

Keystone Law

A Study into the Characteristics and Implications of Change in an International Platform Law Firm

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*“A fresh, exciting and innovative firm that provides a personal, flexible approach
with a first-class service.”*

Chambers and Partners Guide to the Legal Profession, 2021

“It’s about work-life balance and taking control of your life.”

James Knight, CEO Keystone Law Plc, 2022



DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s). A bibliography is appended.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It was not a straightforward undertaking to embark on a protracted doctoral research programme whilst engaged in a demanding “day job” as a practising solicitor. Conversely, it was not always easy for my supervisory team when confronted with a lawyer’s mindset during our very amiable meetings.

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Thanks as ever to my wife Gail, who endured my less than academic overtures whilst grappling with the vagaries of qualitative research methodologies, and who also proofread my script - which must have been a joy undiscovered.

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May 2023

ABSTRACT

This research encompasses a group of legal practitioners in the London based law firm, Keystone Law, a pioneering legal practice, and the first of the so-called platform law firms – one predicated on remote working with a centralised support function. The research is founded upon a qualitative design with an interpretivist perspective.

The UK legal marketplace has changed considerably in the last twenty years or so and the Keystone model of business has grown, such that in three years' time it is estimated that over 25% of lawyers will be employed in such firms (Codex Edge, 2022).

This work-based project considers two groups of current Keystone lawyers who joined the firm approximately 10 years apart. Its aim is to ascertain their personal motivations for joining, whether the demographic of such lawyers has changed in the intervening period, and why.

An inductive phenomenological approach was employed, looking within each group at lawyers' personal reasons for moving from the traditional law firm model. Braun & Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis was utilised with each group; identifying four main themes in each data set which were then evaluated. By assessing the themes, it was possible to identify differences in the type of individual joining the firm, furthermore, compare with recent 2022 studies on the rise of the platform firm in the English legal sector.

This research observed that the newer recruits tended to be more entrepreneurial; considering other business interests to lie alongside their legal practices, with such lawyers prepared to take more personal risk in the pursuit of work/life balance.

The finding of this research is important for the management at Keystone Law when considering future employment requirements in a time of increased applications, as well as whether the future business plans need to consider the changing demographic when addressing future strategy and business efficacy.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The UK legal services sector is the second largest in the world. The first being perhaps, unsurprisingly, the United States of America. The UK legal market in 2018 had a fee revenue of £33.4bn which amounted to about 10% of global legal service revenues (CityUK, 2018). In 2022, the legal services market increased to £37bn from 157,000 practising solicitors (Taddia, 2022). According to the 2022 PwC UK Legal Services Report, in 2021/2 the UK legal sector contributed circa 4% of gross added value to the UK economy, making it one of the country's most valuable industries. Consequently, it has in the last few years been seen as an attractive market for outside investment (PwC, 2022).

The UK legal market is somewhat distinctive. One end of the market is comprised of so called, "Magic Circle" and "Silver Circle" global law firms such as Clifford Chance and Allen & Overy, which make up approximately the top 15 firms in the UK (based in the City of London). Magic Circle firms are regarded generally as those with the best overall reputation. There are five such firms in the City, namely Clifford Chance, Linklaters, Allen & Overy, Slaughter and May and Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, who enjoyed in 2021 revenues of over £1bn (Legal Services Board, 2021). Silver Circle firms are those perceived to be just below the Magic Circle in terms of overall reputation. Firms such as Ashurst, Norton Rose and Hogan Lovells, all of which will have very high profit per partner. (Malcolm, Wilson and Xie, 2011).

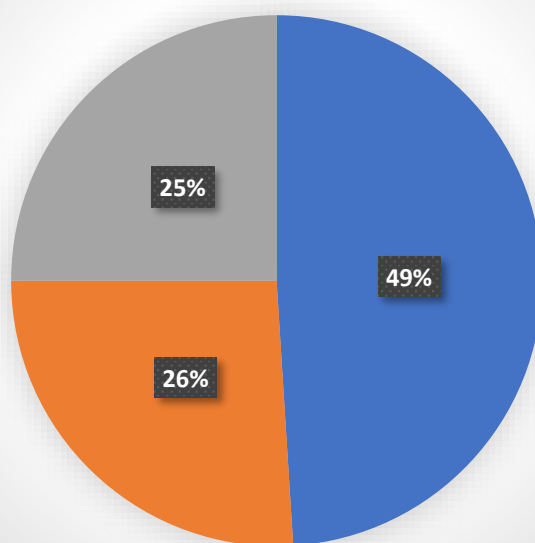
At the opposite end of the legal spectrum in the UK, are the solicitors' firms one sees on the "High Street". There are many such firms throughout the country, and others of slightly larger size throughout the United Kingdom, outside the UK Top

200 law firms (by number of partners and revenue). Such firms, as a rule, would have annual revenues below £9m. The firms that sit between these two counterparts are known as mid-market or mid-tier, but which still generate annual fees of approximately £9.5bn (Williams, 2021). These broadly represent the next tier down from the Silver Circle and may have a national or international presence. Firms such as Taylor Wessing, Shoosmiths and Macfarlanes (Malcolm, Wilson and Xie, 2011).

Much of the emphasis in this study will be on the city law firm as discussed above. Charles River Associates carried out a study of so called “city” law firms and helpfully illuminated the rather esoteric term. They noted several key attributes that differentiate these firms from other law firms in the market - although they did accept there are no hard boundaries. The location of such firms tends to be in and around the City of London although over time this has come to encompass Canary Wharf and Holborn areas of London as firms relocated to newbuild premises. The types of firms tended to be in the top 50 to 100 largest law firms (the top 1%) in the country with high levels of profits per partner. The main types of work were corporate and mergers and acquisitions (M&A), transactional work and associated financial services. Finally, the types of clients tended to be corporates and financial institutions such as banks and pension funds (Malcolm, Wilson and Xie, 2011).

The diagram below illustrates the UK legal market space and its share of revenues by firm size by revenue.

MARKET SHARE BY REVENUE



Blue: Top 15: Orange: 16-100: Gray: Smaller mid-market and High Street

Source: Arden Research, the CityUK and the Lawyer, 2021

The Platform Firm - Keystone Law

The primary emphasis of this thesis is in connection with one English law firm, namely Keystone Law Plc, a large multidisciplinary commercial solicitors' practice with its head office located within the City of London in the United Kingdom. It has additional offices in other jurisdictions, including Australia, Northern Ireland, Isle of Man, and the Middle East. Keystone Law historically operates in the mid-market (mid-tier) sector referred to above and it has historically recruited its lawyers from such firms. That said, Keystone is now in the upper echelons of such UK law firms, with a turnover of over £69.6m in 2022 increasing to £75.3m in 2023.¹ In 2022 this first platform legal practice entered the UK top 50 law firms (ranked by revenue) (Walker, 2022). I am a solicitor and partner in Keystone Law ("Keystone"). Keystone was established in 2002 (originally called Lawyers Direct).

¹ Source: Figures from Keystone Law, 2023.

It was the first of the so-called platform law firm models which has, in recent years, disrupted the traditional law firm model.

Throughout the literature and media, there are references to firms now deploying similar business models to Keystone's; being known variously as Platform firms, Disruptive firms, Consultancy models, Networked firms, Dispersed firms, Alternative Law Firms, and Virtual, to name but a few, although the most used appears to be platform. However, the terms are interchangeable, especially in the literature and websites, so there is no standard designation, but the reader should be aware of avoiding possible misunderstanding. In the study, I have primarily adopted the use of platform firm.

The platform firm organisation is one that provides a corporate umbrella and regulatory infrastructure to individuals who are self-employed (through their own service company), but uniformly branded. The company provides back-office support such as administrative services, marketing, and networking opportunities, whilst the consultants are free to pursue client work as they see fit - without billable or time targets. There is no salary nor, indeed, equity share (Avery, 2022). The consultants get a percentage (commonly 70 to 75%) of the fee income they bring to the firm. There commonly also a referral fee of 10-15% to the lawyer who refers work to a colleague, with the other solicitor taking home about 60-65% (Codex Edge, 2022).

This model is not unique to law firms - possibly the best known and largest adherent being St James's Place, the FTSE 100 wealth management company (Wilson, 2018). Arden (a mid-market investment bank that advises law firms about listing and other forms of external investment) drew a parallel in its report in 2021, with the disruption wrought by St James's Place using a scalable platform to draw in over 4,000 self-employed financial advisers which equated to about 12% of the

entire UK market (Llewellyn-Lloyd, 2021). The model has also successfully been deployed in the opticians' market. Arden (2021), in the above referenced report, observed similarities with how the UK opticians' market changed when a regulatory shift allowed opticians to advertise their services. Two thirds of the market have now been established by three nationwide chains: Specsavers, Boots, and Vision Express, all of which run franchise models like a platform law firm (Llewellyn-Lloyd, 2021). Keystone was the first such organisation in the legal sector, however, given the trajectory of the optician's market, and the opportunities in the legal arena clear, as the Arden report argues, 50,000 UK lawyers in consultancy practices by 2026 is quite achievable.

The research carried out for this thesis concentrates on the legal practice of Keystone Law, and specifically the individuals who joined the firm and work as partners or consultants. In this work-based project, I have considered new partner/consultant joiners to Keystone Law in a period of approximately ten years; in particular, I have looked at two groups of lawyers who joined Keystone, the first set circa 2010 and the second group circa 2020. My research question and objective of this study is to consider whether the demographic (for example, age, gender, and motivations such as lifestyle benefit) of the individuals who joined in these two different periods have changed in the intervening time, and if so, then why and how.

Before exploring the type of lawyer who was contemplating joining what was a unique alternative legal service provider in a traditionally based business sector, it was more important to also consider how/why the structure of this firm was adopted at its inception in 2002 compared with the customary law firm model prevalent at that period. Furthermore, how the Keystone model developed as it has, from its formation in the West End of London, to the present day where it is

one of the leading UK commercial law firms which has over 450 lawyers in the UK with a large, fully integrated, London head office hub housing over 70 support staff.² This is in addition to numerous regional and international offices, as well as the conversion of the firm to a publicly listed company on the London Stock Exchange in 2017. Keystone was the third legal practice to float, following Gateley in 2015 and Gordon Dadds in 2017 (Avery, 2022). In 2022, Keystone was cited by the influential Lawyer Magazine as a UK top 100 law firm (by headcount and turnover), (Lawyer Magazine, 2022). The prominent Legal 500 publication, in its 2022 edition, has revealed that the firm has increased its rankings (of deemed expert lawyers in their field) from 21 in 2018 to 42 in 2022 (Avery, 2022).

[The Traditional Legal Practice](#)

The traditional law firm structure has been the abiding feature of the legal landscape for centuries - a group of practitioners who form a partnership to practise and share the profits and costs. Such partnerships are governed by senior lawyers and have a strict progression structure from articled clerk (trainee) to partner, with a few variations (see Appendix Seven). Some firms adopt the Limited Company or Limited Partnership structure to reduce liability, but the fundamental career paths are the same (Poole, 2018). Until the 1990s, the only significant change in this model was the growth in the size of firms, particularly in London and some national UK firms. The firms I referenced on page 1 (“Magic Circle” and “Silver Circle”) are such examples, with firms such as Shoosmiths, having national offerings with multiple geographical offices. Then in 2007, the Legal Services Act 2007 allowed non-lawyers to own and manage law firms (Law Society, 2022). This in turn allowed for alternative business structures – firms

² Source: Keystone Law, 2022.

owned by private equity (called corporate consolidators), and/or to having the ability to float on the stock exchange, although only a few have done so (Llewellyn-Lloyd, 2021, Avery, 2022).

The notion of remote working, which this study will explore in detail, was a problematic concept for large traditionally structured hierarchical partner led law firms to embrace in the early 2000s, when the founders of Keystone Law (then Lawyers Direct) were considering their *attack* on the establishment model for London legal practice. In fact, little initially changed, even with the advent of innovative (or some might argue disruptive) challenger firms like Keystone, with the traditional “City” firms considering the new models were minor irritants (hence the term disruptive) and would be highly unlikely to break into the high calibre client base that these firms enjoyed (Llewellyn-Lloyd, 2021). As Keystone, and later other similarly organised firms (such as Gunnercooke LLP in 2010), entered the legal marketplace and began to enjoy sustained growth in terms of high calibre lawyers’ recruitment, clients and income, somewhat tardily the legal press and commentators began to take note (Crainer, 2008, Avery, 2022).

Rather belatedly, City law firm management boards also recognised the trajectory that the legal marketplace was taking, when solicitors, and indeed their clients, were prepared to move to these young pretenders. Various initiatives were developed to counter this new business structure, including dealing with the millennial issue (which will be discussed later), primarily by increasing pay to astronomical levels, especially for newly qualified lawyers, to attract and aid retention (The Economist, 2021). Whilst the consultancy business model is a growing movement in law firm businesses, especially in the UK, it still represents quite a small fraction of the £3.8bn legal services market and 157,000 practising solicitors in the UK (Taddia, 2022). In its Alternative Law Firm Report, Codex

Edge/Atlas in 2022 suggests the data shows that 25% of lawyers could be at platform consultancy firms by 2025. Of significance, the numbers of lawyers joining the top five consultancy firms (see Appendix 8) has a compound growth by headcount of 13%. The figure in the top five hiring firms in the traditional sector is - 6%. This data suggests that platform firms are outperforming traditional firms for both hiring, and importantly, retention (Codex Edge, 2022).

With respect to individuals, and touched upon above, there has also been a generational change with the perceived *Holy Grail* of promotion and partnership aspirations which all lawyers must surely aspire to. This has, to an extent, been replaced by so called millennium lawyers opting for different career paths quite early into their legal careers, or indeed leaving the law all together (Bleasdale et al, 2020, Major, Lindsey & Africa, 2021). This shift in focus, in the last few years, has resulted in many experienced lawyers looking to consider alternatives to the traditional law firm model of trainee solicitor to equity partner - with the ultimate gift to those that succeeded of ownership of the business and profit share. Moreover, no number of financial incentives have appeared to alter this. Leon Hutchinson, co-editor of PwC's Law Firms' Survey report stated, *"Following the end of the last pandemic lockdown earlier this year, we have seen partners and fee earners on the move...."* He goes on to say, *"Continuingly increasing remuneration is not a sustainable option. We expect law firms to prioritise their strategy towards other areas, including work life balance, the hybrid or remote working model and their ESG policies, all of which are increasingly valued by staff today."* (PwC, 2022, p.2).

[The COVID-19 Effect](#)

According to the accountancy firm PwC's 31st Law Firm Survey, the Top 100 UK firms averaged a 9% growth in fee income in 2021/22 (PwC, 2022). However, the

conventional or traditional mid-market firms in the UK have, for some time, now encountered some turmoil, especially following the financial crash of 2007 and COVID-19 pandemic (Taddia, 2022). Further research undertaken by PwC has considered how the UK legal marketplace has fared in 2022, post COVID pandemic. PwC concluded that 2022 was a year of uncertainty, although it also noted that overall (and mostly in the largest City practices) UK law firms have seen a healthier than anticipated financial performance in 2021/22. Kate Wolstenholme, of PwC UK's Law Firms Advisory Group and editor of the Law Firms' Survey, said:

“Despite a very strong year, law firms now face some headwinds from continuing macroeconomic and geopolitical uncertainty, with high inflation, tightening of credit markets and the energy crisis creating a shift in business confidence.

“Firms may need to look beyond pricing to non-core cost reduction, improvements in operating model, and technology innovation to combat those challenges. But with some market players now focusing on expansion into adjacent service lines, successful firms will maintain a strategic growth mindset to avoid compromising mid- to long-term ambitions.” (Wolstenholme, 2022, p.1)

Post pandemic there has clearly been a shift in attitudes to working in general, and the legal profession has been no exception (Llewellyn-Lloyd, 2021). Lawyers are now more than ever likely to consider work life balance as a guide to future employment within the sector (Codex Edge, 2022). Whilst many of the largest law firms have embraced some form of hybrid working arrangements, which has accelerated post the COVID pandemic, the Codex Edge research has found that the pull of the traditional model of office working is still prevalent with law firm owners, even when most practices reinvent themselves and consider some form of hybrid or remote working offerings following enforced absences from a centralised office - as the cited PwC report affirms. In a second report by Codex

Edge on 20th September 2022, it concludes that lawyers have also seen that many firms have not lived up to their post-lockdown promises of hybrid working practices (Codex Edge, 2022).

John Llewellyn-Lloyd, of Arden, said, *“The pandemic has increased pressure to invest in IT infrastructure and reduce back-office costs, but most firms are facing historic lows in available cash, with partners generally reluctant to commit additional capital”* (Llewellyn-Lloyd, 2021, p.2).

One alternative, both pre pandemic and certainly now post COVID-19, was a different and refreshing model of law firm, the so-called platform law firm as referred to above. Keystone Law was the first such enterprise in the UK legal sector, and although this form of business model is no longer new or unique, it is growing in popularity for reasons this study will discuss. As Charles Avery stated in the Legal Business journal when discussing the Keystone type model of remote working, *“After several pandemic hit years in which people from all walks of life reassessed their working habits, the model is viewed with a good deal less suspicion than it once was.”* (Avery, 2022, p.1)

[Why Keystone?](#)

The founders of Keystone witnessed the increasing dissatisfaction with the traditional model, where the partners response to change and retention problems, as had previously been highlighted, was to throw money at their lawyers, but at the same time increase the pressure to make more money for the firm. Pressures in recent years, especially in the lower end of the market (generally smaller firms) have also occurred because of the increasing commoditisation of many legal services. Conveyancing and personal injury being two such examples, whereby increasing use of IT/AI has had dramatic effects on revenues (Suttie, 2019). In

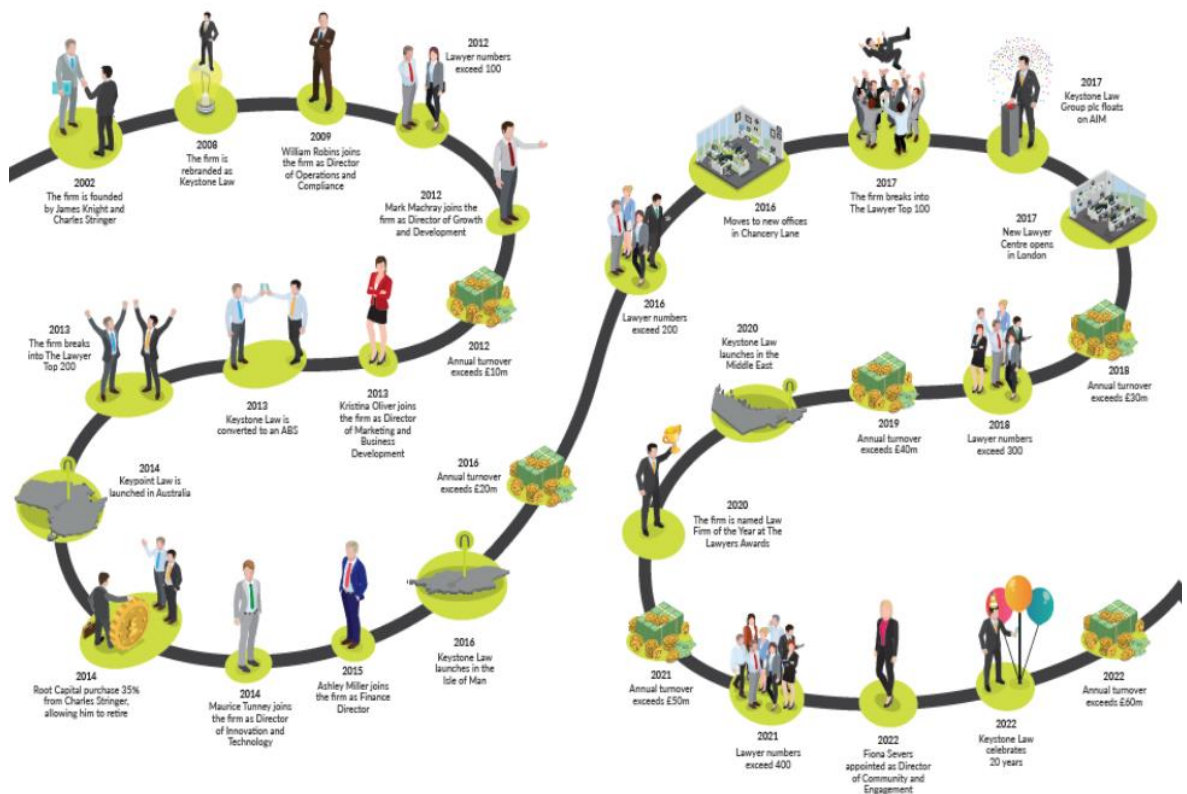
addition, the economic climate in recent years and push on costs resulting in lower fee incomes, but with the perfect storm of increasing overhead costs, particularly in office space. This has been one significant consequence post the COVID-19 pandemic and the home working reform. Moreover, in 2023, the spectre of rising inflation and interest rates, the energy calamity, increasing regulatory scrutiny, the disturbance of global supply chains caused by the war in Ukraine, and retrenchment of globalisation, all added to the pressure for those in charge of large law firms - as opined by Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer's managing partner Claire Wills (Walker, 2022).

As a consequence of the changes outlined above, there has been upwards pressure on individual solicitors, with increasing billable hours targets, but at the same time increasing expectations on such lawyers to undertake business development, and for the more senior to engage in increased managerial responsibility. Turning again to the above-mentioned PwC survey, 88% of the top 100 UK law firms are concerned about a shortage of talent which will affect their financial ambitions in 2023 and beyond (PwC, 2022).

The overarching concept for Keystone, when set up, was to have a highly skilled cadre of senior lawyers with established client followings who wanted more flexibility in their professional working life. This *modus operandi* was supported by highly sophisticated bespoke IT platforms and extremely proficient administrative support teams. The concept was conceived by the creators (one a practising solicitor, the other an entrepreneur) to disrupt the traditional law firm model of a constrained partnership hierarchy of both experience and remuneration, primarily concentrated on office-based working.

One of the greatest challenges identified in the PwC survey, noted above, was the need for law firms to adapt more to a hybrid working model in the wake of the

pandemic. Mostly, it reports that firms have effectively adopted this change, although further steps need be taken to optimise effective ways of working. It concludes that, *“Challenging conditions look set to continue, and law firms must continue to demonstrate agility to successfully navigate the turbulent times ahead.”* (Wolstenholme, 2022, p.1).



Source: Keystone Law (Keynews), 2022

With the Keystone model, flexibility in operation was a core principle. This type of business model encompassed remote working away from a centralised office, no target culture (i.e., working to management billing and time targets), and with hourly fee rates left to be determined by individual solicitor consultants (partners). That allowed the lawyers to do what they did best – that is practise law and focus on client engagement, rather than become constrained by management activities and firm policymaking as one gained seniority by time served but did not

necessarily gain management skills. A straightforward notion that encountered considerable resistance from the established City law firms. The report by Arden Partners, and reviewed by the Law Society Gazette, confirmed that the traditional firms viewed the Keystone legal consultancy model with some disdain, and it was *“dismissed as a passing trend or of minor consequence”* (Taddia, 2022, p.18). It has, though, proved robust and successful with an increasing number of practices operating in the commercial law sector, recruiting primarily from not only mid-tier firms but now “Magic Circle”, in-house, and national law firms, in a diverse range of legal sectors (my own; marine, being one of them).

This piece of work looks at Keystone Law, the largest, and it could be reasonably presumed (by the legal awards won) the most successful of the platform type firms in the market. I wished to consider if there had been a change in the last fifteen years or so in the demographic of lawyers applying to join the firm. The work will examine lawyers who joined the firm in two different time periods; to look at and consider if they are joining at an earlier age/post qualification experience: their motivations and their focus, as well as their seniority and experience at the time of joining Keystone Law. As somewhat of a paradox to the overriding principle of flexibility when the model was conceived, some joiners to Keystone prefer to work in an office environment rather than at home, but still wish to retain IT flexibility – that is the ability to have all they need on a custom-built laptop for remote working when required, coupled with the professional support teams in London.

Consequently, this is one adjustment that has had to be considered as the model developed. Keystone has therefore added offices and workstations in its London central office which lawyers can hire by the day or longer term. So-called “pods” have also developed, whereby teams of solicitors join the firm rather than

individuals which had generally been the case. This will be examined in my interviews.

Established commercial law firm structures have been rather outmanoeuvred by this new (and increasingly fashionable) business model and are now taking a serious interest in the threat posed; one being losing high quality, high billing lawyers. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how versatile the platform model is, with a seamless transition for both lawyers and staff to home working, using the bespoke IT platforms designed for remote access.

Research Question

The question to be posed is, “how the characteristics, and reason for joining such a practice, changed/developed? In addition, if so, then how and why? - especially when one only gets paid when the client pays - a significant risk factor for the individual lawyer. Furthermore, how will this situation play out in the coming years in a changing legal marketplace generally and with the firm’s business strategy? There are good reasons to believe that platform companies will become more popular, within professional services at least, post COVID-19 since the pandemic has advanced the principle of remote/dispersed working by some years.

