corporate turnrounds of the financial crisis.
White & Case	The first whole-company securitisation of a timber business	6	7	6	**19**	Incorporated the unique constraints of the timber industry with an inventive financial structure to ensure RLC, an Oregon wood products manufacturer, could survive the housing crisis.
COMMENDED						
Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe	Redwood Trust's public offerings of private-label mortgage-backed securities	6	6	6	**18**	Helped Redwood navigate a deal that took place in an unknown environment. The firm's understanding of the evolving regulations and regulators helped restart this industry sector.
Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison	Exit financing strategy for AbitibiBowater's restructuring	6	6	6	**18**	Unique features of a $500m rights offering allowed the newsprint company flexibility to decrease or eliminate the offering if it was able to raise exit financing on better terms once it emerged from bankruptcy.
Seyfarth Shaw	Combining public-private financing with new economic recovery investment vehicles	5	6	7	**18**	Helped spur commercial development and create more than 2,100 jobs in Georgia through smart tax structuring and partnerships.
Jones Day	Lehman Brothers' global settlement agreement with Ambac Assurance	6	6	5	**17**	Following a restrictive court order, the firm led the settlement of one of the largest claims to date in the Lehman bankruptcy. Expert navigation of overlapping state and federal law led to an audacious strategy that closed the door on this dispute quicker than the stakeholders anticipated.

Leading light

Profile of a legal innovator who shone brightly in this year's FT report

STEPHEN POOR

Chairman and managing partner, Seyfarth Shaw

Stephen Poor has been chairman and managing partner of Seyfarth Shaw since 2001, and has led the firm to adopt the quality and efficiency methodologies of the Six Sigma management system.

Rather than trying to steamroll the methodology across the firm – "or boil the ocean", as Mr Poor puts it – the firm began by instigating Six Sigma department by department. It has now been woven into every aspect of the firm's operations. "It has become the prism through which we look at everything," Mr Poor says.

Seyfarth's client service model focuses on creating "value-based" relationships that incorporate Six Sigma techniques, process improvement strategies, alternative fee approaches and technology. Clients say the firm stands out for an enthusiasm for new and innovative ways of working.

Mr Poor has also led the implementation of a full competency-based talent system, which introduces performance-based remuneration and career progressions for the firm's attorneys. The firm believes clients gain greater value from a system that better aligns attorney skills and rates with client business needs.

This year, Seyfarth launched a labour and employment fellows programme, providing second-year law school students an opportunity to develop hands-on skills in employment law.