Whilst there are now a growing number of similar firms in the UK legal marketplace, there has been little study in how a particular firm has evolved. In this regard Keystone Law was the first of the platform firms and a benchmark for the alternative type of law firm. There have been very recent research papers in 2021 and 2022, sometime after this study was commenced, on this growing legal sector that have considered the developing platform law firm sector and some of the firms operating in that area (PwC, 2022, Codex Edge, 2021/22, Flex Legal, 2022, Thomson Reuters’ 2021, and Arden, 2021). There has, however, been no study

on Keystone Law as a firm (or indeed any particular practice), and which focuses on how and why the demographic has altered and whether the business model may have to adapt. Moreover, whether the type of practitioner joining has pushed the change – or indeed their clients. There are studies into the development of IT and artificial intelligence that affect the law firm model generally, for example, by the IT research company Atlas Cloud (Watson, 2021). However, there has not been any directly associated with the actual Keystone firm model and its development. My research will concentrate on, and consider, the changing demographic of new joiner solicitors to the practice of Keystone Law, set primarily with the developments in business culture in general, and the challenges now experienced by the legal profession, particularly in view of the post COVID-19 work environment considerations.

Whilst the platform model is proving successful, there are genuine considerations that potential recruits must consider. There is now a growing number of platform firms, but the challenge is how many lawyers are there who have the sort of following and the business development skills to feed themselves? This model relies on a level of self-sufficiency of its consultants. Clearly, there are lawyers who can do that (have client followings), but whether there are enough who can consistently do that, will be the question (LexisNexis, 2022). Another potential barrier for entry to the revenue-sharing platform model, is not having adequate financial support to tide over newly appointed joiners in the initial period whilst they attempt to procure client work.

Notwithstanding the above, Keystone is flourishing in a difficult and uncertain time for the legal sector. Its revenue rose by 27% to £69.6m in the 2021/22 year (Avery, 2022). The legal services area is undergoing significant fundamental change as new business models emerge, such as Keystone Law - firms which

leverage contemporary technology to confront the traditional law firm model. This has been emphasised by the growing headcount at such firms, growing much faster than traditional firm competitors. As mentioned above, data suggests that up to 25% of lawyers could work at alternative law firms, such as the platform model, within the next three years (Codex Edge, 2022).

This research will, I believe, assist those on the management board at Keystone Law who must consider the business plan for the practice for the next five or so years. Moreover, it will assist their thinking when developing coherent strategies, based partly on past development (including considered historical errors, such as office space) and current uncertainties in the marketplace. For example, the rapid growth of the sector, training, and importantly recruitment and retention, as aggressive alternative platform firms look for recruits and who may offer real alternatives.

In this work-based project, I will investigate the changing demographic of a new model law firm with international offices and sophisticated clients. I will focus on the practitioner, the baby boomers, millennials, and to an extent Generation X, who have changed how the firm has progressed in the last 15 years or so. Why this demographic has changed has not been generally debated, certainly not with a single legal business. Jordan Furlong (a legal researcher) and others have cited reasons for general change in the industry, but not in the context of one business model and the success story which is Keystone Law (Furlong, 2017/19). Whilst there is literature which provides analysis into why people are motivated to move firms (examples cited above), some common themes may have emerged, but not especially as to the demographic of lawyers in the firm. Darryl Cooke, a co-founder of a large platform law firm, discussed why the profession needs to change and why the “challenger” law firms (as he called the platform firm) are

doing that, but he does not consider the change in the firm itself (Cooke, 2018). An article in another legal journal discussed why lawyers are moving to the so-called “Gig economy” law firms, and cites flexibility, money, and ability to raise children whilst running a business, as reasons (Griffith, 2019). In the findings of the Arden report mentioned before, it was said that future generations of lawyers are of the view that equity partnership is an increasingly unappealing ambition (Llewellyn-Lloyd, 2021).

A study of one practice, Keystone Law will provide both an overview and the changes identified in recent research into the UK legal marketplace. More particularly though, how that change has manifested itself in Keystone itself and what changes may have to be accommodated, or at least considered to adapt to the different types of lawyers looking to leave the traditional law firm, and in their expectations and those of their clients. This work-based project has been written primarily for the benefit of the management team of Keystone Law. Its style has been deliberately penned in the “*first person*”, such that its contents are readily digestible by non-academic colleagues whose primary focus is on the business strategy of the firm, and how Keystone Law may continue to adapt its professional stratagem during a period of significant change, in the legal profession as a whole but specifically, within the platform law firm - as this type of dispersed legal offering experiences exponential growth with an increasing number of new firms in the marketplace adopting similar business models. This study seeks to accomplish this.

CHAPTER TWO

COMPARATIVE RESEARCH AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

There is a paucity of existing literature and/or research into the implications of changes within Keystone Law - which is the subject of this research project. Such change includes the demographic and other personal characteristics of change in the lawyers joining, not just by for example age (such as generational changing attitudes), and qualification time, but also the changing attitude of practitioners and their personal motivations. As Keystone was the earliest such platform consultancy law firm, there were no pre-existing practices or models of law firm to investigate, and consequently no existing literature or studies. As my Introduction notes, there have been in the last two years or so, and sometime after this research commenced, several published studies/surveys on the legal consultancy sector and model of business (especially its growth trajectory, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic). This will be explored in this study (for example, PwC in 2022, Codex Edge in 2021/22, Flex Legal in 2022, Thomson Reuters' in 2021, and Arden Partners in 2021).

Given the inventiveness of the legal consultancy style of business, it is important to consider what makes Keystone Law what it is, and how it can operate as it does. This will I trust paint a picture, which assists in both the research aim and will enable the reader to understand the sector, and why this research is important to the business. To undertake this task, and given the lack of existing persuasive literature, I intend to examine various influences (not necessarily unique to a law practice) to illustrate how the Keystone model operates, along with what similarities and differences there are as to what can be termed the traditional law

firm model. By doing so, I will interconnect the various threads to support the context to the Keystone model, and importantly the individuals who may join it as lawyer consultants.

Before one can review this progress, and more importantly to my research aim – the people who come to Keystone Law, the changing demographic within the firm, and the evolving motives for applying to join, it is pertinent to consider the traditional English law firm structure. In addition, the English legal market's evolution in the last 25 years or so, particularly following significant statutory interventions. Moreover, and importantly, what the future may hold for such firms with the advent of more flexible working models - such as the one deployed within the Keystone model.

Whilst not predominantly pertinent to this work, it is important to note that the emphasis of this study is on an English law firm, although in the production of this thesis, I have considered more general observations and commentaries from writers in the United States and Canada where the legal structures, training, and evolution, are akin to the English common law model of practice. This contrasts with the European codified legal arrangements, with the significant cultural and structural differences in how the law is both constructed and practised. In the codified system, there is a methodical collection of statutes so arranged thus avoiding inconsistency and overlapping interpretation. In the common law approach, the law originates from sources such as court decisions, customs, and principles of jurisprudence (Law Teacher, 2013). As with all things “legal”, it is never clear-cut and in England and Wales, although a common law system there is an element of overlap.

Notwithstanding that, this thesis considers the progress and the demographic change within a London solicitor's practice; some of the background and reasons

for the evolution of the Keystone form of legal business can be related to other industries that have employed similar professional models for their companies. It is reasonable to postulate that such businesses were scrutinised by the founders of Keystone Law when they considered, the rather revolutionary concept (in 2002), using technology and remote working as a progressive model in what was a rather orthodox and traditional business sector. By way of example, the highly successful St James's Place, a FTSE 100 wealth management company, was one such organisation that was studied by Keystone's founder, James Knight (Wilson, 2018). Accordingly, it is important to consider some organisations outside the legal sector, together with current literature and research which will cast further illumination for my research.

The COVID-19 pandemic, of 2019 to 2021, has brought remote and flexible working into strict focus (Taddia, 2022). Within the general confines of the recent pandemic, the creative and highly flexible system of working that Keystone Law (and others) deployed when the UK Government imposed "stay at home" edicts on business, was comparatively seamless. Conversely, many other large traditional law firm partnerships did not have the adaptable IT capability to engage quickly with the enforced system of home working. Remote or hybrid working has now become mainstream and typical business practice. There is recent research and commentary on how the future will look with several businesses (including law firms, accountancy practices, and banks) abandoning large corporate offices (or scaling down) and moving to semi-permanent flexible working models (Llewellyn-Lloyd, 2021). For Keystone Law, the unfortunate and unimagined requirement to work remotely, as a direct consequence of the global pandemic, had little impact – the firm was supremely able to transition; even for its office-based support staff – clear evidence (if such were needed) of the flexibility and success of the model.

A further outcome, which will be considered in this research project, is the effect on the recruitment and the characteristics of lawyers wanting to join such a firm. Remote or hybrid working in 2022/3 is not, of course, a legal business phenomenon. So, in this literature review, it is of import to consider recent discussions and research on this evolving phenomenon as it may (it is considered) directly relate to the Keystone lawyer and their personal motives for joining the firm, and as such, an important aspect when a consideration is made of my research aim.

A short article, concentrating on Keystone Law in the legal publication *Legal Business in 2022*, spoke to three recently incumbent Keystone lawyers about their own journeys to the platform offering. It did not however examine what their actual motivations were when they were considering a move (and why), although it did touch upon what they liked about Keystone. It rather came across as a promotional piece rather than a critical analysis (Avery, 2022). Otherwise, there is little existing narrative concerning why individuals chose to join Keystone Law as a business, and in particular why motivations may have changed in the period that this research is focussed on.

I consider it important to reflect on the more generic reasons as to why solicitors change firms, also the types of legal structures that are now available in the marketplace. As such, this literature review has looked at the areas that have influenced such decision making (not necessarily legal in origin). By deploying subheadings, and with these in mind, I will cover the general areas/factors which have influenced lawyer choice and career opportunity, (or lack thereof), with a view to then tailoring the prevailing literature to the Keystone experience and the motivations of legal professionals, which will be addressed in the interviews that form the principal aspect of this research.

Constituents of a Platform Consultancy Law Firm

In considering the existing literature/research, I consider that there ought to be a proper reflection of a number of the key areas which have been mooted above, and for the sake of clarity, and ease of discussion/analysis to break these down into defined segments; the law firm, the advent of Alternative Business Models (ABS), Information Technology (IT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI), the solicitor, the client, remote working, image, risk and brand – an important concept in legal practice. By doing this and drawing in research and commentaries from similar non-legal models where necessary, this study can then refine itself to the analysis of: Keystone Law, its structures, lawyers who join it, and the primary emphasis in the stated research question. For ease of review, I have set this out diagrammatically below.



The primary constituents of a platform law firm.

The Firm - Tradition was Key

Before one can fully appreciate the concept of the Keystone model of a law firm, it is essential to appreciate how the predominant model for legal practice works.

The traditional solicitor's practice, whether a two-partner High Street practice or global commercial firm, has fundamentally the same business model which has changed little – even following the Legal Services Act 2007 which promoted alternative business models that allowed diversity of law firm ownership (Legislation.co.uk, 2021). Law firms in the United Kingdom consist of sole practitioners, or more commonly partnerships. Until the Legal Services Act, only qualified solicitors could have “partner” status, that is effectively a share of ownership in a firm. In this model of business, seniority rules, and the legal profession remains one of the last business sectors to retain this legacy (Moradzadzadeh, 2021). Such firms have a standard structure, a hierarchy based on seniority which has changed little since their founding ethos in the medieval guilds (Darbyshire, 2020). Would-be solicitors undertook articles of clerkship. Since 1970, having studied law (or a non-law subject) and post graduate professional qualifications, a two-year training contract is mandated. Since 1990, Articled Clerkship became a Training Contract and “articled clerks” morphed into “trainees” (Darlow, 2014).

Irrespective of the practice, a would-be solicitor joins a firm on a contract for two years, and assuming they are retained after the training contract, work their way slowly up the ladder of seniority (see Appendix Six) by time served, fee targets achieved, and billable hours – particularly so in the square mile of the City of London and those firms in other large cities. The goal of partnership and a share in the profits (which could be considerable) might be attained approximately ten years later – if at all. At partner level, the individual moves into management roles,

irrespective in many instances of previous experience or interest. In simple terms, seniority of experience rules practice (Moradzadzadeh, 2021).

The structure of an English law firm, and what the distinction is with the Keystone model, also needs to be clarified before it is possible to have a full appreciation of the fundamental change that Keystone inspired. The English legal system differs from many jurisdictions in that there are two main branches within the legal profession, namely solicitors and barristers. Whilst not necessitating a comprehensive treaty on legal history from the 12th Century, it is important to distinguish that new model firms, such as Keystone Law, share some of the benefits from both sides of the divide, thus relevant to this research. Barristers are lawyers who plead cases before the courts of England and Wales, whilst solicitors (called attorneys until 1873) are the interface with clients and prepare the procedural side of cases on a day-to-day basis (Brand, 2011). There have been several reforms over the years with monopolies being eroded, hence the more generic term “lawyer” which includes several others employed in the legal sector, such legal executives, and licensed conveyancers. I will use the term lawyers in this study. The two branches of the profession can, to a great extent, now do each other’s job, and non-solicitors can be partners in solicitors’ firms (i.e., legal executives and accountants), although the Bar (generic term for barristers) and the solicitors’ profession maintain their own regulatory frameworks. There is an on-going debate as to a fusion of the two professions (as has occurred in Canada, the United States, and Australia), but this has yet to enjoy traction in the UK where the primary arguments seem more about duplication of effort and money rather than access to justice (Lawrence, 2008).

Barristers are instructed by solicitors, although through the legal reforms mentioned above, the public may have what is called *direct access* to certain

barristers. Traditionally, barristers are self-employed individuals who join a Chambers (a group of barristers) where resources are pooled (such as administration and finance functions) and the individual pays a percentage of fees to his/her chambers. This is a broadly similar concept to the platform firm. The solicitors' profession has followed a similar path. That is, one or more solicitors join up with each other to practise law. Historically, such firms have been quite small, two or three like-minded individuals forming a partnership sharing the profits and the costs (and liabilities), and many such firms enjoyed success on the high streets of towns in England and Wales, offering services such as conveyancing, probate, and family law.

Over the last 30 years or so, commercial legal practices (those offering a wide range of business-related legal services), primarily in the larger cities, began to grow (principally by mergers), and to enjoy economies of scale following the US model (Arden, 2021). There are now numerous international legal practices employing thousands of lawyers operating in various jurisdictions (the global partnership Clifford Chance, a good example with 2,784 lawyers, 121 directors, and offices in 39 countries).³ Conversely, the concept of the elite super firm, or "BigLaw" as it is sometimes referred to, primarily in the USA, is not something European law firms have embraced. One reason for this is the codified system of law, whereby using the Civil codes makes interpretation of a contract quite short, whereupon many international corporate transactions rely upon English (or US) Common law, where contracts must be drafted to consider many eventualities. Global business predominantly requires such contracts, and law firms grew internationally to accommodate this requirement (Cassis, 2006). The legal

³ Source: Clifford Chance, 2021.

commentator, Jordan Furlong, considers what he calls the “zenith of BigLaw” will be reached by 2024 as the so-called Baby Boomer generation retire (those born between 1946 to 1964), and where the traditional billable hour was king (Furlong, 2019). This changing demographic of individuals is of import to my research, as will be noted later, but I do not fully accept Furlong’s view – although time has moved on significantly in the last three years. The super law firm (Including the big four accountancy practices with legal arms) will be part of the legal landscape for the foreseeable future primarily given that the type of specialist law sectors enjoyed by such firms, and as such, I do not consider the large law firms will change for many years to come - from my own experience practising in the sector.

The well-regarded legal analyst, Professor Stephen Mayson, similarly opined that the BigLaw business model of the larger firm is flawed. Whilst he concedes for some legal work it may work, his view was that large firms still adhered slavishly to the cost of time (the billable hour), then an added mark-up, whereas such firms were facing increasingly crumbling client demand as clients were faced with an increasing range of alternative options, although he did not refer to the platform law firm offering as being one. Mayson argues that, had such firms been in tune with their client and own lawyers’ requirements (as they erroneously considered they were), there would be no room or requirement for the emergence of alternative legal structures (Mayson, 2021). He reaches analogous conclusions to Furlong (2019), in that it is as much the type of lawyer entering practice as the client, although he does not identify so called millennials as such. Junior lawyers, he suggests, are not committed to long hours and poor work life balance for what was insufficient financial or future profit as an equity partner - the seeming goal for all lawyers, such firms’ management boards assume. This point has been investigated further in recent reports into the UK (and US) legal sectors where the

millennial problem, and post COVID pandemic, has fundamentally altered perceptions, faster than Furlong and Mayson predicted (Codex Edge, 2021/22).

To a degree, I consider Mayson accurate, especially on the individual lawyer's changing perception to work. With regard to the law firm structure, I accept his analysis may fit relatively well in the mid-market sector (where Keystone sits), and as such, is a threat to BigLaw, but it would not overtly affect the international law firms; where multinational and large complicated transactions require large teams of lawyers to be on standby – something in my view, a platform firm (of self-employed individuals) just could not compete with. This can be illustrated in an article in the Times by Jonathan Ames, where among other matters discussed, he quotes an 8.5% growth in fee income for the largest ten firms in the City, most who could be regarded as BigLaw. Conversely, the legal practices that are a step-down, have revenues predicted to slow or stagnate to some extent (Ames, 2022).

Notwithstanding the diversity of firm types in the UK, the traditional structure remains, as noted, to a large extent, unchanged to the solicitors' practices of more than 100 years ago – a hierarchical office-based system based on chargeable hours, targets, and strict promotion criteria (Financial Times, 2019).

In 2003, Sir David Clementi undertook a review of the regulatory framework for legal services in England and Wales. His remit was to consider what would be the best structure to promote innovation and competition in a more effective legal sector. In addition, he was challenged to recommend an independent framework which would be comprehensive, flexible, transparent, and not overtly restrictive (LSB, 2021). In his recommendations, he advocated the establishment of alternative business structures that would have different types of lawyers and non-lawyers managing and owning law firms. The UK government accepted most of these recommendations and enshrined them in the Legal Services Act 2007. This

ushered in a fundamental transformation for the legal sector, and allowed for new, more innovative, business models with client service at the core. Keystone Law is one such practice model that took advantage of this legislation. Indeed, what this study will consider, in terms of its structure, is the employment of its lawyers and those lawyers' motivations when considering their career options in making a departure from the established norm.

As observed in the Introduction, the market in which Keystone generally operates (known as mid-market – firms in the top 200 in the UK) has suffered for several years. Pressure has come from commoditisation of services and the economic climate, with consequential pressure of fee income and is compounded by increasing overheads (CityUK, 2018). To alleviate this, traditional firms increased billing and performance targets of lawyers, but in the meantime still expecting them to carry out the management and marketing responsibilities (Financial Times, 2019). What was worrying however, was that increasingly many lawyers did not see the merit of the goal of equity – as contended by Mason (2021) above and affirmed by the Arden report in 2021 (Llewellyn-Lloyd, 2021).

In traditional firms, partners shared the profit, and in many cases, promotion was stymied by older partners wishing to retain more of the profits (Financial Times, 2019). This outmoded model has assisted new types of legal practices, such as Keystone, to recruit highly motivated lawyers looking for alternative career paths. The opportunity for a new disruptive model had emerged. They provide workers with greater flexibility, work life balance, and independence. They also provide more financial motivation to lawyers working long hours (Griffith, 2019). The legal consultancy model of a platform firm has predominated within the mid-market sector, and in a few years, it may well dominate this sector (Godfrey, 2021).

The Solicitor and Generational Theory

In 2020 a leading international legal recruitment company, Major, Lindsey & Africa (MLA), surveyed US law school graduates born between 1995 and 2000 (who they postulated will make up 36% of the workforce by 2021). This qualitative and methodological research showed that 59% of those interviewed still saw the large traditional firm model as their future – primarily motivated by the perceived high calibre training and financial rewards (Peart and Lefebvre, 2020). Conversely, a similar survey by the same company in 2019, of 1,200 so-called millennial lawyers (generally those born late 1980s to early 2000s) when asked about their ten-year goals (partnership status), only 40% saw themselves as a partner in their current firm or similar (Fivel and Bhatt, 2019). This survey contradicts, somewhat, the younger interviewees' views in the 2020 survey as to longevity in a firm, but there is a synergy in that it appears a lawyer (having experienced some actual working life experience) concluded that work life balance was their top priority with 75% of those surveyed willing to trade money for flexible work or reduced billing targets. In addition, over 75% would not put firm loyalty as a priority. Interestingly, 21.4% interviewed (from junior associate to partner level) thought that the traditional law firm model was *“fundamentally broken”*. This research accorded with Richard Mason's views in the UK (Mason, 2021).

Both research methods deployed were grounded on a constructivist phenomenological standpoint looking at the personal experiences of the participants, albeit the earlier survey was more centred upon the perceived future, and the later one on actual shared experience, which may account for the divergence of opinion. This major study has, in some regard, been affirmed in other recent research (Reynolds, 2022). This Codex Edge report noted, “Once many lawyers aimed to climb the Hierarchy with the hope of eventually becoming

a partner. However, this career path entails years of impossibly high targets, ever increasing billable hours, workplace politics and bureaucracy. Now lawyers are waking up to the fact that there is more to life than partnership.” (Reynolds, 2022, p.2)

I should mention that the MLA surveys, as referred to above, looked at US lawyers, but the US has the same basic structures as in the UK, and the same disruptive developments – the firm Rimon PC, a leading example. A survey, conducted by the recruitment firm “Lindsay & South”, found that only 23% of young practising lawyers that were interviewed expressed an interest in the traditional career and a partnership, and 7% left the law altogether in the first few years of practice (Times, 2021). One major factor was a requirement of flexibility in working life – a similar view as that found in the MLA surveys. A further UK study, by Thomson Reuters, opined that the appetite for flexible working has increased dramatically, with 63% of those surveyed wanting more flexible hours. This was compared with 22% pre the COVID pandemic. Most wished to work in a hybrid manner (Thomson Reuters, 2021).

Such comparisons (albeit some pre COVID) are noteworthy, as clearly at graduation stage aspirations were quite reasonably focussed on career and the traditional structure students had learnt that they had exposure to at law school – the ridged hierarchy and aspiration to partnership. However, following some experience at the “coal face” of long hours and high stress, attuned younger lawyers’ minds as to their aspirations at more senior level. This will be looked at more when considering Keystone lawyer’s own reasons for leaving the traditional practice. Of note, however, neither of these surveys, save Reynolds (2022) on the rise of alternative law firms, considered the actual Keystone model of practice, which, to reiterate my introduction, has been referred to in several ways such as

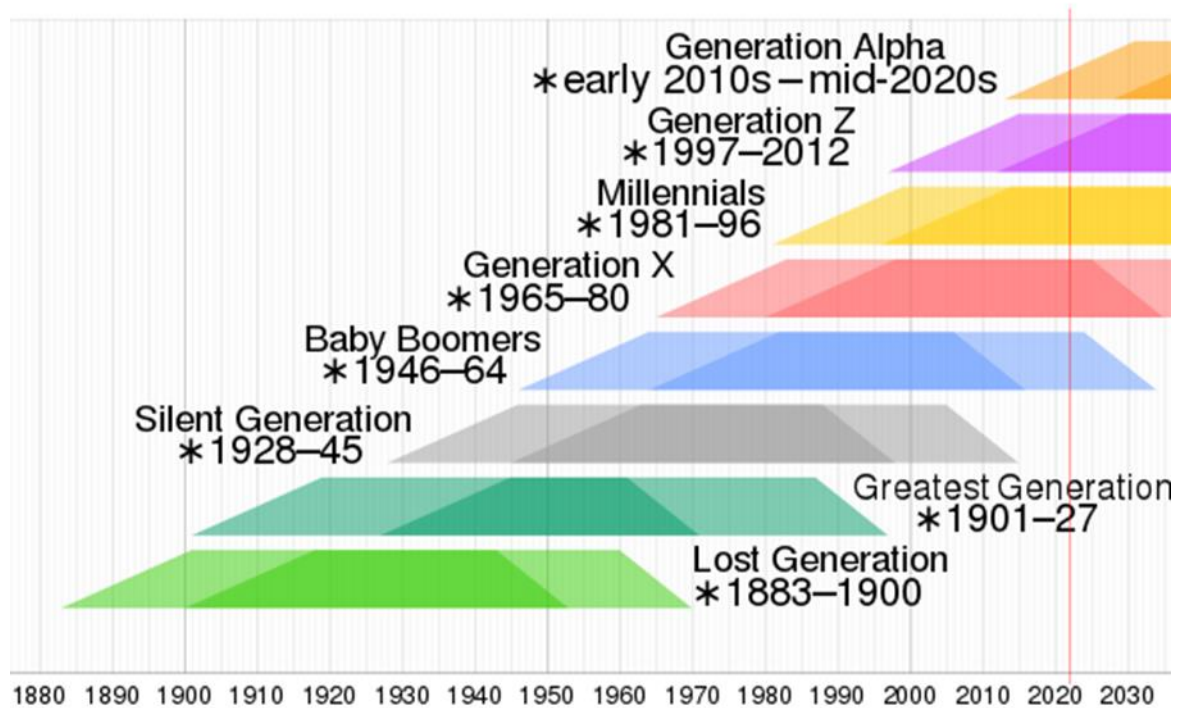
the platform firm, dispersed law firm, disruptive practice, or distributed law firm, all seemingly to be used interchangeably dependent upon the commentator. Given the fundamental difference, particularly in the lack of hierarchical promotion criteria for example, it is considered that an MLA survey done in the next year or two, now that the platform style of law firm has greater prevalence in the marketplace, may alter the finding postulated above – especially for career progression in the earlier research with law students. Of course, one distinction is that most lawyers historically in these disruptive firms are senior (by time qualified) with client followings, otherwise there would be significant financial risk - notwithstanding lack of employability credentials at such firms. This was considered in my interviews and may be changing – a point that will be further explored in this research.

Contrary to some of the views expressed in the surveys referenced, many lawyers do remain in the large commercial firms for many reasons, including type, quality and scope of work, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to retain mid-level associates (the most financially productive for the firm), as no matter what salaries are on offer, life style expectations override career in the traditional firms (Reynolds, 2022, Codex Edge, 2022). As such, the new model or platform disruptive firms' business models are finding attraction with younger lawyers. Professor Mayson argued that in large firms (BigLaw), the stresses to achieve targets and fulfil expectations are causing a drift away from such firms by an increasing number of mid-level associates. As he opined, there is more to work than just exorbitant salaries (Mayson, 2021).

Jordan Furlong mentioned above, and a market analyst on the future of legal practice, argue that it is now a buyer's market, and that firms and lawyers must adapt to survive. How one works, and who one recruits, an important factor (Furlong, 2017). He based his report on a series of interviews with senior partners

in both legal and other professional firms in the US and UK. Additionally, in one of his legal blogs, he discussed that it is extremely unlikely that millennial lawyers will be content following rigid hierarchies, hourly billing, such features of their “parents” law firms, and simply carry on as before. Equally improbable, he opined that millennial clients would continue to dutifully send volumes of straightforward tasks to law firms and pay the resulting invoices without complaint. Furlong believes that era has passed (Furlong, 2017). A report by the UK Law Society expands on this viewpoint. The professional firm is changing, be it law, or other organisations that offer skills of highly experienced staff to clients who require outside advice to address specific issues, the type of people, and entry criteria remain similar although that is changing. Legal apprentices for example (Law Society, 2020). It is of note that the millennium lawyer will increasingly have millennium clients – who don’t necessarily see large offices and rigid hierarchy’s as important – more the competence and likability of the lawyer acting for them. This could also be similar for Generation Z lawyers (currently at the start of their careers), a survey just prior to COVID by Major, Lindsay & Africa observed, and directed at law school students (Peart and Lefebvre, 2020).

As seen above, there are arguments offered as to the changing attitudes towards work (both pre pandemic and subsequently) with the differences as between the generations – the legal sector just conforming to the norm in society. The generally accepted generational theory designations given, are noted below.



Source: Wikiwand, 2023

Various models of generational theory, mentioned above, have been espoused over the years and to which the designations illustrated above commonly fall. One such theory was put forward in 1991 by the Americans William Strauss and Neil Howe. In its most simple form, their hypothesis asserted that there is a recurring cycle of four generations that recurs about every eighty years. The cycle commences with a period of crisis, followed by a period of prosperity (known as a “high”), then there is an “awakening”, and finally the “unravelling” leading to another crisis and repeat. There are four generations, with each generation shaped by the events that occurred when members of that generation were growing up. Of note to the designations in the above diagram, according to Strauss and Howe, the Baby Boomer generation is an idealist generation, Generation X is a reactive generation, the Greatest Generation and the Millennial generation are both civic generations, and the Silent Generation along with Generation Z, are both adaptive generations. The last “high” was in the 1950s and early 1960s, the era of prosperity when the Baby Boomers were growing up (Van

Eck Duymer van Twist, 2021). Whilst this model could possibly create a fit with the individuals joining law firms and their aspirations, the theory has been debunked to a great extent as there is not any credible evidence to support it. In many cases, Strauss and Howe identify various historical events as being of a certain kind, simply because of when they happened and not because of their traits (Reeves and Oh, 2008). Jessica Kriegel, in Forbes Magazine, rather debunks generational theory and the above illustrated generally accepted designations. She stated that so-called experts have created “*reductive stereotypes*” which therefore prevent us considering people as individuals that they actually are. Moreover, generational stereotypes do not allow for natural human development as one moves through one’s life stages (Kriegel, 2015). Whilst I appreciate the argument made, for an adaptive workplace and especially for those in management to understand their workforce, I believe that a certain consideration of the generally accepted facets of generational theory are realistic and acceptable. In my own career, in management and recruitment of junior lawyers, I have taken note of generational theory to an extent when reflecting on recruitment and retention, this was certainly a topic on the agenda in most partners’ conferences attended in various firms. This work will further be discussed in the Analysis in Chapter Four.

Notwithstanding the theories of generational change discussed above, it has been reasonably established that there are unique traits, strengths, and abilities within e.g., the baby boomer, Generation X, and the millennial generations (see illustration below). Those in management of businesses, and the professions (generally), must adapt to harness the potentials of each generation (Pendergast, 2009). The dominating set, the baby boomer generation, gradually retire over the next few years and this period of assumed stability coming to an end (Howe &

Strauss, 2000). This had been noted in the legal profession in the studies referenced above. As such, the importance of understanding generations and their effects on the profession is an important consideration for all law firms to reflect upon.



Source: LDG, 2022

The professional firm is changing, be it law, or others – organisations that offer skills of highly experienced staff to clients who require outside advice to address specific issues. The type of people and entry criteria remain similar, although that too is changing. Legal apprentices for example (Law Society, 2020). Van der Mandel and Parker opine that with the changes in approach, and globalisation of talent, there are increased opportunities and complications created by the increasing diversity of staff – with professional and personal expectations. Also, how this change will be managed by the increasing sophistication of clients and technology (Van der Mandele and Parker, 2009). Van der Mandele and Parker, both management consultants, have highlighted the change that a platform law firm has to an extent encompassed - the need to look at how the world is

developing. Firstly, the ability to develop with Alternative Business Structures (ABS), then a consideration of the real expectations of the lawyers in the business – and not forgetting clients’ ever changing and sophisticated requirements. The flexibility of the platform model has allowed firms to develop quickly and to changing needs and expectations. As Susskind (2015) foresaw, IT and AI has already shown how versatile it can be during the current pandemic and with AI there has in 2023 been a remarkable rise in its use. However, the practitioner has had to develop also, and indeed the recruitment policy of firms. Much of that is organic and the Keystone law model, developed over 20 years, has shown this. Versatile working, with clients’ expectations leading the way, has shown lawyers that flexible working away from the office is part of the future of law.

Jordan Furlong and others, such as Richard Susskind, have cited reasons for general change in the industry, but not in the context of one business model and accomplishment which is Keystone Law. Whilst there is literature which provides analysis into why people are motivated to move firms (examples cited above), some common themes may emerge - but not especially as to the actual demographic of lawyers in a firm. Darryl Cooke, a co-founder of a large platform law firm, discussed why the profession needs to change and why the “challenger” law firms are doing that, but did not consider the change in the firm itself to accommodate generational attitudes (Cooke, 2018). An article, in another legal journal, discussed why lawyers are moving to the so-called “gig economy” law firms, and cites flexibility, money, and ability to raise children (Griffith, 2019). Furlong, in another research report, argues that whilst in the last 50 years or so, young lawyers have focussed on the commercial legal market (as against the more societal but lower remunerated roles in crime for example), where salaries are higher, work varied but with the downside of long hours and targets. The

millennium lawyer with changing attitudes to career and the advance of IT/AI are starting to consider more social roles with work life balance (Furlong, 2019). This might include working in the civic community and with a consideration of a balance in life in the traditional BigLaw environment to the platform law firms offerings, where targets and time recording are not the *raison d'être* of employment. Furlong did not, at that time, factor in the perceived advantages of the platform consultancy structure and its focus on lifestyle benefit.

It is suggested that whilst Furlong paints a vivid picture of where he considers the legal sector will be in the future, and even 2034 and 2044 in his report, much of it is conjecture and based on what he perceived will be the advance of technology and perhaps outside interference from Chinese and Indian state run legal systems, but in the medium term at least large corporate legal firms will continue to control the commercial legal space and BigLaw will always be part of the legal system. In 2020, the consultancy legal model contributed only about one per cent of market share by value and similarly a very small percentage of the solicitors practising in England and Wales (Llewellyn-Lloyd, 2021). The comprehensive research report by Arden Partners, a bank specialising in funding new legal practices, does however conclude that growth in the new type of law firm will be 100% per annum with about a third of all lawyers working as consultants in five years – considering the different perceptions of millennium lawyers with more flexibility of career opportunity.

The business advisory firm, Hazlewoods, who researched into the decentralised legal models for some years, produced its latest update on the virtual law firm more particularly during the COVID-19 crisis (Hazlewoods, 2020). It opined that there was a 7% increase in lawyers in what it refers to as “virtual firms” in the UK since the outbreak of the pandemic, with 1,355 lawyers at such firms up from

1,270 pre COVID and from 803 in 2017. This research found that many lawyers question whether they could earn more at a lower overhead firm by retaining more of their billing. This conclusion rather conflicts with the theme espoused by Furlong about a move to more socially aware law. Money is still judged to be a significant driver for lawyers, notable by the salaries that newly qualified are paid in London, but only it seems if a balance is struck. In my experience as a recruiting partner in a large firm, salary is no longer a prime motivator. It is considered though, that this is exactly what many of the platform firms can provide (and state as such to aspiring recruits) – potentially more money and more flexibility, a heady mix for up-and-coming, and more established lawyers. This change as to individuals' perceptions of their careers will be explored in this thesis and whether money is a significant driver for such a personal change.

Remote Working

The Keystone business model was conceived with the overriding concept that the lawyers in the firm can be dispersed – that is not located in a central office or other offices. Senior lawyers recruited did not require direct supervision⁴ and could therefore work remotely. The Keystone business plan enabled the lawyers (also referred to as fee earners) to work from home, or in client offices where they wished, be it in the UK or, in some instances, abroad. The head office support team were office based (now in 2023 hybrid), there was a cadre of junior solicitors, trainee solicitors, and paralegals, all located in the head office to support the needs of the partners as required. This working model is a staple for the platform

⁴ As required under the regulation for solicitors practicing - Solicitors Regulation Authority, 2021.

or disruptive law firm model with a growing number of other firms now operating in the legal marketplace.⁵

This model for remote working with a central business base is not a Keystone invention nor indeed unique to law firms, although it is a model that lends itself in many regards to a legal practice, whereby lawyers in different disciplines can quite readily operate remotely assuming the IT infrastructure supports the operations in such areas as research, finance, client management, and communication with colleagues. Remote working was a concept embraced by the St James's Place financial services firm when it was conceived by Mike Wilson and Mark Weinburg in 1992 (Wilson, 2018). The St James's Place model was studied by the founders of Keystone Law, James Knight, and Charles Stringer, prior to setting up the firm. With the advances in technology and a growing breed of more commercial lawyers wanting a more independent lifestyle, the Keystone journey began in 2002 (as Lawyers Direct before rebranding) (Crainer, 2008).

There are advantages of remote working which some businesses have embraced for numerous years. For the employer, there is the benefit of reducing office space and the attendant costs. For the employee, an improved work/life balance has always been a draw to remote or home working. Sandy Chander, a recruitment consultant with HRS (Hyper Recruitment Solutions), argues that more healthier lifestyles can be a direct consequence of remote working. Examples being less office snacking, drinking after work, and more time to exercise. Also, a reduced carbon footprint with less need to commute (Chander, 2021). Chandler does, however, accept that there are also downsides which she cites as reduced

⁵ Such firms as Gunnercooke LLP, Arch Law, Taylor Rose, and Rimon PC.

social interaction, cybersecurity issues, communication, and increased distractions (children, deliveries, etc.) – especially for those new to such working.

A peer reviewed research study, undertaken by a university in Latvia for the NORDSCI conference on social sciences, acknowledged that remote working is a “modern form of employment”. The study repeats some of the more common points referred to by HRS, but its research conclusion was that remote work has more advantages than disadvantages to both the employer and employee. They concluded that there is a relationship between remote work and job satisfaction (Blumberga and Pylinskaya, 2019). The study was limited as it was concerned primarily with a particular IT business in Russia, but the results of this research may be borne out in time given the vast increase in remote and hybrid working worldwide in the post COVID-19 era. One conclusion of note, and not covered in other articles on the subject, was that of a prime benefit to such working for the employer was that it enabled a wider geographical pool for suitable employees, and conversely it reduced the need for an employee to move location for work.

With the Keystone paradigm in mind, there are partners working ostensibly in London (in so far as the client is concerned) but who live (and work) in varied locations across the world. This reflects the opportunities for the firm and the lawyers, enables partners to service their clients, and the firms have the best people irrespective of location and with the current trend of internet-based resource, Zoom/Microsoft Team meetings are becoming the norm. This benefits the remote lawyer, although some clients, however, do still require face to face meetings, as do many lawyers as more can be gleaned from such personal interfaces in meetings (body language), and there are physical downsides to prolonged video calls such as eye strain (Ramachandran, 2021). As such, there is

a measure of inflexibility for such partners unless they come to their own arrangements with established and loyal clients.

An article penned for the journal *People Management* by a practising employment lawyer, Alexandra Carn, examined remote working. There was an increasing number of employees working from home to some extent, but the COVID lockdowns saw a steep rise in such working practices. An issue that has been highlighted, is that of employees being unable to disconnect from work leading to a large increase in working hours but with no commensurate increase in salaries. Given that most Keystone lawyers are, in effect, self-employed, whilst working hours may increase, the lawyer would not be faced with the same issue with wages – most earning more (Carn, 2021). Carn goes on to consider the employer and their heightened obligations to think about their staff's mental health and safe workspace.⁶ Further obligations are enshrined in the Working Times Regulations and Equality Act 2010 – all further considerations to be considered for the remote working future. This article by Alexandra Carn (2021) will be of import to employers given a recent article in the *Law Gazette* which referenced a survey undertaken in 2022 by the legal technology provider Clio. This firm surveyed 154 lawyers about home working. This survey found that two-thirds of the lawyers who answered said that they were now working longer hours as a consequence of flexible working from home. Conversely two thirds also accepted that their work-life balance had improved since the end of the COVID lockdowns. Clio reported that these findings reinforced the results of its 2022 legal trends report, where 86% of lawyers worked outside the 9-5 working day, 74% worked 'after hours' and 69% dealt with clients at weekends. (Fouzder, 2023). Longer hours do seem to negate

⁶ Requirements under the Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974.

the benefit of flexible working and something employers will need to take heed of, irrespective of the slightly paradoxical work life balance finding. Sarah Murphy the manager at Clio who carried out the above referenced survey succinctly expressed the position that, *“Overworking is still overworking, even if you’re at home and have flexible hours”* (Fouzder, 2023, p.1).

As is well rehearsed, since the COVID-19 pandemic caused people to work from home in many parts of the world - both businesses and individuals had to adapt. The use of, or adoption of, home working is here to stay, as organisations struggle with the basics of operational and strategic support. There are various reasons which have been considered already, but in summary can be argued as economic necessity; to gain competitive advantage or a business continuity plan (pandemic response). There is little research into the virtues or disadvantages generally to a firm, particularly when considering the pandemic restrictions on work, but a research study carried out in March 2021 by the University of Lisbon sheds some interesting insights into this increasing business phenomena (Ferreira, Pereira, Bianchi and da Silva, 2021). The university deployed a design science research methodology to consider “remote working advantages, disadvantages, challenges and driving forces as well as their relation”. The authors carried out 129 qualitative interviews with professionals who home worked during their research. At the time of the research in Portugal, about 60% of the workforce were home working. They concluded that business (and personal) cost reduction and the flexibility to promote work-life balance were the main positives, whilst communication issues and technical difficulties, together with management issues of workers, are what was most concerning. As with other articles considered above, the overall conclusion was the positive attributes that outweighed the negatives for employer and employee. The Lisbon researchers concluded their research with several

recommendations. Investment in IT infrastructure/technology that was compatible with home working and has good levels of remote support was one. Another important suggestion was that the employer needed to find appropriate ways of ensuring employees could manage, and integrate, their personal and work life.

This is something Keystone Law has concentrated on for some time as remote working was always a cornerstone of the business. A firm *intranet* site keeps all staff fully informed, provides easily managed resources and helplines, as well as facility for social interaction (where it won various awards for its innovation during the pandemic).⁷ Of note, this study was carried out during the pandemic whereby some workers may have been forced to work remotely rather than by choice, given a growing number (at that time) of consultants (mainly teams) paradoxically preferred office working as observed in my Introduction. As such, their responses were perhaps influenced by this. Interestingly, the research above did not consider any job or culture of business (or size for that matter) may be better suited (or not) to a remote working role.

In April 2021, the UK government published a report focussed on health and employee rights when hybrid working. The report recommended a legal right to internet access and online health care – although new legislation may be some time off and therefore the emphasis is on employers to recognise the changing working landscape and ensure they have appropriate policies in place. The Carn (2021) article cited above and indeed the Gazette article in 2022, evoked important considerations, but it is not I consider pertinent to the Keystone model, save where support staff have worked remotely or consider hybrid working. The firm emphasis is on the support function being preferably fully office based and as

⁷ Source: Keystone Law, 2021.

soon as possible. Keystone partners/consultants are directors of their own service companies and self-employed as consultants to the law firm, such considerations are not key – unless they employ junior staff in their pods (see below).

In an interview in June 2021 with the international legal website Legal Week, Keystone’s founder, James Knight, succinctly argues against the traditional view of the lawyer only being able to work productively in an office building. In the early 2000s, with the advent of faster internet and perceived changing attitudes to work (especially with millennium lawyers), he set up the firm disrupting this long-held view. He argued (what many in the business now accept) that the dispersed law firm has become a known force in the legal sector – job applications since COVID lockdowns has merely accelerated the growth of such firms. Knight does, however, strike a cautionary tone. The traditional City firms embracing some form of home working but keeping the same strictures on targets and ethos will not reap the benefits without a significant reflection on culture and a “collaborative community”, as he calls it, which will increase both engagement from the lawyers and productivity.⁸

Working at home, or away from the main office, has been to some a draw, and to others in the legal profession, and elsewhere, a notion not particularly favoured. There are distinct advantages in working in an office with a team when discussion and ideas can be aired more easily, and culture also plays an important role. To counter this potential drawback, in Keystone there is an emphasis on the firm’s culture and inclusivity to bring remote workers together both online (intranet) and importantly in physical venues, where networking, meetings, and social interaction play a significant role in the ethos of the firm, and which may attract new joiners.

⁸ Source: James Knight, Keystone Law, 2021.

This notwithstanding, the legal regulator has also had to adapt to more remote working practices for law firms and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Solicitors Regulation Authority has promulgated guidance to practices in England and Wales, such that, firms must satisfy themselves that they have appropriate measures in place to supervise. Flexibility and the use of technology are also important considerations mooted (Law Society, 2021).

Supervision is an important, and of course required, function. If more lawyers are looking to join a platform firm somewhat earlier in their careers, and with the ongoing requirement to train solicitors for the future, there must also be a consideration of how this will take place in a more remote environment. Currently, Keystone Law training functions are undertaken at the head office in a more traditional environment, although, some new joiners bring their own teams and within that structure (called a “Pod”) they can apply to become training principals with the Law Society. This is I consider an area that, whilst outside the remit for this paper, would be a suitable subject for further research.

Keystone won the Lawyers prestigious UK Law Firm of the Year in 2020.⁹ A particular point made in the award citation was what was a difficult year in which the legal profession, in its entirety, had to go to virtual working, Keystone had been, “light years ahead”. It cited a technically enabled legal services provider that continued to attract good quality lawyers from the traditional law firms, (Griffiths, 2020). This award succinctly reflects the trajectory of the firm from its early days, encapsulates the radical changes in the legal sector, and consequently the shift in thinking for those looking for a different type of legal career – the emphasis of this research.

⁹ A prestigious and yearly award organised by the legal publication, Legal Business.

The Franchise Model

As with St James's Place, previously discussed, platform law firms deploy a form of franchise model of business whereby the owner of the business permits a third party (lawyer in this case) to operate (a service or product) under the owner's name, using its systems for a fee (Reader, 2016). The first franchises can be traced to feudal England when a landowner allowed his peasant certain rights on part of his land in return for a fee or share of the produce (harvest). The 1950s and 60s saw a huge increase in the franchise model in the UK (Reader, 2016). Most franchise models benefit from a well proven business model and strategies (Marten, 2020). The opticians' market has been mentioned, but dentistry is another business model that lends itself to the franchise structure. Dental clinics are on the increase across the UK as larger companies enter the market looking for economies of scale of operation (NF Dental Group, 2021).

The franchise model confers considerable advantages such as support, infrastructure, territorial rights, and profile. However, as with all such models there are also some disadvantages to consider, especially it is suggested for the lawyer working in an established law firm environment where in effect all the management and liability considerations are covered under the terms of one's contract or partnership deed. The web resource Science Direct used SWOT analysis to determine the pros and cons of franchising which illustrates some downsides that are common with all franchise models from McDonalds to Costa, and Bang & Olufsen (Salar, 2014). The initial set up costs can be high (product purchase for example), commonly there will be restrictive requirements to fit the business model, the main company (franchisor) could go out of business, the brand may be affected during the franchise agreement, and of course the franchisee must pay for the privilege and must make its own profits. The Salar analysis concluded that,

notwithstanding the advantages and disadvantages of the franchise model, franchising has more advantages than disadvantages in large part due to the known brand that is traded.

Neither the Salar (2014) research nor Reader's (2016) franchise guidebook considered the legal marketplace, although such firms had been operating both in the US and the UK at the time of the report and book. It is considered that there are additional advantages in the legal model franchise. Importantly, professional indemnity insurance which all lawyers and firms must hold, but which is increasingly expensive and difficult to procure, especially to a new entrant be it sole practitioner or firm set up (if a new firm can even procure such cover in a reduced insurance marketplace) (Davison, 2022). All the platform models of law practice in the UK offer, as part of the package, a professional indemnity cover. As such, having the benefit of operating under the franchisor's cover and its proven claims track without having to apply, is a significant benefit. In addition, more mature practitioners from small firms avoid the spectre of run off insurance (having to pay insurance premiums for up to six years post-retirement). Brand, of course, can be important and will be covered elsewhere in this review. In contrast and covered to a degree in the SWOT analysis above, there is the risk for a lawyer new to Keystone Law, or similar firm, of the cost of getting started when you only earn when you invoice. The recruit also must be conscious of a client's somewhat fickle attitudes to instructing a particular lawyer. Although the person is always an important consideration for a client, the profile of the firm may also be a motivator and is considered later in this research.

In speaking about franchise models in law, there are some that focus on supplying a defined service within the sector, rather than a full-service model such as Keystone. The franchise is a similar concept, but the individual is more self-

employed providing a certain service – for example, in conveyancing and will writing. Traditionally this would be the domain of the sole practitioner in a High Street practice, so distinct from the larger commercial model on which this thesis has its focus. One reason why this model is working, is the decline on the small practices that once abounded on the High Street (Point Franchise, 2021)

The franchise model of business is now well established in business generally, and one now more recently adapted in the legal sector since alternative business models were permitted in the Legal Services Act of 2007 as previously discussed. Its use for the small practice, undertaking domestic work under a uniform brand, has had some success in maintaining the High Street legal provision,¹⁰ but significantly allows large law firm business models to thrive and adapt with the franchiser providing significant opportunity to a company set up by the individual Lawyer, such as in Keystone Law and other commercial firms, where the reality of a franchise is not perhaps readily apparent to the client/contact. St James's Place (SJP) restricts its self-employed advisers (partners/franchisees) to deal only with SJP branded products (Yodelar, 2021). The law firm model significantly does not – allowing its lawyers to select and act for clients of their choosing, being a large commercial firm, it would be like any comparable but more traditional practice in that regard.

The Alternative Business Structure (ABS)

Keystone Law would not have been able to operate had not been for the introduction of Alternative Business Structure (ABS) licences allowed under the Legal Services Act 2007 and considered above. This statute was an innovative step in the legal world and with a traditionally conservative business, the sector

¹⁰ The hybrid firm Taylor Rose, a success story on the High Street.

was initially hesitant to consider alternative business structures (Griffith, 2019) where such a structure allowed non-legal companies to invest in and/or operate in the legal sector.

The Legal Services Act made a significant change to how legal practices could operate. The Act's provisions allowed non lawyers to own and invest in law firms. The route for this was using alternative business styles. In theory, this would allow law firms to be employee owned (not just as solicitor partners – somewhat like the John Lewis model of ownership (Law Society Gazette, 2016). It also allowed nonlawyers into senior roles. As well as law firms changing their model, one of the biggest developments was the so called “Tesco’s Law”. Brands such as Tesco, Co-op Legal Services, and AA Legal Services, entered the legal marketplace offering legal services to complement their core products (Rose, 2001). They were not that successful – having the wrong brand was one differentiator according to an article in the Law Society Gazette which considered the growth of ABS (Goodman, 2022). Accountancy firms (the *Big Four* in particular) have also bolted on legal services in much the same way, but with more success as they marketed to their core client bases. The legal marketplace has fundamentally changed consequently, and this change has affected lawyers’ perceptions on what kind of firm to join. The other innovators being the flexible working environment of the platform firms, such as Keystone, and this study will look further into how the changes of the legal services market have influenced choice.

Of course, there were downsides. The more traditional firm model does not have the same issues, such as where solicitors are employed by a company which has investors. A question could be, “where is the solicitor’s primary duty owed?” – the client or the shareholders? Whilst allowing outside investment/capital, law firms have been slow on the uptake. The Legal Services Board analysed investment in

legal services since the ABS licensing commenced and concluded that the slow take up by law firms was due to cultural attitudes with lawyers reluctant to give up a measure of control, rather relying on profits, reserves, or lending to fund growth. Gately Plc was the first firm to list on the London AIM stock exchange in 2015. Keystone was the third firm to float, in 2017, raising £15m. This followed the firm's conversion to an alternative business structure (ABS) in 2013 with funding by a venture capital company (McCann, 2017).

Before the Legal Services Act, law firms were partnerships. 2018 saw the number of law firms operating as ABSs reach 130 with 44% of these firms limited companies and a further 15% as limited liability partnerships, with only 17% of firms the traditional partnership model (Langdon-Down, 2018). There are now a broad range of ABS's operating in England and Wales. These include listed companies (for example Gateley, DWF, and Keystone); private equity-backed companies (ElevateNext); online platforms (Legal Zoom), and multidisciplinary practices mixing law and other professions (the Big Four, Knights) (Goodman, 2022).

One of the more prosaic reasons for floating, James Knight the joint founder of Keystone quantified, was to garner reputation and brand awareness with sophisticated clients – floating a company is not easy and hence a successful floatation gains security and trust (Langdon-Down, 2018). Whilst an important by-product of being an ABS and quoted company, rather obvious to the founder, it may now be a draw for a would-be Keystone lawyer – brand may be important if considering making a move from a well-known City firm to this new platform offering – as this research will investigate and identity in the interviews undertaken.

Whilst innovation is obviously a positive dynamic, the traditional law firm is not dead, although for tax and liability reasons, limited liability companies and partnerships are more prevalent than the pure partnership model as noted above. Notwithstanding this, the managing partner of Slaughter and May, a major City law firm, stated that he considered it important that the partners are owners of the business. He argued that being such, empowered them and provided the authority (and responsibility) to grow their practice and build the firm. It assisted in a collaborative culture to work with colleagues and think about what is right for the firm rather than themselves (Langdon Down, 2018). This rather outdated view (perhaps in 2022) is contradicted by legal analyst Jordan Furlong who opined, at about the same time, that the traditional law firm model is a “poor fit” for the new legal market and will not survive the competition from the new type of firm such as the ABS Keystone (Furlong, 2017). The reality is that I consider both types will continue to be required, but there is a market sector (perhaps large commercial deals as against mid-tier private law) where perhaps one will over time prevail over the other. As highlighted above, there have been significant ABS failures such as Co-operative Legal Services – afflicted by poor branding; Parabis going into liquidation, and Slater and Gordon and the high street firm Quality Solicitors both funded by private equity, suffering severe losses, perhaps evidencing it is not so easy to turn a quick profit in the legal sector (Law Society Gazette, 2016). The ABS, Inces Group, once a famous shipping law firm, collapsed into a pre-pack deal in spring 2023.

Information Technology (IT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Another significant change in the legal landscape has been the use of Information Technology (IT) and Artificial intelligence (AI), the latter being developed to undertake routine legal work such as commoditised services like conveyancing

and contract drafting. Much has been written on these changes in the profession and the so-called digital revolution, especially in 2023. Some firms are, in effect, virtual businesses without offices (IM Report, 2012).

Technology and change are, of course, nothing unusual or to be feared. The Industrial Revolution of 200 years ago brought in automation and skills through use of new or adapted technology. We are now in the twenty first century in a new transformation brought about by the internet and digital technology. Lawyers are no longer bound to their desks which was not something reasonably contemplated 30 years ago (Llewellyn-Lloyd, 2021). In 2017, McKinsey's Global Institute published a research paper that examined the effects of automation on the workplace and predicted that one-third of workers (in the USA) may be out of a career by 2030. The report identified professions such as lawyers, accountants and like professionals as "relatively safe from automation", which rather contradicts the view held by Richard Susskind (see below). The analysis was that law firms had already made good use of such technology (reducing support staff and outsourcing some functions). In addition, some work could be taken over by AI allowing junior lawyers to focus on more highly paid work. Interestingly John Flood challenged this last point. He considered that it was actually junior lawyers who were most at danger from AI - it only needed senior lawyers to develop the more complex tasks that AI currently cannot do but with the knock on that senior lawyers must be juniors at some stage which may result in lacunas in expertise and training (Flood, 2019). I think that the real consequences may only be quantifiable in the next few years as the AI revolution with "bots" expands in legal practice.

The general consensus was that the traditional law firm must adapt like this or lose out to robots and global outsourcing. In McKinsey's view, the future for law firms

belongs to decentralised and agile law firms (McKinsey, 2017). Exactly the reason it could be suggested for the growth of platform-based firms. A contrary view on outsourcing however, from Bona Law PC, argues that whilst the drive for automation and outsourcing are welcome, where there are numerous global low cost-based providers that offer services that were previously performed in-house (at huge margins), the costs plummet while value and innovation peak – the general way markets work it was argued. The legal industry is no exception, and as such, a note of caution which is both correct and welcome (Gott and Bona, 2021).

In 2017 Lord Adair Turner gave a lecture at the John Hopkins University in Washington DC which considered the use of robots and artificial intelligence in the 21st Century. He tended to agree with the McKinsey viewpoint, although he was not just looking particularly at the legal sector. He opined that economies that rely on low skilled and low wage work will suffer as technology replaces labour, but in contrast the requirements for professionals will remain and not so easy to automate – at least in the medium term (Turner, 2018). In the McKinsey report noted above, they considered full automation of jobs could occur by 2100 (McKinsey, 2017). Another report on the future of employment by Fry and Osborne (2017) estimated that 47% of all work is susceptible to automation. This, I consider, might be mere conjecture given the fast pace of technology, all be it the contrary view expressed on the professional services which I suggest might place a margin of error in this projection.

The well-known commentator on legal services, Richard Susskind, investigated AI and lawyers of the future. He predicted a world of on-line courts and a change in how lawyers work and the demographic of such lawyers, not restrained by antiquated partnership models. He considered new types of legal jobs and

internet-based practice – akin to the platform model, with online document production, commoditised service, legal process outsourcing, and web-based resources (Susskind, 2019). Ironically, much has come to pass with the COVID experience and home working has to a degree validated one of his hypotheses sooner than envisaged.

Susskind developed his theories such that IT and AI will replace much of what we have now, and with that, a change in the type of practitioner, one more tech savvy and remote (Susskind, 2015). Whilst the author takes a view that computers will take over from humans in the professional legal sector, generally this is some way off (see below on CHAT GPT). Research by the Civil Justice Council considered the impact of COVID-19 in the civil justice system. During the pandemic, lawyers had to make use of online courts. The study reached mixed conclusions (Byrom et al, 2020). The use of online courts was generally considered to have worked, but practitioners had reservations including the technology, wasted time, and tiredness using a screen for long periods (which I can personally attest to). Post pandemic, there seems to be an inclination (save perhaps for low value non contested hearings) for physical hearings, which interestingly contradicts somewhat Susskind's theory, although it must be appreciated that his comments in 2015 and much has happened in the technology space since then.

Susskind is now the chairman of the British Legal Technology Forum. He argues in an article in the Times in February 2023, that the recent breakthrough in artificial intelligence, is the latest reminder that lawyers need to be concerned about their futures. He claims in this article that ChatGPT (see below) is even now better than most junior lawyers at various functions (such as drafting, summarising, and comparing documents). Susskind opined that critics are wrong to focus on the errors the AI system can make, because we are in an experimental stage. He

seems to suggest that the technology has identified new careers for lawyers, including risk management, design thinking and data science (Susskind (Times), 2023). It would appear that Susskind now acknowledges that to a degree, whilst AI may replace some functions, lawyers will be increasingly needed in other capacities to both check and enable AI to function (legal design, legal coder and data visualiser etc.). He states this in the latest third edition of his book, *Tomorrow's Lawyer*. He also accepts that, *"that the speed of change, that is much trickier to predict"* (Susskind, 2023, p.viii). This is a point I would agree with. He does not however, consider the potential data breach possibilities with AI and which is now causing some concern of which more is discussed below.

As Susskind acknowledges, technology is of course very fast moving and in very recent times and since the commencement of this project, the advancement of artificial intelligence in the legal world has been reignited. Magic Circle practice Allen & Overy was the first law firm to trial an AI "assistant" in 2022 to speed up the work of its lawyers. Its developers, say the system (called Harvey), could, *"generate insights, recommendations and predictions based on large volumes of data, enabling lawyers to deliver faster, smarter and more cost-effective solutions to their clients"* (Bindman, 2023 p.1). Notwithstanding this hype, the law firm's technology spokesperson, David Wakling did caution by saying that the software was an initial research and drafting tool and did not aim to replace lawyers and that the Harvey response would have to be carefully evaluated for accuracy. If, however, it saved an individual lawyer just a few hours it would represent a saving of millions of pounds – especially where there were over 3,500 lawyers in the firm. AI may not therefore work so well in smaller firms – at least in the near future (Bindman, 2023)

A new British company, RobinAI, has contracted with a Google-backed company (a rival to OpenAI – see below) to develop another robot lawyer “bot”, that will be programmed to draft contracts, critically review contracts and suggest new wording to solicitors. This technology is being trialled by the Magic Circle firm Clifford Chance (Field, 2023). Pertinently, and affirming the Bindman (2023) comments above, this Daily Telegraph article also noted that recommendations from this robot would in any event need to be thoroughly reviewed by a real and qualified lawyer, which I suggest shows that such robotic technology is limited in its efficacy as the lawyer’s main function is to adapt advice to a client’s expectations. Moreover, there are also data security concerns to address. Another 2023 Telegraph research article by the same author reported that JP Morgan and other investment banks are notifying their own staff of risks in exposing client information to artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT - another artificial intelligence chatbot launched in November 2022.

Microsoft has adopted its technology, revamping its Bing Search engine using tools built by OpenAI, but security experts have cautioned that using private data with such tools may lead to it being viewed later by a third parties or incorporated into AI responses in the future. Jon Baines, from the law firm Mishcon de Reya, stated that using ChatGPT could risk breaking data laws if the software created inaccurate data causing an infringement of the GDPR requirements to process personal data correctly (Field and Titcomb 2023). Consequently, there are, I consider, still several unintended consequences that have to be taken account of as this technology advances. Whilst AI is being adapted quickly, it can and does make mistakes as it is programmed by humans. There is some excitement that such automation will replace not just repetitive jobs (such as bank clerks and blue-collar jobs), but professions such as journalists, computer programmers and, of

course, lawyers. It is however more likely to challenge the legal marketplace rather than replace it (Oban 2023). Indeed, the new revolution of the internet nearly 30 years ago and emails merely enhanced the lawyer's repertoire. In my own career the internet and use of emails made research and communication quicker but had the consequence of increasing the pressure on a lawyer of expected speed of response (an email takes a few seconds, a letter a few days). As Oban (2023) opined, this will only increase as AI becomes more mainstream. Whilst it is all well and good advocating advances in IT, the Rimon research discussed earlier, also strikes a note of caution. In the aftermath of the COVID pandemic, there was considerable pressure to upgrade/improve IT infrastructure and reduce back-office expenditure but many law firms are facing significant cash flow issues with partners also reluctant to commit to additional investment. (Llewellyn-Lloyd, 2021). Keystone already had sophisticated bespoke IT systems and therefore does not face the same limitations. It was awarded the Governments Cyber Essential Plus accreditation in 2017, one of the few law firms at the time to achieve this.^{11 12}

Cyber risk was one issue highlighted above and which was not considered by Susskind (2015, 2023) or other commentators – that is hacking law firms' IT systems. This is obviously of particular concern when confidential client information is held. This risk has heightened in recent years with hackers becoming more sophisticated (both State sponsored and private). Law firms must also budget for cyber security spend. A report by PwC highlighted that the top 100

¹¹ Source: Keystone Law

¹² <https://www.keystonelaw.com/news/keystone-law-delighted-with-new-cyber-security-protection-accreditation>

firms have increased their cyber risk spends by between 50 and 70% (Wolstenholme, 2022). There is concern that smaller firms may suffer with the increased demands of both IT sophistication post COVID with more remote workstations, together with the attendant cyber security implications which had not been considered too vital just a few years ago. A survey of UK office workers (including legal services) by Atlas Cloud, a legal IT consultancy found that 37% of their respondents' companies had made no changes to their IT systems to mitigate potential cyber threats (Watson, 2021). It seems the larger law firms (and platform firms) at least were better prepared.

Professor John Flood, referred to above, an academic who focuses on the character of law firms and the regulation of legal services, considered with a qualitative approach, and based on historical interpretation, how automation and client requirements are changing the traditional view of legal firms and the future of the profession – considering advances in technology and client expectations. He argued that the dilution of the legal brand is inevitable with the increase in paralegal advisers/automation. The author is cynical of the future, notwithstanding the evolution of platform law firms with complex IT structures, senior practitioners, and international focus despite traditional lawyer/client interface (Flood, 2019). Flood seeks to define a role for the traditional partnership with evolving automation and more specialised skill sets that are required. He justifiably (in my view) challenges the expectation still seen by some (see the Slaughter's partner comment above) that the future is as it has been for hundreds of years. He exposes the requirements of sophisticated clients - the "transactional expert" concept as against "trusted adviser" in a modern legal interface. He raises, in a robust argument, that technology and automation is, and will cause, an upheaval in the marketplace, and that a lawyer's skills and ethos must adapt in areas such

as conveyancing, and the replacement of associates and juniors by computer algorithms. Flood includes some quantitative methodology in his consideration of both historical fact and his assumptions of the future based on analysis over a period of about ten years. This author has written 52 papers on training, technology, and globalisation, most from a legal or quasilegal perspective (i.e., Flood 1996, 2012). He is a prolific commentator on the future of the legal profession. There are, I feel, some difficulties with such a position as the author is a vigorous advocate for change. Consequently, his ontology and epistemology could be somewhat tainted by his leaning for change in his own profession, and in addition being a paid consultant to law firms in transition – including Keystone Law. The papers on this subject by Flood are not in some instances predicated by observations as to where the author obtained his data/comparisons, which inevitably could diminish the conclusions he draws.

Over the last fifteen years, automation and its consequential affects have been much in focus, and as such, Flood's viewpoint, notwithstanding his position noted above, does cover the range of a lawyer's *raison d'être*. Keystone would not have been able to grow as it has without sophisticated IT systems (as against AI) to allow seamless remote working which was evident in the recent pandemic.

The Law Society has discussed the role of automation for the future and rather embraces the idea, illustrating six areas where AI will assist (Law Society, 2018). Whilst significant, technological advances (such as the Chatbot 2023 discussed above) are moving quicker than regulatory bodies. Notwithstanding the consensus in this area, an article by a lawyer at law firm Coffin Mew LLP suggests that, whilst automation does have its drawbacks, as Flood opines, it is also to be viewed as a positive development but unlikely in the foreseeable future to take over - but to complement. Of import and not considered by some of the other commentators,

client interaction cannot be replicated by a machine. Ethics being a prime example and leveller (Stevens, 2019). I concur with this more prosaic view.

Brand, Image, and Culture and Risk

Branding is a process of creating a name or design/symbol that identifies and differentiates a business from that of its peers and competitors (Garcia, 2018). In 2022 at the time of this review, Keystone Law has created a very solid brand in the legal sector. It has won numerous awards culminating as noted above in winning the accolade of Law Firm of the Year in 2020 where the competition was UK nationwide, including some of the largest names in the industry. It is the first time in the awards' 26-year history that the top prize has been awarded to a non-traditional law firm, having previously been won by some of the UK's biggest firms including Clifford Chance (Griffiths, 2020). These awards have reinforced the brand as a serious mid-market commercial London law firm, irrespective that it is a distributed or platform business model.

In the legal sector, and with the advent of Alternative Business Structures, brand awareness was a key factor in some non-traditional entrants into the sector. A good example being the Co-op's legal business arm Co-operative Legal Services (CLS,) which offered legal services to seven million members. Director Christina Blacklaws was clear that brand power was of great importance with the Co-op brand, and with its ethical stand she considered put it in a strong position with customers. Blacklaws' phrase was a "trusted brand" (White, 2012). Whilst this example demonstrates brand loyalty, the Co-op was primarily targeting its members, not general commercial or high-net-worth new clients as with Keystone, where ethical history is of less appeal. As Blacklaws opined, trusted brand status means recommendations from friends and family, in what is the smaller scale legal business such as family law. An interesting statistic is that the Co-op bury 25% of

people in the UK, hence a probate facility within CLS. Conversely, the Tesco Law brand discussed earlier was not successful – primarily as there was not an established legal brand or, indeed, client base for legal services (Goodman, 2022). For Keystone Law, brand and image have been, in the creators' view, pivotal to its success. The name change from Lawyers Direct was an admission by the founders that the original name did not provide the image they were looking for. Deploying a sophisticated marketing department ensured the firm was well represented in social media, and winning awards across the legal spectrum ensured the firm's profile and credibility with peers and solicitors was enhanced. The latter, important for the recruitment of high calibre lawyers. That said, there can be disadvantages to brand image (Alhaddad, 2015). A positive brand has the benefits discussed, be it for recruitment and importantly for potential client engagement (i.e., a well-known legal firm to do business with). However, client perception can quickly change with negative press/reviews for the firm or individual lawyers who are the face of the firm, Keystone is very careful that recruits will enhance the image it wishes to promote in the legal sector and its general client/contact base.

An important brand awareness strategy for law firms is for departments within the business, and individual lawyers, to be cited in the main public directories in the legal sector (worldwide). The two main publications, being the Legal 500 and Chambers guide to the Legal Profession, both use their own researchers and interviews with practitioners and clients to provide ratings in legal sectors (such as my own in shipping and marine). These publications are used by client and in-house counsel when considering law firms for instruction, but also as peer reviews, and firms consider it of great importance to have a good number of their

lawyers listed - a quality assurance indicator perhaps. I have previously cited the 2021 Keystone statistics in such publications (see page 6).

According to an article in Forbes Magazine, there are considerable benefits to a strong brand and culture in a corporate environment, especially when considering employees and recruitment. A good identity maintains cohesion and attracts better talent and assists retention. Image, of course, assists in attracting the right type of new recruits (Laker, 2021). It also assists in developing a specific image that can enhance reputation – important in a services company such as a law firm. Millennials, discussed elsewhere in this review, have, it states, an attraction for a strong company culture. Employees increasingly seek employment with companies that they consider are “invigorating and inspiring” (Vaughan, 2016). Keystone Law has achieved this, and one reason being, it is suggested, that lawyers may be seeking to work at the firm, and a point that will be explored further in the research.

Branding can, however, be expensive although that implies to some degree the symbol rather than a brand as a business. It can also be expensive to change brand/image (Garcia, 2018). As Keystone changed its name/brand early on in its journey, the cost and disadvantage were negligible, but the distinct logo and colour scheme now employed are very easy to identify with the firm.

Professor Boris Groysberg, of Harvard University, carried out research in 2018 with 100 middle managers into corporate culture in the US, but it has resonance in the UK also. His research opines that culture shapes attitudes and behaviour of a business and its workers. Culture can also evolve (both for the good and not so) over time. The research does suggest that a firm’s culture is a group phenomenon rather than an individual’s belief (Groysberg, 2018). I agree with this to an extent, but an individual or a small group, such as the two founders of Keystone Law,

determined a culture for the firm which has then developed over time but on the same lines as the firm has grown. Keystone sees retaining what it sees as its collegiate culture as vital. The Harvard research looks at eight culture styles, including what it calls “people interactions” and “response to change”. Both important constituents in Keystone’s development. Having the right lawyers, and indeed support staff, are imperative to growing and retaining the right image and culture. The main conclusion from the research was that successful leaders should regard culture as a fundamental management tool rather than with frustration.

Notwithstanding the above, and admittedly a few years later and post pandemic, (which has shifted attitudes generally), Hannah Walker writing in the legal magazine Law.com International, concludes from a survey of senior lawyers (partners) that remote working is destroying their firm’s culture which makes it harder to retain staff (Walker, 2022). I have discussed this point further below, but interestingly an article by the same online publication, albeit a different edition by Krishnan Nair, concluded that City law firm culture was merely a money-making culture, so a proper definition of what “law firm culture” is needed to be addressed as the generations clearly had a different interpretation, and collegiate was not a description generally accepted (Nair, 2022). There is clearly a contradictory position as to what culture is with many traditional firms and why Keystone Law, as discussed, made such a point of developing a firm culture which attracts lawyers to it.

Whilst remaining on the topic of culture another general theme in business is that of risk culture or attitude towards risk for the individual. This is ordinarily considered to be based on a financial perspective although a person’s view of risk is multi-faceted, looking at other factors such as technological factors, financial

literacy, psychological, social and socio-economic considerations (Kumar and Xiao, 2021). A paper by the University of Verona considered financial risk aversion and personal life history. In summary the researchers considered that a person's attitude towards risk (and here they concentrated on financial risk) has a strong correlation with personal circumstances out of an individual's control such as illness, loss of a job and other personal obstacles (Buccioli and Zarri, 2013). Notwithstanding the Verona study, I consider that the main risks to a potential Keystone Lawyer when contemplating a move from a traditional law firm and their personal comfort zone (see below) is one's client following (clients moving with the lawyer to a new firm) and financial stability when one does not earn an income – covered elsewhere in this work.

Lawyers and law firms have a traditional culture of risk aversion (King, 2013). Lawyers are in business to reduce client risk, and this tends to reflect on an individual's own risk appetite both in their advice and when making their own decisions. Legal practitioners can view each work instruction they accept as a question of their self-image and setbacks can develop into a personal risk. As such, they tend not to pursue things that might be outside only pursue activities where they consider they will do well (Thomson Reuters, 2016). In essence, a fear of failure and reluctance to go outside their comfort zone.

An individual's attitude towards risk has been defined as a particular state of mind concerning those doubts that could have a good or negative effect on a person's objectives (Rogan, 2020). Females tended to be less risk tolerant than males (Xiao et al, 2001). Being less tolerant of risk, both professional and personal and being in a comfort zone at a firm can therefore be a hindrance to entrepreneurial endeavour. Making a leap of faith (in many respects) to join a new form of law practice (still not always accepted as mainstream even in 2023), can be seen as

challenging within a risk averse culture – something imbedded from law school days (Weiner, 2021).

Some lawyers are bucking this perhaps unfair perception and with the advent of Alternative Business Models discussed above and the increase in a business culture in law firms, more entrepreneurial individuals can co-exist more comfortably in the established practices but more so it is considered in the platform offering which provide a more business centred approach to the practice of law – something that this study will investigate.

Entrepreneurial Endeavour

According to the *Journal of Financial Planning*, entrepreneurship can be defined as the process of identifying and starting a new business project, sourcing and organising the required resources, whilst also taking both the risks and rewards associated with the venture (Kinder, 2014, 2023). Entrepreneurial endeavour, whilst there is no strict definition, can be regarded as the driver of economic and social value in a society or workplace. The value lies in the best economic rewards, and in the thrill and meaning experienced and exchanged in the engagement (Kinder, 2114). In short reward for risk.

Entrepreneurial endeavour can readily be recognised in a variety of business settings, and serial entrepreneurial public figures (e.g., Richard Bransom and Elon Musk) – usually very successful businesspeople, although when one reads their back stores one can readily recognise the risks and failures along the way to success.

Entrepreneurial endeavour in the legal sector does not readily resonate bearing in mind the above definitions, however the founders of Keystone Law were clearly entrepreneurial, one being a business executive and one a lawyer, both who took a significant personal and financial risk to create their new form of law firm structure in a risk adverse and traditional sector. Whilst it is a reasonable view elucidated in the previous section (p.65), that a lawyer's primary function is to manage risk for their clients and as such, and by

training most lawyers still tend to be risk-averse, whereas entrepreneurs are risk-takers (King, 2013, Carbon Law Partner, 2022). This trait doesn't mean the latter are reckless, but that they have higher-than-usual risk tolerance and view downsides as tests rather than failures. Harvard Business School considered what made a good legal entrepreneur (Carbon Law Partners, 2022). Traits such as:

- ~ **Curiosity** – Lawyers learn, from day one, how to explore a subject and research.
- ~ **Structured Experimentalism** – A significant part of what lawyers do is to follow a methodology for researching (as point one) and then testing that to find to whether it's the right course of action.
- ~ **Adaptability** – Good lawyers have outstanding listening skills, as well as an ability to negotiate.
- ~ **Decisiveness** – Once the above done, there is the confidence to make recommendations that might well challenge the norm and the professionalism to see things through.

As Suttie (2021, p1.) opined in the Canadian Lawyer Magazine, "*Square-peg disruptors don't fit in traditional, round-hole law firms*". She went on to argue that an individual, "*who, at their core, is a true entrepreneur or innovator will bridle at boundaries and bust out to do their own thing.*" I concur with this viewpoint, in a traditional legal law firm setting discussed earlier in this work. There are many constraints, not least the rigid approach to seniority and advancement. The recent COVID -19 pandemic provided an opportunity for many lawyers to reflect and consider alternatives and leave traditional law firm life to start entrepreneurial ventures, either away from the law or within a legal environment that allows such endeavour. It is surmised that the rise of the disrupter law firm (platform firm) catered for this new cadre of lawyers who wanted to be more than a risk counsellor to clients. In my view the legal marketplace and clients in particular will benefit from entrepreneurial endeavours – lawyers in many ways having more in common with the clients they serve. A recently published book, *BigLaw: Money and Meaning in the Modern*

Law Firm, by Mitt Regan and Lisa Rohrer, suggests that law partners need to be entrepreneurial to bring in business a rather simple concept which any “leaders” in the large traditional firms still find difficult to engage with (Regan and Roher, 2021.)

As has been previously debated and alluded to by Regan and Roher (2021), the type of lawyers entering the legal profession has, it could be argued, changed in recent years, and in part discussed in the section in this literature review which considered generational theory on page 29. The platform law firm offering in particular has allowed practitioners to undertake other work or interests alongside their legal careers, as evidenced in the interviews undertaken and discussed in Chapters four and five. This entrepreneurialism is both collective (firm) oriented and personal (the entrepreneurial self). What is apparent is a leaning towards business and more businesslike approach to legal careers and indeed some law firms focus on having fee earners who are entrepreneurial as well as good legal advocates (an example being the law practice MBM Commercial (<https://mbmcommercial.co.uk/>)).

From the 1970s law firm mergers that amalgamated one firm’s specialism and another’s credibility or international reach (for example Clifford Chance and Herbert Smith) were commonplace. However, by the end of the 1980s and 90s a new area for conservative UK law firms emerged. There were the collaborations by the big accountants; firms such as KPMG, EY and PwC making acquisitions of law firms where practices complemented their own services. In the 1990s came an industry-wide acceptance that positioning firms as businesses, was needed with the introduction of The Legal Services Act (“LSA”) previously discussed in this thesis. (Carbon Law Partner, 2022) The legal landscape was changing and this before the advent of the platform offering. The LSA brought about distinct reforms that were calculated to improve the way legal services were provided allowing non lawyer practice owners and blended alternative business models, cooperation, and a shift in focus towards client, rather than law firm and partnership priorities.

As the new millennium arrived, a second wave of legal entrepreneurs was spawned due to the emergence of legal technology designed to increase efficiency, free up lawyers from mundane tasks and increase access to flexible legal services – all matters discussed in this chapter. As discussed in the section in this review on Brand, Image, and Culture and Risk, there are a small but increasing cadre of business focussed entrepreneurial lawyers who still find the traditional law firms concept of entrepreneurial endeavour to be somewhat stilted, and hence the attraction of firms where one can not only practice law in a more entrepreneurial manner (which much of the current literature concentrates on), but perhaps more importantly engage in other business endeavours as an adjunct to their legal practices which the platform offering generally allows – something this work based project will contemplate

[The Rise of the Platform Law Firm](#)

Recent research papers into law firms in the UK (and US) primarily during the COVID-19 disruption have been thought-provoking, as the platform law firm has become more of a discussion point with several research companies and commentators. This study will consider some of these in light of the comments made, however, none of the more recent papers and findings on the legal industry that have been reviewed have considered an individual's personal motivations for joining a particular law firm. There have been commentaries about the rise in the platform consultancy firm, particularly their agility during the pandemic crisis when it was found that many traditional firms lagged behind as both personnel and IT systems (as discussed) were not sophisticated enough. Also, notwithstanding that, many lawyers worked on PCs, not laptops, which compounded the problems faced for home working. A report by Arden Partners Plc considered this, and in their words, pronounced that "*market disruption*" would be a key theme for legal service providers in 2021. They opined that the pandemic had been, "*A catalyst for the industry, highlighting the poor management and outdated models of many*

law firms. A new model that began as a small tremor five years ago is now turning into an earthquake for the legal sector” (Llewellyn-Lloyd, 2021, p.1). This report was looking at the rise of the platform firm model, although the five-year reference is incorrect as the type of business structure was initiated in 2002, although I accept that it was not widely appreciated or understood for some years subsequently.

Recent research has also considered why lawyers are inclined, in some instances, to consider the platform offering – especially given this sub sector of the alternative legal services market is growing quickly and now a known and viable alternative in the marketplace - something just five or so years ago it was not. This is ably illustrated by Marialuisa Taddia writing in the Law Society Gazette. She refers to a Thomson Reuters survey in 2021 that found nearly two thirds of lawyers want to work flexibly (Taddia, 2022). This is something the “platform offering” provides by default whereas traditional firms, whilst giving due regard to flexibility, are still promoting office working as at the very least to make use of expensive office space. A survey by an organisation called Law.com International, of senior City UK law firm partners, found that 68% considered that remote working was detrimental to their firm’s culture (Walker, 2022). Conversely, Taddia (2022), as referenced above, goes on to quote a CEO of a large platform firm which was recruiting consultants at the rate of 15 to 20 a month, though he accepted the COVID pandemic has considerably assisted. This disparity, in my view illustrates how some partners, particularly in the large firms, are out of touch with the mood of their lawyers. This can be demonstrated in the same survey by Law.com, where over 75% of those polled considered that remote working will increase departures from the firm – due considerably by a lack of interaction.

Clearly, this theory is being dispelled by the numbers moving to platform firms (Walker, 2022).

Summary

I have, in this literature review, taken the approach of segmenting the components of how I consider a typical platform law firm is constituted by means of a consideration of similar business and concepts that Keystone Law encapsulates. Given the dearth of existing literature, I believe this approach enables me to facilitate a full understanding and investigation of the model. Furthermore, this allowed me to support a consideration of literature and studies where similar structures, or social issues, have been addressed. This also facilitated a critical evaluation of both legal and other business models, and associated literature and studies, to better ascertain how the Keystone concept was conceived and developed. Additionally, this approach enabled a consideration of an individual's potential acuties, thus their motivations concerning joining one business, Keystone Law. As noted at the commencement of this review, there was no existing literature on why people joined this one firm, but by way of a consideration of the sector, and taking account of very recent studies and surveys, albeit primarily associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, I believe that by utilising this approach this has been achieved.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Introduction

This chapter will consider the primary aims and the research design, including the methodological and philosophical considerations chosen to credibly respond to the research question. It explores the epistemological theories and methodologies that were considered for the research conducted.

As established in the literature review, there is a dearth of current knowledge concerning the platform law firm, and more particular Keystone Law, the focus of this study. Consequently, there was little existing understanding of the demographic and personal reasons of potential new recruits that chose to join the firm, and whether there have been significant changes in the demographic of joiners in the period that this research covers. This work-based project sought to address this lacuna. Notwithstanding the emphasis and findings of this work-based project on Keystone Law, its findings have resonance when business plans and recruitment strategies are contemplated for the increasing number of such platform law firms in the UK legal sector.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives and Focus of Study

The object of this study is to consider and address the scarcity of information identified in the literature review (Chapter Two), concerning a fast-growing sector of the legal marketplace and changing motivations for lawyers joining a specific firm accepted as the first such business model in the UK legal sector. The research question is:

Keystone Law - A study into the characteristics of demographic change in an international platform law firm.

There were two primary objectives in this work-based project, namely:

- To better understand the changing demographic of lawyers joining over time.
- To generate credible knowledge of lawyers' personal motivations concerning joining the practice, and how these might have changed, such that management might utilise the findings in this research to better understand the “why” and “how” (van Maanen, 2011, p.219) changes within its business to enable it to utilise such information when developing its recruitment and business plan strategies.

Research Setting

The *modus operandi* of Keystone Law, when founded, was to liberate the individual lawyer from bureaucracy and to deliver flexibility. This objective was facilitated by bespoke IT platforms and proficient support teams allowing greater autonomy for the practitioners. The concept was to break the traditional model of a constrained partnership hierarchy and office-based working. The business model proved successful, with an increasing number of similarly structured organisations now offering a diverse legal offering both in commercial law and the domestic market.

There appears to have been a change at Keystone Law in recent years, although the primary values remain. I was keen to investigate this. I queried whether lawyers seemed to be joining at an earlier age/post qualification stage of their careers; how they made use of the non-exclusive contracts with the firm and whether there had been a change in those not having held partnership positions in

previous firms. Moreover, did the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate to potential recruits how versatile the Keystone model was.

This research centred on lawyers in one legal practice, some of whom were participants in this study. Pursuant to its business model, with a headquarters based in a City of London office which incorporates its management and support function, most of its lawyers are though located remotely, working from home offices, those of their clients, or other premises in the UK and overseas.

The research process was undertaken principally by interviews (see page 84), which were conducted primarily using remote techniques, and face-to-face meetings (where possible under the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic). The utilisation of web-based facilities such as Teams/Zoom systems enabled interviews to be undertaken with participants located abroad and those restricted from travelling. The sampling method used for this research is set out in page 86.

Research Design - Synopsis

A research design is the overarching strategy for the collection of information, the means of compilation of the data, together with the measurement and analysis of the material gathered, whilst also succinctly describing the purpose of the study (Gray, 2014). Academic wisdom suggests there are four fundamental elements to a comprehensive research design, namely the researcher's epistemological stance, the theoretical perspective, the methodology, and finally the methods utilised in the research (Crotty, 1998). This position was adopted by Creswell (2003), who concluded that these four decision-making components lead to a research approach dependent primarily upon the researcher's stance on the nature of knowledge. The primary paradigms and traditions of research were also contemplated so that an informed decision could be taken. The strengths and

perceived limitations of several, the better-known, qualitative research methods were examined.

To provide a synopsis, this work-based project is centred on qualitative research methods to examine the dynamics of the research participant's personal decision-making process. The primary research utilised in depth semi-structured interviews. Secondary information was obtained by interrogating data gleaned from Keystone Law's archives and its lawyers. The epistemological stance is constructivist - based on the experience and perceptions of my research participants - with an interpretivist perspective. The methodology is from a phenomenological inductive standpoint.

Ontological and Epistemological Stance

Ontology

With a historical foundation in contrasting Greek philosophical belief (Heraclitus and Parmenides) (Gray, 2014), ontology refers to inquiries concerning the nature of reality (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998), or as Crotty (1998, p.10) succinctly stated, "*the study of being.*" Ontology is normally classified in two ways, namely realist or relativist. The former definition assumes that reality exists outside of one's mind - independent of the witness's perceptions and objects. Contrastingly, the relativist ontology assumes there are multiple realities and ways of accessing them which are not governed by natural laws (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

A relativist ontology will be prevalent in a qualitative research study as there can be no real or actual constructions, but only those formed by the person as there is no objective world or truth. In brief, everything is created by us as social beings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). How we as humans interpret the world around us is mainly a consequence of our own thought processes and our way of interpretation.

Clearly for the researcher what we see, and as such is affected by the values of the researcher and how he/she sees the world – that is, how the researcher (and participant) constructs everyday reality.

This study looks at a group of lawyers, all with their own personal reasons and beliefs that affected their decision-making process before applying to join an innovative structure of legal business. As Saunders et al (2012, 2023) acknowledged, a social phenomenon can be better understood by studying people's personal opinions and experiences. Some of the lawyer participants were known to me on a professional basis, some I had not met before the interview process. I determined that a relativist ontology was the correct position, as it assumes that reality is more an outcome of socially constructed perceptions (Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba, 2011) – those of my interviewees.

Epistemology

Crotty, (1998, p.10) considered ontology and epistemology as complementary and therefore difficult to distinguish. In his words, they “*tend to emerge together.*” Nevertheless, the chosen epistemology becomes the cornerstone of research and influences the study undertaken. It is the examination of knowledge, its nature, and scope. It is though accepted that we as human beings each have our own views of what shapes our own world view. Therefore, the researcher's epistemological stance directly affects or informs the theoretical perspective of the research and methodologies pursued (Crotty, 1998).

Epistemology deals with the nature of knowledge and as Crotty (1998, p.8) also opined, an epistemology is a mechanism for understanding and explaining, “*how we know what we know*”. It provides “*a philosophical background for a determination as to what knowledge is 'legitimate or adequate'*” (Gray, 2014, p.19).

It can be regarded as to how it is possible to know more or find out about our world (Snape & Spencer, 2003).

Although Crotty empathises with the plethora of confusing terminology (Crotty, 1998), he does identify three primary epistemological positions (additionally several variants). These are, objectivism, subjectivism, and constructivism, each evolving from different philosophical perspectives. Objectivism is where meaning, and in consequence reality, must exist apart from the operation of any consciousness (Crotty, 1998). If research is undertaken in the right way, the researcher should uncover the objective truth. In short, reality exists independently of consciousness (Gray, 2014). A subjectivist epistemology suggests that standards of logical belief or understanding are specific to the individual – we each have a different understanding of what is known. Reality can be expressed, in for example language or religion, and can be shaped to fit, such that meaning, and interpretation, makes sense to that person. Subjective research reveals how one's personal experience shapes perception of the world (Moon and Blackman, 2017). Constructivism is a theory based on shared experiences. All our views are constructed – dependent on our own perceptions/experiences. This doctrine suggests that we construct our own social world or what we do, say, or feel. There could be varied interpretations of an event and/or situation, shaped by the individual's perspective, be it current, social, and/or historical (Crotty, 1998). Truth or reality is different based on who you ask, and people may change what they consider to be their meaning of truth based on their dealings with other people or a particular situation and/or environment.

The epistemology I determined appropriate was constructivism, in the context of the research question – it was the personal views and thought processes of the

participants, and where such beliefs were shaped by the individual lawyer's own perspective and experience of their own legal and personal world.

Theoretical Perspective

A paradigm is simply a framework for a belief, values associated with such a principle and the actual methods used and in which such research is undertaken. In a more succinct view, a paradigm is "*the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by members of a given community*" (Kuhn, 1970, p.175). Kuhn also usefully described a paradigm in more simplistic terms as a way of viewing the world and a context from which to understand human experience (Kuhn, 1970). Paradigms shape our everyday view of the world – a set of assumptions (DeCarlo, 2018), and researchers use them to assist in framing their research questions and to provide and support sense in the results of their research question. The paradigm utilised is dependent upon the research, and indeed the researcher's viewpoint – epistemology, ontology, and the description of a shared experience in a certain context (Guba, 1990). A paradigm is a more practical theory rather than idealistic, as there are various ways of arriving at the reality and this can be by subjective or objective means, or alternatively by a combination of subjective and objective techniques (Onwuegbuzie, 2009). It may be regarded as an approach that focusses on the practical or rational response. Interestingly, Babbie, (1998) acknowledged that social science researchers establish their investigations in numerous paradigms. None of them are necessarily right or wrong, but in essence more or less useful in a specific setting. They each influence the kind of theory created for a common understanding. It is generally accepted that there are two primary theoretical perspectives, namely Positivism and Interpretivism. Positivism, an ideology used predominantly in quantitative research, considers factual knowledge gained through deductive

logical observation and experiment (research for a vaccine for Covid-19 a cogent example). Such a paradigm is more linked to objective scientific research derived from examination of data (Creswell, 2011). It attempts to explain the world precisely and from a scientific standpoint (Crotty, 1998). Greener (2008) suggested that a Positivist methodology is one that implies knowledge can only be created using the five primary senses. The historical counter ideology to Positivism is Interpretivism, commonly utilised with qualitative data gathering techniques. The Interpretivist approach is to understand “*the world of human experience*” (Cohen & Manion, 2017 p.19). This theory suggests that we construct our own reality by our social interactions (Mertens, 2005). This position was affirmed by Creswell who opined that the researcher must rely on “*the participants’ views of the situation being studied*” (Creswell, 2003 p.8). Interpretivism asserts that research does not necessarily reveal objective results, as it considers the meaning of human interaction (i.e., lawyers in a certain firm). It considers the subject of the researcher’s experiences when engaging in social interaction and practice of interpretation (Crotty, 1998). It is an inductive practice with a consideration of behaviour or attitude from within a certain business for example. This paradigm considers reality, meaning, and knowledge constructed by people - their beliefs, motives, and reasons, and by so doing one can understand reality in a social context (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). This is best undertaken by interviewing and participant observation where there can be a subjective relationship as between the researcher and the subjects.

An Interpretivist perspective was chosen for this research. It fitted within the relativist ontology adopted, and the aims for the research question – to gain understanding of individual’s realities and experiences in how they considered the phenomena of joining a legal practice. That is, how they perceived/constructed

the environment they were in at the time. As Kaplan & Maxwell (1994) acknowledged, human complexity regarding how they understood the phenomena in question, which encompasses making sense of their experiences and interpretations.

Methodological Technique

As this research concentrates upon individuals' personal motivations for joining a new legal business model, a methodology was desirable that would enable insight into the dynamics at play in the decision-making processes. Such a process could be regarded as a phenomenon – a new firm and type of legal structure. As Creswell (2003) opined, research is undertaken to generate new knowledge concerning a phenomenon. The predominant traditions of research are quantitative and qualitative (additionally mixed methods, which incorporates both methods).

Quantitative or Qualitative Research?

In quantitative research, used generally in more scientific exploration, it is the norm to collect facts and then study the relationship between the sets of data using structured and pre-defined research questions and frameworks to reach quantifiable conclusions. In qualitative research, the objective is more to comprehend an individual's perception of the environment they dwell in – which suited the subject of this research. An interpretivist stance considers credibility and conformability, whereas the more positivist principles are of reliability and generalisation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This study adopts several key principles of qualitative research as espoused by Denzin and Lincoln (2011). It seeks the meaning that the participants applied to a phenomenon; it adopts an interpretative approach and seeks to consider a shared phenomenon in its own natural setting

(the law firm). In addition, there is the use of empirical information from interviews. (Bell and Waters, 2018; Creswell, 2003). The intention was to develop theoretical rather than statistical conclusions (Creswell, 2003). In this study, research was conducted in a unique setting with people considering joining Keystone but where little perhaps was known. This suited a qualitative approach, as such a methodology can be used where comparatively little is known about the phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

The chosen philosophical stance lends itself to a qualitative research approach, which I adopted, as it allowed for the participants to express their own individual personal experiences and motivations within a semi-structured interview process.

Research Logic

The generally accepted primary research logics are induction and deduction. These theories were first defined by Dewey (1993), who contemplated what is referred to as inductive discovery and deductive proof. Deductive reasoning starts with a working theory and seeks to test the arguments by empirical testing to confirm a theory, whereas the inductive approach starts with a hypothesis and considers an accrual of data to look for patterns that might suggest relationships between variables (Gray, 2014). Järvensivu and Törnroos (2010) suggest that researchers having a realist ontological view use deductive approaches, whereas relativists consider theories from an inductive standpoint. As this research considers lived experiences, changes in people's perceptions with data gathered during interviews to see what, if anything, had changed and why, it was considered an inductive approach was pertinent to this study.

Research Strategies/Methods

Qualitative research strength is its capacity to provide plentiful information about the parties being studied. It can also focus on detailed knowledge and in a particular local context. Contrastingly, gathering data for such research can be time-consuming, and the follow up analysis usually takes longer than in quantitative research. Moreover, the researcher must be wary of generalisations as this might depend upon several subjects with individual characteristics, and perhaps bias (Sutton and Austin, 2015). In qualitative research, there are several methodologies, and a certain fluidity concerning where each may fall, but a phenomenological approach merited consideration.

Phenomenology

This methodology flows from an interpretive standpoint and focusses on the study of direct experience of the subject individual by observation – from their standpoint at face value, and in the environment they inhabit. This methodology is centred upon the phenomena of lived experience (Cohen et al, 2017). Data collection methods include interview, focus groups, and detached observation.

Phenomenological research in its purest form seeks to describe rather than explain with a starting point free from hypotheses or any preconceptions (Husserl, 1970). The overall context is that it allows the participant the opportunity to express their own personal opinions or viewpoint. It examines the different ways in which people experience something or think about something. It enables the interviewer to be responsive to individual nuances on posed questions and the situational circumstances. A large amount of data can be collected in a reasonably short period (dependent upon questions posed). Its strength is that there can be cross-validation and triangulation of different data sources – participants at interview (Patton, 1990).

This method can sometimes lead to the generation of significant interview notes/recordings which then have to be analysed, although research can be successful with limited numbers - 5 to 15 participants being cited as apposite by David Gray (Gray, 2014). Analysis can take time as data may not fall into easily defined categories, and there can be several ways of linking between different parts of discussions or observations. Additionally, information obtained in interview relies upon the skill of the researcher, and indeed the articulate abilities of the participants – in this study all senior lawyers.

The interviewer must appreciate the subjective reasons in responses based on the participant's lived experience and thought process of decision making. Some commentators have suggested that with such a methodology, one cannot start the process as an impartial observer as we all have inherent biases or preconceptions, but the researcher must in their findings set out their interest or subjective views to enable clarity (Stanley & Wise, 1993).

This method was chosen, as the phenomena in my view is Keystone law and the thought process of individuals, and how they expressed their feelings and perceptions about joining a very different type of legal business - the lived experience of the relatively small number of participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Insider Research Considerations

The role of the researcher is critical and is dependent upon their position in the investigation. This research was carried out with participants working in one law firm. The researcher is also a partner at the same firm. Whilst undertaking this research project, a certain rapport was built up as a direct consequence of this. Indeed, it was important to engender a supportive environment in interviews such that the participants were best able to express themselves. This required certain

skills of the interviewer, including being a good listener, putting people at ease, and clarifying points as required (King and Horrocks, 2012). As an experienced public speaker, and as a lawyer trained to communicate with empathy, this was deployed with significant advantage, albeit the participants were similarly experienced lawyers, which made the interview process reasonably straightforward. Nevertheless, an important consideration was that of insider research as I was researching my peers in a familiar setting of Keystone Law. Coghlan (2001, p.1) refers to this as “*insider action research*”, where professionals are engaged in research in their own organisations.

As with all research techniques, there are advantages and potential disadvantages to the researcher being in the same environment as the research subject. Insider researchers could, it is argued, be less objective than they might be, but objectivity is not necessarily the aim of qualitative investigation (Creswell, 2003). A concern of the interviewer coming across as patronising, is somewhat offset in that the insider researcher generally shares the same occupation as the participants as was the case here (Asselin, 2003). The familiarity of being in the same firm in fact allowed, in my view, the interviews to progress more fluidly, and as the participants practised in a different legal sector to me, the researcher, any element of professional or seniority concerns were eliminated. Hockey (2006) also emphasises the difficulties when researching one’s peers. These include the blurring of roles between researcher and the researched, and the care required to set the scene at interview – is it a friend or colleague and so forth. There is also the prospect of the interviewee being fazed by being interviewed by a colleague whereby they might consider themselves open to assessment and/or professional scrutiny (Smyth and Holian, 2008, Jaber et al and Renold et al, 2008).

Notwithstanding the above, and as mooted above, being in the same organisation additionally has a benefit in that there is the possibility of an enhanced affinity and communication with the advantage of the interviewer possibly being able to better gauge the accuracy and honesty of responses in interview – especially if the interviewer is thought to be empathetic (Hockey, 2006). A potential hindrance is over familiarity and losing objectivity (DeLyser, 2001), and the partialness of their knowledge and being wary of assumption.

I gave due consideration to the potential pitfalls with insider research, but I determined that this was not an overriding concern. I was interviewing colleagues but not those I worked with in my day-to-day practice. I had not joined the firm in the same period as the interviewees, some I had not met in person, and importantly I did not have any managerial or professional authority over them. Keystone, as noted in the ethics section, employs a flat hierarchy, so consequently there was little likelihood of interview concern as to the status/seniority of the interviewer.

Ethical Considerations

Notwithstanding the University ethics committee approving the approach adopted, there is an on-going responsibility for the researcher to ensure ethical standards are maintained during the course of research. As Guillemin and Gillam (2004) submit, an ethics committee cannot determine or have any coherent control during the research and ultimately it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure standards are maintained. This clear logic was adhered to, and consideration given in discussing potential concerns with supervisors.

Before each interview, each interviewee was provided with a consent form and information sheet setting out the background to the research, why it was being

conducted, and how it may be used. It confirmed anonymity/confidentiality for the participants such that no noticeable identifiers would be incorporated in the research findings. Interviewees were advised that the recordings of interviews would be transcribed by me only to assist confidentiality. At the commencement of each interview, participants were again asked to confirm their consent and to ask any further questions on the research being undertaken. Once the above had been covered and annotated on each interview questionnaire, the interviews commenced.

The interview questions used are at Appendix Two. The questions were set out on a prepared document. The form of the interview questionnaire used are at Appendix Two, and the interview consent form at Appendix Three.

Jaber et al and Renold et al, (2008) recognised hierarchical relationship on issues of consent, how it might affect interview cohesion, and the rapport between interviewer and interviewee. As discussed above, Keystone Law operated a strictly flat system of hierarchy so that possible issues where interviewees responses could have been affected by colleague seniority (i.e., wanting to give the right impression) were not a factor that required further consideration. Attention always was given to potential ethical considerations such as cultural and diversity of background, gender, and the phraseology employed (Bell & Walters, 2018).

In this study, I interviewed colleagues at my own firm who all had their own personal reasons for joining. Care was required such that any perceived personal bias or opinion was not reflected in the way interviews were conducted and responses transcribed. Indeed, such research must be considered through the eyes of the participant rather than the researcher (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). The researcher always must be mindful of bias and recognise where elements of bias may encroach, as in qualitative subjective research this may be

inevitable (Mantzoukas, 2005). This I was acutely aware of and considered in each interview setting.

METHODS - Data Collection

A large measure of the success that Keystone has enjoyed is down to its lawyers – a fact that has been recognised by its co-founder James Knight. This study considers this, and I studied the general data available about lawyers in the firm within the timeframes noted. The research conclusions correlated the information gathered, interview transcripts, and compared where applicable to cross reference and compare with critical analysis. Whilst primarily a qualitative approach was employed, the additional data and comparison profiles acquired (see page 105 and 177) did assist in the analysis as the demographic data was used to contextualise the results and allowed me to consider the participant's views and opinions in light of (changes in) the firm's overall workforce profile in the period studied.

Interviews

Interviews are an established qualitative method (Creswell, 2003). Pursuant to a phenomenological methodology, interviewing was the chosen approach, whereby the individual best stated their experiences in a co-operative environment.

Silverman (2017) affirmed that the main function of an interview was to gain insight into the subject's individual experience.

Holland and Ramazanoglu (1995) identified three approaches when using interviews as a research tool. The first was that the veracity might be accessed using reliable techniques (i.e., set questions) controlling subjectivity which avoids possible corruption. Secondly, interviews are a unique account provided in particular circumstances – that is at the time and place of interview. Finally, and a

little between the two above, there is truth of the individual which might be accessed through the participant's accounts. One cannot though be certain whether it is correct. I decided that this third limb was pertinent to this study. As espoused by Moser and Kalton (1971), the interview process can become more of a conversation, allowing other avenues to be explored which I saw merit in. Moreover, as Seidman opined, "*interviews allow the intent to understand the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience.*" (Seidman, 2013, p.20). Additionally, interviews allowed any ambiguity in the questions posed to be easily clarified (rather than in a questionnaire) (Cohen and Manion, 2000). The use of interview, as a primary research tool, enabled me the researcher to gain a clear insight into the interviewee's personal narrative. My interviews allowed me, to quote May (2011, p.131), to engender "*rich insights into people's biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations and feelings.*"

There are three principal interview formats utilised in qualitative research, namely: structured, unstructured, and semi-structured (Edwards & Holland, 2013). The unstructured format was not appealing as I wished to pose certain direct questions to each participant, and to an extent, control the narrative. I considered (especially with lawyers as interviewees) that without careful management, the interviews could become disorganised, with the possibility of too much digression. This could result in the potential to take a protracted time to obtain enough credible information. Moreover, there could be a potential lack of reliability as to triangulation and reviewing the transcripts for comparing data (Jick, 1979). I felt that a little more formality and structure would be of benefit, especially given the time constraints for interviews with demanding people engaged in their daily work lives. More structured interviews also reduced the possible bias that I may have had, having been in a similar position to the interviewee.

The fully structured format utilises pre-planned questions discussed in order, with the same questions asked in each interview, allowing a transcript of the participants responses to be readily compared. Whilst this structure may reduce the potential of interviewer bias, a perceived disadvantage is lack of flexibility in that the interviewer must persist in a particular line of questioning, notwithstanding that the participant may wish or have other valid things to say or pose (Opdenakker, 2006). As the interviewees were articulate lawyers, it was felt that they might not wish to be constrained to strict responses to structured questions.

The semi-structured approach was chosen. With such an approach, it would enable flexibility thus allowing the participant to enjoy freedom to express their views and indeed pose rejoinders to questions presented. It enabled the possibility of further probing of the participant's views and opinions when questioned (Gray, 2014). It enabled the interviewer to guide, probe, and control the interview process – being mindful of potential interviewer bias (Galletta, 2013, Gray, 2014/2021). With this more pliable approach, it enabled more useful information to be gathered, and additionally permitted easier comparison of transcripts using the posed questions whilst allowing flexibility to pursue opportunities beyond the default question. David Gray (2014 p.385) quoted Roulston, (2010) and suggested that with an interpretivist/constructionist philosophical position, the interviewer and interviewee “*co-construct the data through unstructured and semi-structured interviews, working together to make sense of the research topic.*” Having deployed a phenomenological approach which looks to consider the subjective meanings that the interviewees attribute to events in question (Gray, 2014), the semi-structured format enabled me to investigate the individual's views and opinions and suited my research aim.

Interview Questions

The interview questions related to the beliefs individuals held when they were considering joining Keystone Law. The interviews focused on their reasons for leaving their previous firms, the draw of the platform model of law firm, and why they decided to accept an offer to join Keystone. The line of questioning covered why they contemplated a move with the attendant risks to income and a client following, to thoughts on joining a different type of organisation which may at the time have been outside their sphere of comfort – lawyers are often seen as traditionalists. I envisaged some common similarities which were noted in the investigation of the transcripts and common words and descriptors (see Chapter Five).

Sampling, Strategy and Data Saturation

Two cohorts of practising lawyers were interviewed. The firm had grown significantly in the last fifteen years (40% since 2006).¹³ The early period of the firm's existence was a formative time, so collating research information for those seminal years would not have assisted the use of the study's findings being utilised when consideration was given to the firm's future business model. It was decided that a period of about ten to twelve years between the two cohorts of respondents would be of more value to the business. A period of between 2009 to 2012 and 2020 to 2022 was selected.

Ten individuals were interviewed. Rowley (2012) suggested that about 8 to 12 participants represented a suitable sample (each interview of about 30 minutes), especially given the phenomenological thrust, where such research can be

¹³ Source: Keystone Law, 2021

successful with limited numbers (Gray, 2014). I deemed that five participants from each group were therefore a reasonable number. I was aware of the principle of data saturation in qualitative research and in my sample, what would be a considered number of interviews to have, notwithstanding the elucidation on apposite numbers made by Rowley (2012) and Gray (2014). I wanted to ensure that I gave due regard to the information gleaned from such interviews such that the interview response would reasonably be consistent should I have undertaken many more interviews – data saturation. Theoretical saturation describes, *“the point at which gathering more data about a theoretical construct reveals no new properties, nor yields any further theoretical insights about the emerging grounded theory”* (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007 p.611). Saturation in qualitative studies is subjective depend on the study taking place (Hennink and Kaiser, 2022). I found that I was in my interviews quite quickly reaching a point where similar new themes, ideas, opinions, were being repeated and as such I concluded that I was getting diminishing returns even had I been able (in the COVID circumstances previously discussed) to undertake more than ten interview (pus two test cases). I therefore concluded that my data set was sufficient for me to conclude that I had achieved my goal. Data Saturation principles have been around for some time but was developed by Hennick, Kaiser and Marconi (Hennink et al 2017) and also used as a guiding principle for assessing purposive sample in qualitative research (Hennick and Kaiser, 2022).

Data for my thesis was collected during the interviews between February 2021 to June 2022. A purposive sampling strategy was deemed appropriate and indeed the most common method used in qualitative studies (Marshall, 1996). The researcher’s discretion is used to find the most suitable potential candidate – all participants had applied to one firm, and from a cross-section of legal

backgrounds, but having one phenomenon of interest. Silverman, (2017), suggested that a purposeful approach assists in the selection of participants who show a specific feature or characteristic necessary for the research outcome. As Patton stated, *“a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources.”* (Patton, 2002, p.264). This view was endorsed by Mays and Pope who asserted the need to select one’s interviewees (and data) that would best assist in the generation of robust and deep levels of understanding (Thomson, 1999): In this study, lawyers who were relevant to the phenomena being examined (their reasons for joining the firm) (Mays and Pope, 1996). Arksey and Knight (1999), opined that the sample should reflect the people in the organisation. Representative samples of individuals were chosen for the two groups. As Black (1999) opined, the “population”, the subject of the sampling, were those that shared a common trait. In this study, lawyers working at Keystone Law at the time of research, I decided to keep the sample in each cohort the same, as this number would allow a reasonable comparative study to be produced. In each group, the objective was to encompass a broad church of gender, age, PQE, and type of previous organisation, which would also assist in triangulation of data with the secondary data collection undertaken of the whole of the firm’s lawyers.

Initial consideration was whether to choose the contributors by random means; by requesting that the firm’s HR manager provide a list of names of lawyers from each representative’s timeframe, but it was concluded that this would not provide the most reliable sample (notwithstanding obtaining the support of a busy department) that would best deliver on the research question posed, hence the purposive sampling strategy used.

Data accumulated and referenced in Appendix Five was used to identify possible candidates. Notwithstanding the difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic environment, the responses were positive with all individuals approached agreeing to participate in this research, and to have the interviews digitally recorded and/or a Teams transcription engaged.

Transcription

As noted, during this research project, ten individuals were interviewed (in addition, two partners as practice subjects, but not then used in the research). The ideal aim was to achieve full transcriptions of the interviews (Patton, 2002). Gray (2014) suggests that each hour of interview takes between 7 to 10 hours of transcription. Therefore, with a 30-minute interview duration, I expected to take approximately 4 hours for each interview to be transcribed, with over 40 hours in total to obtain comprehensive transcripts. This was found to be a reasonable expectation, although some interviews took considerably longer than others to transcribe.

The conceived wisdom is that transcription is *“a selective process reflecting theoretical goals and definitions”* (Ochs, 1979, p.44). The literature since discusses various views on the transcription of interviews and the merits of differing styles, although there is no real consensus of a standard policy (Davidson 2009). The aim was to transcribe each interview verbatim. Roberts (1997) suggested that it is important to ensure the final transcript is prepared as close as possible to the oral version. He goes on to argue that the transcriber should attempt as far as possible to *“represent the whole person”* as he put it (Roberts, 1997, p.170). With that in mind, I commenced the exercise, but I soon determined that I would not lose this with a small measure of editing, ensuring that the full understanding and grasp of the dynamics in each interview was retained.

Therefore, where there were repeating words, pauses, and *ums* and *errs*, these were removed. This approach was in line with the viewpoint of Oliver et al. (2005) who looked at the range of the transcription processes with *naturalism* at one level where the transcription seeks to provide “*as much detail as possible*” to *denaturalism* where, “*idiosyncratic elements (e.g., stutters, pauses, non-verbal, involuntary vocalisations) are removed*” (pp.1273-1274).

Each interview was recorded in its entirety by means of a hand-held digital dictaphone which was shown to each interviewee at the commencement of the interview. This audio file was later listened to in its entirety as a first step to ensure I immersed myself in the interview (Kvale, 2007). Notes were also taken, with the interviewee’s name changed to a number system. Where possible, when Teams was used, the site’s transcription software was utilised. I decided not to use third parties for transcription as I concluded that by my undertaking the process it would assist in the later analysis and coding, as one tended to remember and make comparisons as the interviews proceeded. If Teams was used (the case for most of the interviews conducted) the software generated transcript was of invaluable assistance in providing a structure for the actual transcription, but importantly the audio recordings were valuable to ensure nuances were captured, as well as ensuring that the gaps in the electronic transcript (which would undoubtedly occur) were covered. The transcriptions were carried out within two days of an interview which was a little longer than the 24 hours espoused by Liamputtong (2011), but given my own work considerations, I judged was an acceptable compromise.

Reflexivity

It is important that the researcher acknowledges any influences that might affect the data collated by way of personal reflexivity (Fontana, 2004). Reflexivity

concerns the relationships between participants and acknowledging the researcher's role in the research where one's experiences, beliefs, and expectation, can influence the process (Gillam & Guillem, 2018). It is a concept used to describe the relationship between the researcher and the subject of research (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007), and is commonly applied to the gathering of qualitative data through interviews (Ryan and Golden, 2006). In summary, personal reflexivity is an acknowledgement that the researcher is rarely a neutral listener at interview but is implicated somewhat in the construction of knowledge being researched. Responses gleaned must be those from an individual's personal perspective – not a linear generalist response from a group as such, or written responses possibly flavoured by the interviewer's own perceptions. Reflexivity is one of the pillars of "critical" qualitative research (Fontana, 2004).

In interpretivist research, it is reasonable to have a reflexive sense of the researcher's own position and expectations and how to best be aware of, and manage, the interview process and transcribing to ensure that the interviewer does not impose expected meanings based on what is collated. I found that by being self-critical and questioning my own assumptions at all stages assisted, notwithstanding that it is fundamentally impossible to disengage fully one's own expectations of the interview and research process. My goal of being reflexive was to identify any personal beliefs that may have incidentally affected the research and interview process. As (Gray, 2014, p.606) stated, *"this involves some personal reflection on how the research processes impacted and changed the stance taken by the researcher."*

With interpretivist research, it is common to have a reflexive sense of one's own position and expectations, and how to be aware of, and control, so as not to impose expected meanings on the evidence or possibly corrupt the data. This

meant “parking” my expectations – which, in reality, is difficult so a self-critical reflexive stance allowed me to mark possible limitations. I was, as mentioned when discussing insider research above, at the time of the interview process, an insider to the business which had both benefits and risks as outlined above. However, I was not an insider in respect to the two sample groups I interviewed as I was somewhat distanced by both personal knowledge of the interviewee and work sector employed in (a different practice area), and more so as my employment start at Keystone was not in either of the time periods covered in the interview process.

Descriptive Data

A secondary, but necessary element of the research, required an analysis of data concerning all lawyers working as consultants at Keystone. This enabled me to provide an examination of various significant factors that would then be used to correlate with, and inform the primary research undertaken. This was possible following permission of the directors of the firm and being mindful of the strictures imposed on access to information for a publicly listed company (disclosure of what is publicly available). Some of the data gathered were general statistics on lawyers that the firm held – mostly published from time to time on its primary external website over the years (www.Keystonelaw.co.uk) – as such in the public domain. Other evidence was gathered by gleaning information concerning individual lawyers from the firm’s internal intranet site and from lawyers and directors.

Anonymity was assured in this secondary analysis. Numbers were used rather than names, to avoid identification of individuals in the data collected and incorporated in this study. Records received from Keystone’s head office was

provided in compliance with the firm's responsibility to its consultants, and in accordance with legislative restrictions.¹⁴

The data gathering exercise allowed comparisons with the responses in interviews. The emphasis of the secondary analysis was to provide a background of the change in certain key areas between the time intervals chosen. The interview stage was constrained by the numbers, so the secondary analysis of data provided reliable contextual information of the constituents of the firm, as it covered all partners not just those who participated in the research. Furthermore, it allowed a correlation from the interview to the wider population within Keystone as to changes in the profiles of the people joining and why – a fundamental constituent of the research question.

The data gathered included a consideration of Post Qualification Experience ("PQE") which law firms use to gauge experience. Keystone prided itself as having senior lawyers undertaking much of the legal work as against traditional law firms (as identified in the introduction) who use teams of more junior lawyers with partner supervision. Graphical representations allowed comparison of the changing PQE within the firm, and this was important when considering the reasons for and how this changed as the Keystone brand developed.

Data on male/female ratios was gathered to investigate whether the Keystone model of remote working might have resonated with female lawyers for example, (although COVID implications on working patterns accepted). The legal background of lawyers was collated and any significant changes that were identified in the period covered. Law firms have a habit of merging, changing names or lawyers in large firms leaving to set up boutique offerings. The

¹⁴ Companies Act 1995 and Data Protection regulations.

justification for this exercise was to consider if lawyers were joining from a wider, or indeed narrower type of firm (Magic Circle, Silver Circle, Top 100, mid-market and so forth). Keystone strategically placed itself in the mid-market sector. This study considered if this had changed as the firm developed and became more established, and potentially more attractive to lawyers for example in the most prominent City law firms.

One further indicator I was keen to consider was the millennium question, discussed in the literature review section: The younger more entrepreneurial individual who no longer sees the law as a one firm or type of firm career from trainee to partner, but sees their career trajectory in a different light but wish to remain in the law. I considered the statistics for joiners to ascertain any change in status of the individuals joining in the two periods being examined. This also tied in with the PQE point raised above. This was further explored with individual participants during the interview section, but an analysis of all lawyers enabled comparisons to be considered by way of graphical statistical representations.

In summary, this secondary information will provide a rich source of data that will inform my analysis and correlate with the interview responses.

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction to Thematic Analysis

The evaluation of the information obtained from the ten interviews conducted is crucial as it leads directly to how such data is interpreted and then presented (Liamputtong, 2011). This study is interpretive in nature, and as such, thematic analysis a suitable fit which enabled me to consider an interpretative analysis whilst going beyond the initial more obvious data analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2013). As Thomas, (2011, p.171) states, “an *interpretive inquirer study means that people*

are constructing of the situations in which they find themselves in order to understand the social world". Thematic analysis is simply a method used for identifying and then analysing themes (patterns) within qualitative data – in this study from the interview transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As Crosley (2021, p. 2) affirmed, *"thematic analysis is the study of patterns of meaning. In other words, it's about analysing the themes within your data set to identify meaning"*.

A theme is something significant about the data which has a direct correlation with the research question (Gray, 2014). As Braun & Clarke postulated, it was important in my analysis to consider what counted as a pattern or theme as such (but not simply using interview questions *per se*), although in practice there may be numerous themes. When employing thematic analysis, the researcher first considers and makes use of codes within the data – a code being in effect a marker allocated to part of a text, with the aim of using the code(s) to identify and summarise important concepts or themes within the set of data – those that occur frequently (Crosley, 2021). In this research, within the ten interview transcripts I produced.

Thematic analysis is sometimes regarded as a method as against a methodology (Braun & Clarke 2006/2013). As such, it is not constrained by any particular epistemological or theoretical viewpoint, which made it a particularly flexible and reasonably uncomplicated method of analysis, which I saw merit in when analysing transcripts using a phenomenological perspective.

Braun & Clarke (2006) did accept that whilst thematic analysis is relatively straightforward to undertake, there are potential pitfalls, one being that the researcher usually paraphrases the data without developing an orderly narrative. Furthermore, such analysis might also be unconvincing or inconsistent. It was

therefore important that I ensured the themes identified conformed to a central concept based on my research question and objective.

It is important that my analysis was conducted in a thorough and methodical manner such that I could generate meaningful and useful results. According to Nowell et al., (2017), *“...to be accepted as trustworthy, qualitative researchers must demonstrate that data analysis has been conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner through recording, systematizing, and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough detail to enable the reader to determine whether the process is credible.”*

To ensure the credibility of my research analysis I deployed the approach for judging the trustworthiness of qualitative research espoused by Lincoln and Guba (1985/89) and considered the primary standard for evaluating the quality and trustworthiness of qualitative research. These are discussed below:

- **Credibility** – To show that the research process had integrity and that the final rests can be trusted – that is confidence in the 'truth' of the findings - how well the study findings represent the data (I used my emersion in the interview process and subsequent analysis to endure the context as appreciated and such that I could rise above any potential researcher preconceptions. I also built trust with my interviewees (not too difficult as peers).
- **Transferability** – Showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts and settings (Enworo, 2023) – in so much as I could in the circumstances of my own research.
- **Dependability** - To show that the research was sound, and that the outcome would be similar should it be repeated Showing that the findings

are consistent and could be repeated especially with purposive sampling - data saturation considerations.

- **Confirmability** – To show confidence in the fact that the findings are based on data generated and verifiable. A degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest. I made great efforts to avoid any bias (as previously discussed with reflexivity) especially as I was also a Keystone lawyer.

Guba and Lincoln's (1985) parallel criteria for evaluating rigor in research, remains one of the most extensively used and which I adapted to my own findings and I determined that my analysis did, by taking account of Guba and Lincoln achieve the expected rigour.

How I used thematic analysis in this research project to properly scrutinise the data and then to ensure credibility and present my findings is set out in Chapter Five.

Summary

This chapter considers the methodological and philosophical factors (building blocks) best suited to answer the research question posed. It defines a qualitative design with an interpretivist perspective. The methodology is from a phenomenological inductive standpoint. This research design was felt well suited to research carried out within one setting and with fellow senior lawyers as the research participants. The phenomenological approach is appropriate as the research is looking into the individual's own reasons for joining what was a relatively recent phenomena in the legal world, namely a platform law firm, and in particular Keystone Law. Within this setting, it was appropriate to consider the

relative advantages and disadvantages of insider research and the role the researcher takes, and the possibility for inherent bias.

The methods of research were also considered, together with the ethical considerations, including anonymity and peer interview considerations within the firm. Interviews were the primary vehicle, this method fitted well with the research design deployed. The data gleaned from interviews were interrogated utilising thematic analysis, an accepted qualitative tool for data analysis. Themes and codes emerged to enable comparison and interpretation of the finding between the individuals in each cadre and between the two groups. Further descriptive data was utilised to provide a firm wide background to the primary research information garnered from the interviews.

The methods and sampling chosen embraced the research methodology and enabled the research questions to be successfully answered.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction – Thematic Analysis

Good quality data analysis is crucial to plausible and reliable qualitative research. The researcher can be depicted as the *research instrument* insofar as their ability to understand, describe, and interpret experiences, perceptions which is fundamental in discovering meaning in particular circumstances and contexts (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

As noted at the culmination of Chapter Three, I chose to use thematic analysis to analyse my data set. Thematic analysis and the search for codes and themes was important to the description of the phenomenon which was within the remit of my research question (Daly, Kellehear, and Gliksman, 1997). I discovered during my research that, with much in the qualitative sphere, there are numerous approaches to data analysis (e.g., Javadi & Zarea, 2016; Alhojailan, 2012). This inevitably led to some uncertainty as to the nature of thematic analysis, such as how it differs from content analysis for example, (see page 93). This notwithstanding, it occurred to me that the most influential approach (having a clear and straightforward framework) was Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-stage framework. Indeed, the authors suggest that it is the first qualitative method that should be learned as, “.. *it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other kinds of analysis*” (Braun & Clarke, 2006 p.78). I have therefore adopted this method in this study. It enabled me to both investigate, and then identify, patterns/themes that span the full data set obtained from my interviews.

When undertaking qualitative research, the investigator can be presented with large quantities of data (text) which can become somewhat unwieldy to manage. Because of this, there are various software packages available to undertake this process – such as NVivo (Gibbs, 2002). However, as I did with my transcription exercise, I decided to manually consider the data as I felt I would become more immersed in the information, and consequently have more empathy with the data – which might enable better appreciation of codes and then emerging themes that a computer application might miss. Furthermore, given I was considering only ten transcripts, I felt the time more productively spent in manually sorting. I found that undertaking the manual analysis was fruitful, and as espoused by Hughes (1990) it enabled me, in an interpretive manner, to identify evolving themes by reading and re-reading each interview transcript and then cross referencing with the full data set. This enabled me to develop a greater understanding of the pertinent information in the transcripts, therefore enabling me to better relate my findings to the research question which was concerned with the motivations of new joiners to Keystone law, and how this might have changed over time and perhaps demographic change.

Braun and Clarke (2006) defined six steps when using such thematic analysis and these are set out below.

Step 1	Become familiar with the data	Step 4	Review themes
Step 2	Generate initial codes	Step 5	Define themes
Step 3	Search for themes	Step 6	Write-up

Source: Braun & Clarke's Thematic Analysis as adapted by Maguire & Delahunt (2017)

Codes and Themes

The terms “codes” and “themes” have been mentioned so it is useful to describe what I was looking for in the data captured from my interviews. The primary classifications Braun & Clarke identified (and noted above) are codes and themes. It is common practice when undertaking qualitative data analysis to use coding as a way to first identify, then draw together themes. Braun & Clarke commented that, “..coding is a common element of many approaches to qualitative analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.122). A code is basically a label assigned to a word in the data or piece of text. My objective of using codes was to identify and condense what I felt were important concepts within the data, in my case from interview transcripts (Gray, 2014). Codes, whilst also being a method of data reduction in the analytical process, are equally important as they form the building blocks for the next important definition, namely a theme. By identifying and using the codes, this assisted me in developing the themes which summarised sections of my data sets which enabled me to respond to the research question, and achieve my research aim and objective. Following the familiarisation process outlined in the above six stage process, and the coding exercise completed, several themes emerged from the data set of the two interview groups of Keystone

lawyers I had interviewed about their reasons/motivations for joining the firm in the two distinct time frames. These themes are identified in Chapter Five.

A theme, and there may be a number (or sub-themes), is a pattern or topic that can be identified within a data set, usually several times, although you can also have a one-off standalone theme as well (Crosley, 2021). A theme, according to Gray (2014, p.609), “..becomes important when it captures something important in relation to the overall research question.” Guba (1990) submits that regular repetition within the data is one of the simplest ways to recognise a theme. Some themes become obvious, but others can be more obtuse and subtle. Braun and Clarke also helpfully defined a theme, being, “*something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within a data set*” (Braun and Clarke 2016, p.82). My identification and process of refining my themes that emerged from my classification of codes in my interview transcripts are discussed more fully on page 90.

Steps in Analysis

My analysis of the data set from my ten interview transcripts made use of the clear guide espoused by Braun and Clarke. In summary and following the six-step process I implemented:

Step1: I familiarised myself with the data by transcribing the interviews and highlighting initial thoughts in each transcript. Reading and re-reading some days later assisted immersion in the data recorded.

Step 2: I noted interesting features and highlighted and wrote notes for each interview transcript on the margins of the papers.

Step 3: Following on from some of the notes taken in Stage 2, I collated the codes identified into certain themes or patterns across the data set (all ten interviews). I used hard copies of the transcripts and made use of “post- it” notelets and coloured marker pens. By undertaking the transcription myself, I felt more engaged in each interviewee’s responses, and indeed during the process of transcription was able to identify several codes as the transcription was undertaken. Use of the coloured markers (for code, themes, and relevant quotes) assisted this. It was not necessary for me to identify every possible theme in the data, but rather those with an emphasis on the key aspects that related to my research question (Crosley, 2021).

Step 4: I looked further into the themes identified and checked that they were valid in relation to the coded excerpts that I had identified and labelled within my initial investigation. Again, the full data set was used. Further possible themes were identified at this stage.

Step 5: Here I defined and named the themes identified. I also considered stand-alone themes such as those that might be gender specific, which was pertinent to this study.

Step 6: In the writing up stage, I selected the important extracts and quotes from the data set that I had previously identified, and that I considered related well to the research question and literature. Themes were identified and the names refined, and for ease of clarity to a professional reader (as against only academic), I chose to use thematic maps as a clear and succinct summary of the full thematic analysis exercise.

I opted to deploy a relatively deductive approach, considering that I came to the data with some preconceived themes that I expected I might find, based on my existing knowledge of the platform type of firm. Whilst the Braun & Clarke approach favoured a more inductive approach (allowing the data to fully determine the themes), I favoured a more hybrid approach, particularly with a phenomenological focus, and which is an accepted and rigorous way of developing coding and theme development (Fereday, Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This approach, which culminated in a combined method that I used to identify new codes and themes during the course of my consideration of the data during the six-stage process, was successful.

Data Management, Thematic Coding, and Themes

The key objective in this research was to analyse the changing demographic of new joiner solicitors to Keystone Law in the two defined periods contextualised in the two “year” groups, A and B, identified on page 107 below. As discussed, I decided this was best achieved by commencing the data analysis as a separate exercise with each defined group.

In further consideration for my data analysis process, I considered the advice of Miles & Huberman (1994) who suggested that thematic analysis consists of three distinct flows of activity for the researcher; That is the reduction of the raw data, the data display followed then by analysis and drawing of conclusions.

Decreasing the data to manageable size was important, and which involved an exercise of, “*selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transferring raw data*” (Miles & Huberman 1994, p.21). Flick, (2009) also helpfully suggests how to reduce the volume of textual material by distinguishing three steps when undertaking analysis; summarising content analysis such as paraphrasing, explicating content analysis to clarify any ambiguity or contradictions for example,

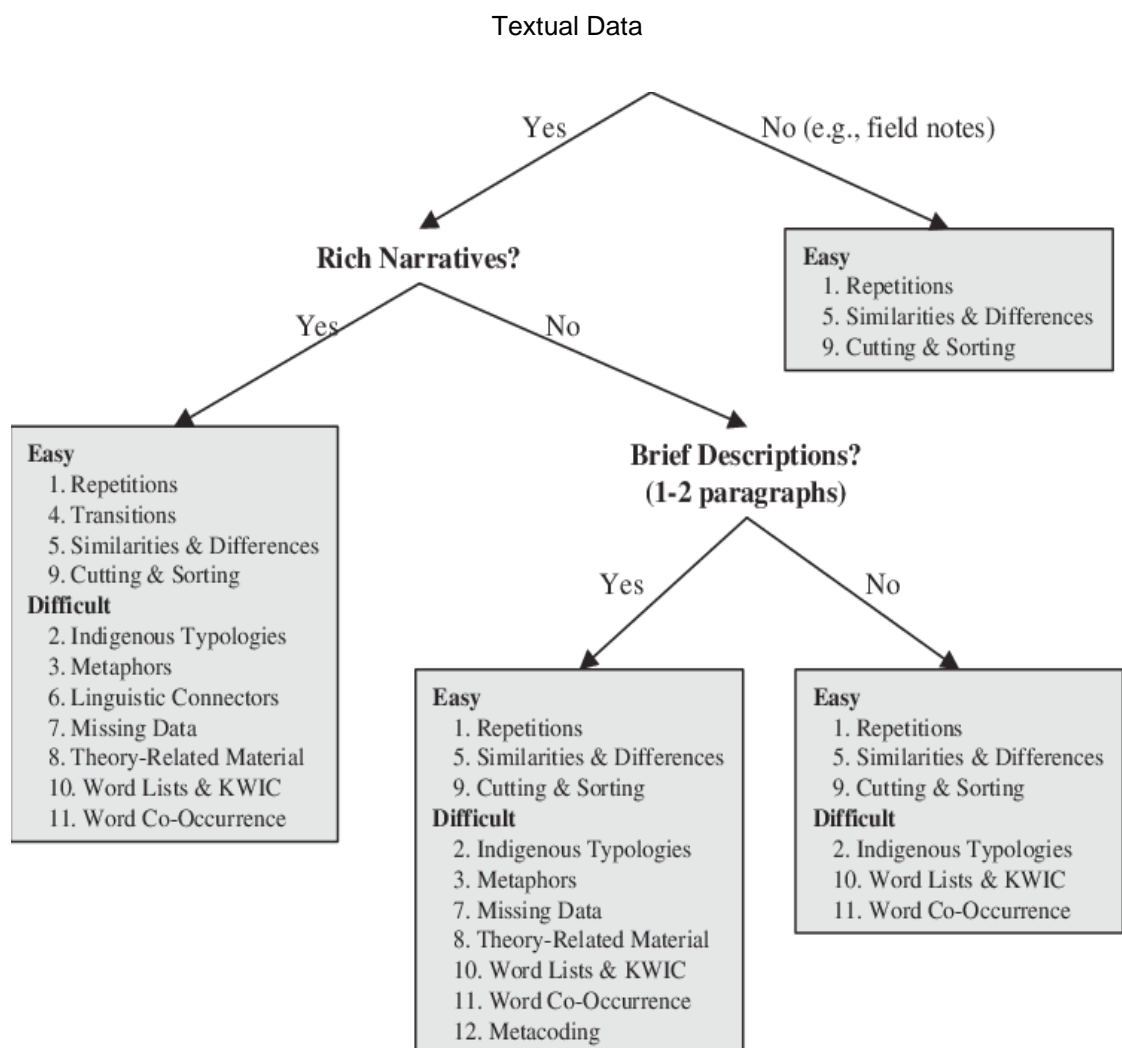
and finally structuring content analysis to obtain key features in the data and then describe in more detail. Having considered these various methods of analysis, I decided to deploy mainly the helpful guide of Braun and Clarke (2006) whilst being mindful of the other considerations. Braun & Clarke suggests that thematic analysis generates a theory from the data by considering themes, "*capturing something important about the data in relation to the research question..*" (Braun and Clark 2006, p.82).

As encountered several times in this study (and as illustrated above), I found that in qualitative research generally the terminology used is not consistent. David Gray stated, "*One of the challenges of qualitative research is that there are no widely accepted rules about how qualitative data should be analysed, other than that the approach is generally inductive and involves coding of data.*" (Gray 2014, p.602). This can be demonstrated with such terms like *chunks and segments* (Dey, 2005) to *codes or categories* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I found this to be the case when considering the procedures for theme identification as there are many variations to coding and theme identification dotted across books and journals used by social scientists (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). As also observed by Ryan & Bernard, theme identification is however probably one of the most important features in qualitative research. Interestingly in their Abstract, they also conclude it is, "*one of the most mysterious*". Consequently, the process of my theme identification was somewhat challenging.

I undertook the thematic analysis as espoused by Braun and Clarke and considered above. Having read through each of the ten interview transcripts again, I followed the six-step process set out on page 100 to 101 above. This process was undertaken with the assistance of coloured shading on the word documents then coloured marker pens and post-it sticky notes to assist in the

identification of codes, and ultimately themes, which were pertinent to my research question.

The data collected in this research was by way of my interview transcripts transcribed manually by me, the researcher. Such data thus textual in its format, which enabled me to better consider the identification of themes by a consideration of any reiteration of words and or statements, and variances and similarities within the information – further illustrated by verbatim statements providing descriptive illustrations for the developing themes. The diagram below is generally descriptive of the procedure I followed, although in my own analysis I was only using interview transcripts.



Source: Theme Identification Ryan & Bernard (2003, page 102)

Analysis of Data Sets

My research question is concerned with the change (if any) at Keystone Law, and in particular the individual lawyers who joined the firm. I identified two groups of practising lawyers who joined approximately ten years apart. I split the data set into two groups of five interviewees. I did this as, when considering the thematic analysis to be undertaken, I sought to identify any potential differences as between the two groups. I decided this was best undertaken by considering the groups as two data sets and producing a thematic analysis on each group. This was undertaken by considering the Braun & Clarke six-stage process for each group separately – as a preliminary exercise.

Codes and themes for each group were identified using the process discussed above, and a thematic map for each produced as part of the “Stage 6” development. These can be seen below in Chapter Five.

Having produced, in effect, a thematic analysis for each group, and consequently the full data set, I was better able to then discern and appreciate the similarities and differences between my two groups, particularly within the themes that I identified. This assisted in my final analysis of the full data set and reflected what I was trying to achieve in the research question.

Comparison Analysis

The constituent members of each group (Group A and Group B) are identified in Appendix Five with names redacted for confidentiality purposes, upon which this research is predicated, and importantly a researcher is obligated to protect the anonymity of participants and keep any personal information private (Foreman-Peck and Winch, 2010). I also identified in interview, several comparison indicators (such as age and gender) as shown in the appendix (and see below),

which are utilised in this analysis. By way of comparison, according to the Keystone Law website¹⁵ the average PQE upon joining is 20+ years. This will be considered further in Chapter Six when considering the interview analysis with other comparison data from the full complement of lawyers currently at Keystone Law as of 2022 (see Appendix Five).

In both groupings, I identified my interviewees by letter, Group A, individuals being A1 to A5 and in the second Group B, B1 to B5. In this data analyses and in the results, all references to individuals (such as when quoted) will use this nomenclature.

In the interview process, I asked everyone the type of firm that they had moved from to join Keystone. This was considered important and as discussed in the introduction, given Keystone initially looked for lawyers from mid-tier (top 200) law firms – primarily London based. I wanted to see if this had changed over time, and which assisted in the discussion of demographic change which the research question was considering. In Group A, there was a mix of previous type of firm, from Magic Circle (top five firms in the City of London (i.e., Clifford Chance)) to large regional firm (i.e., Bristol based), I did however accept that in the last twenty years or so many firms have merged and some practitioners left large firms to set up niche or boutique practices, especially in sectors such as marine and family. As such, the previous firm was not necessarily an important or reliable factor when making comparisons and conclusions.

¹⁵ Source: <https://www.keystonelaw.com/about-us> 2022.

Group A

This group consisted of five interviewees who joined Keystone in the earlier joiners' data set, those lawyers who entered the firm between 2007 to 2009 (see further Appendix Five). There were three females and two males interviewed who had an average post qualification experience ("PQE") on joining Keystone of 14 years 10 months. A4 was the most junior in terms of PQE at 10 years, A1 at 26 years PQE the most senior.

The average age of Group A upon joining the firm was 41 years, with **A1** the oldest at 51, and **A2** the youngest at 38. In this group, the lawyers' previous firms were a mix of top 100 London, Magic Circle and regional. Two had been partners, and three senior associates or associates.

Group B

This group consisted of five interviewees who joined Keystone in the later joiners' data set, those lawyers who entered the firm between 2018 and 2021. Three males and two females were interviewed. In this group, **B4** had the longest PQE at 30 years, with **B2** at two years. The average PQE was 12 years six months. The average age of this group was 39 years 5 months. **B2** was the youngest at 25, and **B4** the eldest at 54. In this group, the participants came from top 100 London firms, and niche London practices (having left larger firms to join these), two had been partners, three senior associates or associates.

Summary

Following my data familiarisation and coding, the thematic analysis exercise was completed following my re-reading of the ten interview transcripts a final time to ensure that I had identified all the salient themes. This was an important final exercise, as whilst a significant theme or themes might be readily apparent this is

not always the case. Braun & Clarke (2006) acknowledged that, *“a theme might be given considerable space in some data items, and little or none in others, or it might appear in relatively little of the data set”*. They went on to opine that, *“researcher judgement is necessary to determine what a theme is”* (Braun and Clark, 2006, p.82.). I identified and refined several themes and sub-themes in each interview data set and then across the full data set of Keystone interviews. Several themes emerged from the data, including flexibility of work, alternative business opportunities and financial considerations. Five themes were identified in Group A, and four identified in Group B. These are illustrated in the thematic maps on pages 113 and 133. In the full data set analysis combined themes were considered apposite and are discussed in chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEMES AND FINDINGS

Introduction – Themes

The next chapter presents and considers the findings of this work-based project. In Chapter Four, I examined the process I undertook to identify themes in my analysis of the ten interview transcripts using the Braun & Clarke (2006) thematic analysis techniques. As discussed, the data in my transcripts was interrogated and the information sifted and narrowed down such that I could start to define the relevant phrases and terms into themes that related to my research question. In my evaluation, I chose to undertake the analysis by way of two separate exercises; using the transcripts emanating from Group A and then a similar exercise with Group B, the individuals who are identified in the previous chapter at page 108. To assist my visualisation of the themes identified, I deployed the use of a thematic map for each group.

In undertaking this exercise, I was reminded again of possible researcher bias, being myself a solicitor at Keystone Law, and having gone through my own thought processes when I was considering the move to a platform law firm. However, and of import, the two time periods in my interview data sets were, with Group A from a time before I joined the firm, and then with Group B, a period some five or more years after I commenced work at Keystone Law. Irrespective of this, I recognised that an objective mindset was required to minimise any perceivable research bias with my findings. As Bel and Waters noted, *“...unintended bias, operating at below the researcher’s level of awareness, is more common.”* Importantly for me they go on to say, *“One of the key characteristics of a researcher is to be open minded and to be prepared to be*

surprised, both by what they find and what the data tells them.” (Bell and Waters, 2019, p.12). I therefore ensured that I questioned my theme identification as I progressed to ensure that, as far as was possible, I eradicated any perceptible personal bias that might have been present. This exercise also had the additional benefit in that it enabled me to further immerse myself in the data and consider where themes identified might have overlapped. The themes I discovered were also discussed with my research supervisors to ensure rigour in developing new knowledge within my chosen field – which is the main thrust of this work-based project into the business in which I work.

My research question concentrated on the individual lawyers in my two groups and their personal motives for joining what a new phenomenon, namely the platform or dispersed legal practice. In particular, I wanted to research if such reasons or motivations identified during the interview process had altered in the ten or so-year lacuna as between the two groups when making their employment decisions in the time periods selected for this research. Consequently, my data collection and analysis gave prominence to this, and the themes considered and identified were a product of such an approach.

GROUP A – Themes and Findings Identified in the Data Set

Having undertaken an interpretive analysis of my two data sets, it was possible to better understand the motivations that individual lawyers had when they were making their decision to leave a traditional law firm model to that of the disruptive model of law firm, Keystone Law. Group A interviewees were made up of practitioners who joined Keystone Law between 2007 to 2009. The following five themes were identified in the thematic analysis exercise within this group of five

individuals. Within each of the main themes, I identified some sub-themes which are also listed and will be discussed:

1. Lifestyle Benefit

Freedom

Independence

Flexibility

2. Personal Circumstances

Redundancy

Maternity

Other projects

3. Brand Significance

Positive and negative influence

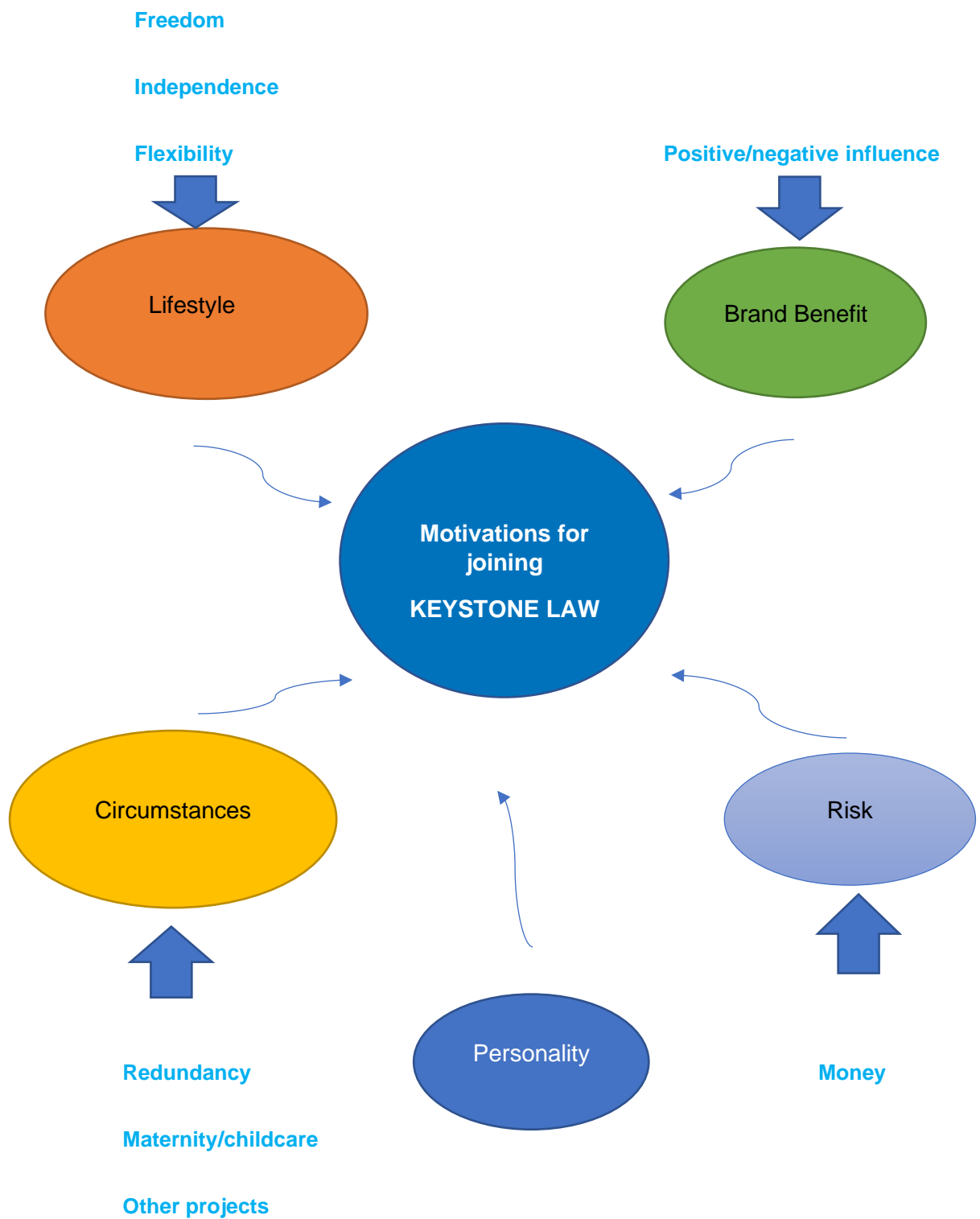
4. Attitude Towards Risk

Money

5. Personality

I described the identified themes and sub-themes in a thematic map which clearly illustrates the motivations/rationale found in Group A.

Thematic Map - Group A



Turning to the themes I identified within this group, the questions I adopted during the semi-structured interview process are set out in Appendix Two. These questions formed an introductory and helpful backdrop to the interview processes.

Moreover, as previously discussed in Chapter Three, the semi-structured format allowed the participants to go “off-piste” should they wish and by so doing allowed a more rounded and progressive discussion. This consequently allowed more latitude and of significance richer transcripts in which to identify salient themes. I now set out my discussions on the selected themes for Group A.

Theme One – Lifestyle Benefit

Lifestyle was a popular theme that emanated from my interviewees. This theme could have similarly been identified as work/life balance, although in my analysis a slight broader theme emerged, hence the label used in this instance. It is important to note that with Group A participants in circa 2009, the concept of remote or hybrid working models (which we will discuss later in this analysis with Group B), was a system of employment few law firms operated, especially the larger London practices, from where most earlier joiners to Keystone emanated (see Appendix Five). Joining Keystone was therefore quite a unique prospect.

In all five transcripts, I identified the common theme of lifestyle benefits to joining Keystone Law. At that period, Keystone was the only London practice that was predicated on remote working with a centralised support service in London. This new concept allowed lawyers to adapt their working practices more to a perceived lifestyle advantage.

A male interviewee (**A1**), had a rather mixed bag of lifestyle motivations for considering Keystone Law, having been posed a similar question:

“...Em, Remote working, I didn’t have to go to an office, em, lack of targets, can do your own thing. A Lack of formality and do your own thing.”

This interviewee considered lifestyle to be a significant determiner in his choice of law firm as he had enjoyed a reasonably flexible work style in his previous firms, in

his case latterly more niche practices and wanted a similar freedom. He also noted that the requirement at the time to be in an office every day to be outdated – and note this was some ten years before the recent events of the COVID pandemic and more flexible working practices. **A1** went on to say:

“... I’ve never understood why people were not allowed to work from home, made absolutely no sense. And, as technology improved that, you know, as a litigator, you can’t work from home because you can’t carry twenty files around with you. But now it’s all online.”

Participant **A1** might, it is suggested, be looking slightly with the benefit of hindsight with the above comment, but at the time he was considering joining Keystone technology had improved such that paperless files were more the norm in practice and given his specific practice area, an important consideration when looking at a new type of firm with a remote working model. At that time, Keystone did not have facility for even part-time office facilities which it did with the latter group of interviewees in Group B.

The solicitor **A1**, discussed above, made further references to lifestyle during his interview. He mentioned freedom and flexibility to work at his own pace/style. He mentioned, following a question directed at his motivations:

“Ones that stand out for me were lifestyle, work balance, freedom and independence.”

Whilst these reasons do, I believe, come under the general theme of lifestyle, I consider that some such as freedom and independence can be considered sub-themes as each raise slightly different motivations which we will consider more fully below. For example, another interviewee, **A2** a female lawyer also cited

freedom and independence, when discussing previous traditional law firm pressure of targets and expectations:

“I needed something completely different, and I had complete freedom and independence. I’m sort of temperamentally suited to having a certain amount of independence and autonomy as I initially trained as a barrister, but I’m sociable so I do miss that. I just don’t like being told what to do.”

In her viewpoint, she stated that she missed the independence that she had when at the Bar which was prior to her employment as a solicitor. Her lifestyle requirements were focussed on flexibility and independence, in part due to her previous type of employment and her other interests outside her legal practice – which she cited as creative projects.

The theme of Lifestyle Benefit was certainly a common topic identified; albeit broad church in the individual’s expectations when making their decision to join Keystone Law.

One interviewee (**A3**), expressed herself eloquently when posed with a question as to why she chose Keystone as against another traditional law practice:

“...I decided to move from London at that point and I looked for an alternative method of working. I needed to continue working, but I had adopted children and I didn’t want to leave them for long periods, so that was it – a lifestyle choice.”

This interviewee, a woman, worked in a large City law firm and wanted to continue to work for a London based firm given her practice area, but wanted more flexibility to manage her new lifestyle choice. When discussing motivations, she succinctly pointed out how new and refreshing the Keystone model was, particularly to her as a female lawyer in a large City practice:

“And yes, just actually the idea of being free to work as I wanted, which at the time was absolutely pioneering, frankly, being able to work when you could choose, without anyone watching the clock and telling you when you should work and how you should work. I loved it...”

A3 also cited in her words, “lifestyle choice” as a determining factor in her decision-making process as personal to her and her family choices at the time. Keystone allowed her to combine the roles at home and work – hence a motivation for her to join what was a new concept in law. I will consider an analogous sub-theme of maternity later. She also mentioned, with some conviction, that if looking back, the lifestyle choice was correct as the main consideration for her joining Keystone – in particular, she picked the drudge of commuting and leaving her children for prolonged periods as further salient examples.

A4 was a younger solicitor when he was considering Keystone Law, at 35 years of age, quite young compared with the average age for Group A at 41 years. Lifestyle was not cited as quite so important as others in the group, which is understandable given his seniority at the time. He did cite various circumstances for his rationales, which will be considered in a separate theme, but in the interview when the question was posed as to main reasons for joining Keystone, he did allude to less formality and internal politics in the way of structure which he wanted, and importantly again the lifestyle wishes for flexibility of work life:

“...the flexibility, ...because it gave me time to put into other avenues. And I suppose potential because I felt that for me to realise my potential, I needed to be the only one responsible for myself. And there’s the politics issue.”

The final constituent of Group A also mentioned lifestyle as the primary factor for considering a move to what was a different type of law firm – especially with the

name, Lawyer's Direct, which was soon changed as it had connotations of a bulk business personal injury firm. This lady (A5), was, when making her deliberations, very conscious of issues connected with family and flexibility. Family reasons will to an extent be considered under another theme identified, namely Personal Circumstances. A5 was a partner at a large City firm when flexibility to work at home when one had young children was not an option in that work environment, and she wanted the quality of life that enabled her to mix her childcare commitments with the job she loved. At the time, this was unobtainable in the type of law firm she was used to (Magic Circle). Keystone gave her this opportunity, A5 having met an ex-colleague who had joined and discussed the type of firm structure with her. She said in interview:

"I loved working there but unlike now where you can work remotely in such firms I had to physically be in the office, so I always felt I was in the wrong place – no remote working then. I did try but it was not as fluid as it is now and not a success and anyway not accepted."

She went on to say:

*"My overriding reasons for thinking of leaving [**] was about flexibility, childcare and quality of life and going to a more traditional firm would be more of the same. Had it been 20 years later I would have probably stayed there for life, and there was no reason to leave other than the child situation."*

The issues of childcare were mentioned by two of the female interviewees in this group, and importantly a desire for flexibility between work and home life. As a consequence of this lifestyle choice, I will look more closely at maternity as a

separate sub-theme under the main theme of Personal Circumstances to be discussed later.

In summary, my analysis of the transcripts demonstrated that all the participants in this group, to a greater or lesser degree, were of a similar mindset, in that lifestyle was a prime motivator for them, when considering a move to a new type of law firm, although they had their differing motives, including flexibility, freedom and work-life independence – all interconnected with their personal lifestyle and work expectations.

Theme Two – Personal Circumstances

A second theme that I identified in the Group A transcripts was Personal Circumstances. Whilst it might be contended to be rather a wide-ranging theme, it was, I determined worthy of its own title given the differing and interesting reasons interviewees gave as to circumstances that made them consider a move from their traditional law firms. Whilst this theme has a measure of commonality with lifestyle, I considered it to be subtly different. As with lifestyle, this theme resonated with all the Group A interviewees.

My discussion with candidate (**A1**), a male in his fifties when he joined Keystone, was noteworthy. **A1** had moved around the legal world quite a lot prior to finding Keystone. He had been made redundant several months previously (in his words, “*I might have been resting.*”), but was generally looking for a way to get back into practice, but not particularly in a law firm. He was not particularly looking at a platform firm but was considering various possibilities given his circumstances. When asked what options he had considered before Keystone his reply was unequivocal:

“Er, well, starting my own firm, starting a debt recovery collection company, em, I didn’t really consider a larger traditional firm as I didn’t really like them.”

It should be noted that Keystone was less than half the size then, than it is in 2022. As to why he did not favour a traditional law firm, he reviewed his last law practice:

“...it was chaotic, badly managed and finances poorly managed and lacked focus... and I had inevitably a difference in views between us why there was insufficient work.”

A1 stated that he heard about Keystone from a friend who was at the time being asked to set up a similar network for accountants, and although he had not heard of Keystone it was worth looking into it. It was apparent during my interview that this participant could be considered as a “rolling stone” career-wise and had not found his niche, and his personal circumstances precluded it seemed longevity in a traditional law firm structure which I concluded was a character trait. He liked overseeing his own destiny which is also highlighted in the theme on Lifestyle Benefit above. In considering Keystone, he said he had nothing really to lose as he could hopefully gain referral work (he was a litigator) from other lawyers to make ends meet and earn that way until he built up his practice, having been out of the sector for some time since being made redundant from his previous practice.

Another interviewee, **A2**, also highlighted Personal Circumstances as a significant causal factor in her consideration of the original offering that Keystone could provide to her. She was content to divulge that she was (at the time) going through what she referred to as a midlife crisis, and that there has been some

illness and death in her family that had knocked her off course. As with **A1**, she was out of work prior to speaking with Keystone, but at her own volition, given the circumstances noted above. When asked why she was looking at Keystone she replied:

“I uh, I quit my job for personal reasons. I didn’t think I was going to continue as a solicitor. I just felt there was nowhere to go with that. I thought law might be an adjunct to all those other creative projects I was going to do, which one does not quite get around to. Then some clients asked me to continue... So, I was looking at just operating as a sole practitioner, but it was very difficult to get professional indemnity insurance.”

She volunteered that her previous law firm was a niche practice but seemed to be in trouble, and she was wary of run-off insurance obligations, and in her words:

“...and that there were some personal events that meant that I was at a crossroads in any kind.”

A2 had found out about Keystone from a client, so by word of mouth, and having met the founder she noted that it offered something that resonated with her personal circumstances and the lifestyle she wanted at that time in her life. She wanted something, *“completely different,”* and that is what the firm appeared to offer her.

A sub-theme I picked up within the theme of Personal Circumstances was maternity/childcare. Both my female interviewees **A3** and **A5** had apposite comments when it came to juggling their love of their legal careers with motherhood and the conflicting interests of an intensive professional life in large London law firms at the time we were discussing in interview, namely approximately 2009/10.

A3 cited her main reason for moving from a large London City law firm after ten years was primarily the issue of childcare. She succinctly noted that it was not so much maternity, but in her case adoption although the difference was somewhat otiose. When I posed the question as to why she was considering moving from her current firm she responded:

Well, this is a very unusual reason. Well, not that unusual or unreasonable. At the time I had just adopted two little girls, and I went back to my former employer and said, could I please come back after maternity leave part time. As in three days a week and build back up. And they said sorry, we don't do that for partners. So, I thought right, sod that and I moved. Decided to move from London at that point and I looked for alternative methods of working. I needed to continue working, but I had children, and I didn't want to leave the for long periods. It was a lifestyle choice for my personal circumstances."

Businesses' changing attitudes towards female professionals will be considered in my final analysis in Chapter Six, but the above quote underlines the difficulty women had in balancing their careers, in this instance in law, with childcare, especially as one gained seniority as highlighted in the transcript above. Keystone provided that flexibility although in a fundamentally different type of working (i.e., no defined income as a "eat what you kill" approach, which will also be considered later. In **A3**'s case, she did have a client following which eased this concern and as she noted it enabled her to, "*facilitate home working.*"

My interviewee **A5**, experienced similar hurdles. Prior to joining Keystone, she was a senior associate in a Magic Circle law firm in the City of London. When posed

the similar question that I did to **A3** concerning why she was considering a move she replied:

*“I didn’t leave [**] to come to Keystone, I left as I had my second child, and I was the first person to work at the firm part-time as a fee earner in 2009... So, when I came back, I persuaded them I could do three days a week but what happened was that a three-day week turned into a 90-hour week, and I had to physically be in the office as early days of emails and stuff on systems not in pace in the same way as now. I didn’t want to leave [**], but it was simply about becoming a mother. Um, I tried to do some work from home, but it wasn’t as fluid as it is now and not a success, and it was not really accepted then.”*

Rather despondently she went on in similar vein:

*“I was on track to becoming a partner which was a big thing, and it was a choice. Having a child. Unless you did not want to see your kids and in those days if female you literally did not see your kids. One woman left the firm when her waters broke and was back at work the day after the baby was born – it was like that at [**] for women in those days.”*

The above transcript is a vivid illustration of how Personal Circumstances affected women in particular in high flying careers. In the case of **A5**, another personal circumstance which was in play, was that her husband left her, and she had to prioritise the children, as she said:

“I did not want to be unavailable to them and it was really important to me to be a hands-on mother.”

A3 went to join a relative in a small law firm but wanted something more structured given where she had come from, and Keystone offered that. As was the case with several interviewees in this group, **A3** heard about Keystone from an ex-colleague who had joined the firm, and she had spoken with the firm's founder a couple of years previously but at that time she had not taken it further as it was just too new and unknown (to her).

The final contributor from my interviews was **A4**, a male solicitor who was about ten years qualified upon joining Keystone Law, but at 35 years of age at the time one of the younger joiners. **A4** had worked as a salaried partner in a large commercial practice in Bristol. He was, however, made redundant as a consequence of the banking crisis which affected his practice area:

"I was forced to because I ended up being made redundant in the property crash following the banking 2009 crisis."

Notwithstanding this, he opined in interview that he had already been considering a move as he was finding his previous firm was not focussed on his particular area of work, which was contrary to what he had been informed when he had joined two years previously. Having been made redundant and his circumstances affected by the dearth of work in his field, he found employment at a small firm and changed his practice to a broader area, although not really what he wanted but he had little choice. This firm was a stop gap whilst he pondered his position.

A4 heard about Keystone from an ex-colleague, and the London centric perspective that Keystone offered, along with the ability to go back to his main area of expertise with support from others already at the firm who did similar work, or who could refer, was a major determining factor for him.

Personal Circumstances as a theme was prevalent in all the interviews conducted and was another prime motivator to change and look at alternative options to the traditional firm. The two main circumstances that were highlighted were redundancy and childcare. Both these were significant life changing events that allowed or indeed invited my interviewees to consider their options. All had to find alternative employment as in their situations at the time, all needed/wanted to make an income, so doing nothing was not an option. Most had heard about Keystone or had previously had initial discussions, but their personal circumstances at this time, it seems, allowed them to consider alternatives to the law firm model they had known since qualification. Moreover, by the time Keystone had been operating (and growing) for about eight years, although a unique working model, it had been in the legal sector for a while and worth consideration.

Theme Three – Brand Significance

Brand was an interesting theme to emanate from my analysis of the transcripts. It also has a resonance to the evaluation of the Group B interviews, and as such worthy of mention. The subject of brand was mentioned as part of my questions (see Appendix Two). It was discussed with all the interviewees. The overriding reactions were not unexpected. At that time (around 2009), Keystone was not particularly well known, and the model of working a different concept among law firms, especially those in London where Keystone based itself. Joining a firm, say with an established department in one's field and the "brand" that firm has in the industry it engages with, are important for a potential recruit. In my own experience, the name of the firm that undertakes shipping/marine law can be all important not least as the clients may require a known firm.

Whilst my interviewees discussed brand, the main inference was that Keystone had no discernible legal brand. In fact, if anything, the brand was negative and not a pull factor to joining. When posed the question whether brand was a factor, **A1** crisply said, “no.”

A2's response was noteworthy. She felt that in her field of work she was in effect the brand, and clients went to her rather than a named firm. She opined:

“No brand was not important, because I’ve worked with good clients, and you know trained at good places, so they would follow me.”

This concept is not unusual in law, some clients need a brand that they associate with excellence in the field, whilst others (as in my own sector, marine/superyachts) are more concerned with the relationship with an individual lawyer whom they consider a trusted adviser. This was the situation with my interviewee **A3**. She considered the brand image of Keystone to be negative, more so with the previous name that Keystone had adopted, namely Lawyers Direct. When asked if brand was important to her in making her decision, she responded in an interesting way:

“...I had initially tried to get insurers [clients] to consider Lawyers Direct. Well as you can imagine at that time there was this dreadful outfit called Claims Direct so the association of brand did not help. It definitely informed my decision to switch horses [to claimant work] because the brand was non-existent, so it was a negative brand for me. But in spite of that I joined them, I suppose we should say because the idea was so clever. It was the forefront of new law firms I suppose.”

She went on to clarify one reason she took a risk with Keystone, in that she moved from undertaking defendant work to claimant, and her claimant clients tended to choose or be referred to her - rather than the firm. She stated:

“In fact, rather arrogantly I am my own brand.”

By saying that she elaborated in that she gets instructed based on her reputation, the firm she was part of was not key.

When **A4** was contemplating Keystone, he asked a barrister friend for his thoughts and was initially put off. His comments when posed if he was aware of the kind of firm Keystone was not unusual:

“I was and I sounded out a barrister I used to work with, and I got a kind of the, not a glowing response. It was a sort of, you know, Keystone Cops kind of analogy and you know, a place for homeless lawyers and all sorts of things. I was slightly put off by some of the things, actually.”

This lawyer, from the interview, was clearly quite prepared to take risks for his career and he did, later in the interview, expand on his earlier comments. He accepted that at the time he was looking to join the firm, he was trying hard to create a brand (abandoning Lawyers Direct name helped he thought), but that they had not yet reached a point where many people knew what they stood for and how they worked. **A4** said:

“... I think possibly because you know, it was seen as something different, and lawyers are normally very cautious.”

He opined that his decision was informed by the fact that brand would not matter as, having talked to the funders, he trusted the firm to grow in stature. Also, he saw himself as entrepreneurial, so brand was, “*almost secondary*”.

A5, volunteered a refreshing resume on her view of brand at the time and whether it informed her thinking:

“No, absolutely not. I didn’t like the colour or the name. It was about my own brand I suppose. I did [do] not get any work from Keystone. I have to win my own. It’s all about my own work.”

As with two of the other lawyers interviewed, **A5** obtained instructions based on her personal reputation and therefore the brand that Keystone may have had (or not) was not a motivator to her – more was the ability to use the platform to service her client base.

Branding as a theme is interesting. As a broad synopsis, it was not felt that the firm had a brand of any merit. The firm was considered by the industry (or so these lawyers opined) as a new kid on the block; an unknown concept, but with connotations of not being particularly professional (the Keystone Cops analogy). Most of the individuals interviewed were either hopeful for the future or were content with their own brand image in their chosen fields as being beneficial to picking up work. How this might have changed when Group B is considered later in this work will be of import. With Group A, none of my interviewees felt the Keystone brand was a causal factor for them joining.

Theme Four – Risk

The theme of Risk ties in well with the other themes discussed, as in all of the interviews I found a subtle overlap which I considered unsurprising. Risk, or more

correctly, attitudes towards risk, is an interesting concept. It is generally accepted that lawyers are risk averse – their time being spent advising clients on risk and how to minimise the same (King, 2013). Whilst this is not always the case, particularly in more business-related areas as King (2013) opines, in these interviews we are talking about personal risk rather than business risk of the firm (for example, taking on particular types of clients or work streams). Keystone was a relatively new concept in the period my participants were considering joining. I have discussed above the view some had of this new pretender remote working firm in a very traditional sector. It is a reasonable assumption to suggest that individual lawyers being used to the traditional route to promotion, and salary expectations discussed in the Introduction to this work, might be a little risk averse when it came to considering Keystone Law for their next employment. The responses received were noteworthy.

Interviewee **A1** was predictably succinct in his response towards the risk discussions during his interview. His personal circumstances (out of work) made the move to Keystone of little risk to him. He was more concerned with being referred work by other solicitors and by being at Keystone assisted this faith, so in his words, *“no risk attached”*. This lawyer volunteered that he has taken risks in his previous employment decisions but personally did not feel that risk was a defining point, and as such, had little to opine on the subject save what was elicited above.

A2 did not consider herself to be much of a risk taker; she had a niche area of law and following her personal circumstances at the time discussed in the Themes above, she felt that a client following (albeit not significant) meant she could move to Keystone without taking on unacceptable risk. In addition, she had a partner who earned well which, of course, cushioned any short-term financial loss. She

considered that Keystone was merely a vehicle to enable her to carry on doing the work she enjoyed and covered the professional indemnity she required.

My interview **A3** interrelated money with risk. She was not concerned with an income in the early months when she joined Keystone whilst she rebuilt her practice, because she had savings:

“Well, I had savings, so I was prepared to invest these, if you like, in my future and the family’s future. So, it was a calculated risk but one I was invested in and I take risks all the time... I do conditional fee arrangements where people are usually broke so I have to win so take risks in my day-to-day work as well.”

A3 clearly did not fall into the stereotype referenced above. She quite deftly went on in the interview to describe herself:

“I’m a risk taker, I suppose, but it’s a calculated risk. I take a measured risk. And that the same both in joining [Keystone] and in continuing.”

Clearly **A3**’s attitude towards her practice risk and her personal attitude towards risk were comparable, and joining Keystone was as she stated, a calculated risk which she had considered in conjunction with her lifestyle choice and personal circumstances.

Interviewee **A4** proffered a similar personal risk profile to **A3**. He was 35, single at the time, and had a generally robust attitude to his future and his aspirations. He wanted a new start where he could (in his view) make a success of his career, having been stymied somewhat in his previous practice. He felt alright if he was responsible only to or for himself:

“So, Keystone suddenly appealed massively because I’m a bit of a risk taker, I think and also, I back myself, I believe in myself. That said I absolutely saw it as less of a risk because I felt I would be responsible for myself and that exactly what I wanted, and I didn’t want the control or politics. So, I actually saw it as less risky if you can understand?”

Turning to the female lawyer **A5**. Her attitude towards personal risk contrasts with the others. She was not concerned about money as she had sufficient resources to assist the transition period. She declared herself not to be a risk taker, especially at work, having only worked in one law firm before Keystone. She combined the risk element of joining this unusual firm with the benefit, as she perceived it. I asked her if she was a risk taker:

“No. I would say I am not a big risk taker. I don’t know it’s hard to explain but I had nothing to lose in my mind because what I was going to do was practise law and bring up my kids. So, to me there was no risk anyway.”

This self-confidence displayed by most of the interviewees in their ability not only to be good lawyers but also to build or reinvent a legal practice when only paid when the client paid (so no regular income), was a significant consideration that will be analysed more in Chapter Six.

Theme Five – Personality

Personality is rather a stand-alone theme, whereas the others discussed above were all subtly interlinked. This theme was only raised by one individual, **A5**, but I felt it was important to record the comments as pertinent, and possibly a fact that others might have raised if a question had been posed on the point. Given the semi-structured interview process, **A5** raised this during discussion and of her own

volition as to her personal views and how this resonated with her and her decision-making process. **A5** was an employment/media lawyer, and as such, she stated that she took a real interest in personalities in her everyday work. In general discussion, and when asked if she had anything else to add, she raised the point:

“Personalities are important. I felt I could trust them and that it was a good thing to be involved in, dynamic and energetic and happy to be involved with them.”

The fact that her meeting with the two founders was next door to a recording studio in Soho, might have swayed her thought process! The personality point is, however, an important determiner in many respects and will be explored further.

In summary of this section, I have analysed the transcripts from Group A, the earlier joiners to Keystone in this study, and discussed the themes and sub-themes that I generated during the thematic analysis process. The same exercise was carried out with Group B, and following that, the next chapter will discuss and compare the themes overall along with my conclusions.

GROUP B – Themes and Findings

Group B interviewees were made up of lawyers who joined Keystone Law between 2019 to 2021. The following four themes were identified in the thematic analysis exercise within this group of five individuals. Within each of the main themes, I identified several sub-themes which will be discussed:

1. Lifestyle Benefit

Independence

Flexibility

2. Opportunities

Business and Entrepreneurial Opportunity

3. Brand Significance

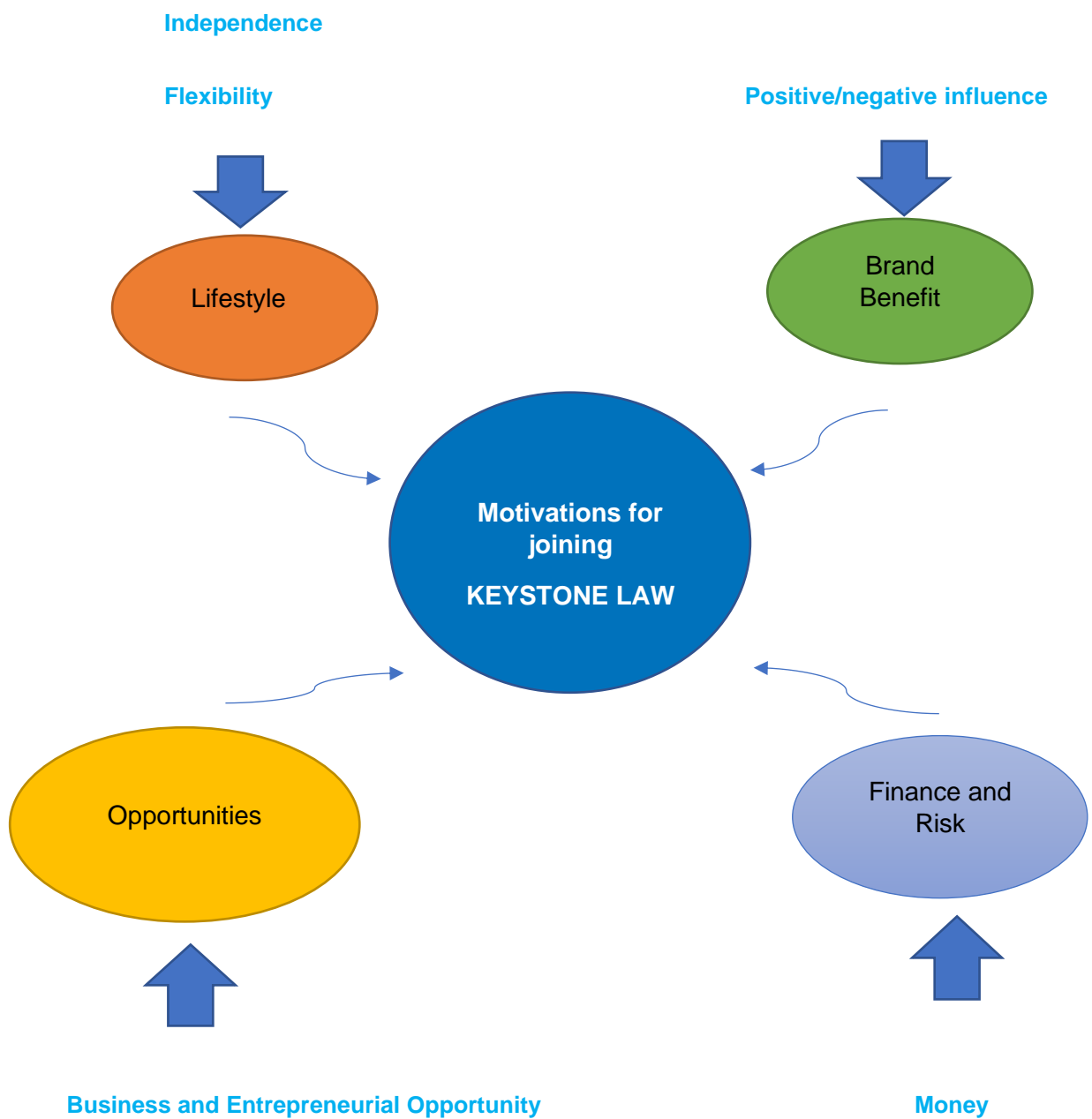
Positive and negative influence

4. Finance and Risk

Money

The identified themes and sub-themes are again illustrated in a thematic map.

Thematic Map - Group B



Theme One – Lifestyle Benefit

This theme was acknowledged by all Group A individuals as being particularly important in their individual thought processes when considering their future employment (at Keystone Law). The notion of freedom and lifestyle balance in, what was an innovative legal practice, could not be underestimated. Following my analysis of Group B lawyers, Lifestyle Benefit also resonated with them, although interestingly it was not so significant a factor within this group, even though mentioned in response to questions on motivations to a greater or lesser degree by all interviewees.

B1, a 36-year-old male when he joined proffered (use of square brackets to ensure confidentiality):

*“I knew my personal circumstances would keep me out of the UK a bit longer and I saw Keystone would give me that flexibility to be connected with, and work in London, but maintain my base in [**].”*

He went on to say:

*“Keystone afforded me the flexibility to essentially go out and get clients, build networks in [**], and back in London and diversify away from the traditional [**] owners work which I questioned the long-term sustainability.”*

B1 had sought to develop a slightly different practice area (in shipping) and felt restricted at his previous practice. He was an associate and was constrained by what he could do as he was not a partner – of which more on this later under the Theme Opportunities. He felt that with Keystone, if they accepted his business plan for his future work rationale, he would by default have the flexibility and

freedom to develop his plans. Therefore, to him the lifestyle benefits additionally meant he could stay living abroad, but still work in the London market in what was by then a large law firm.

Another lawyer (aged 25 on joining Keystone), **B2** did not raise lifestyle as an important motivation when he (and others he joined with) sought to consider a platform law firm. In interview, he did suggest that for him personally (and he thought for his colleagues who he joined with) lifestyle was second or third in his own list of priorities:

“Less structure and that was really important for all of us at the time and so having I think more flexibility in our work life and dealing with clients.

Lifestyle and money earning potential would be second or third...”

B2 was very much looking at business opportunities, and as he had few ties or restrictions, that and his financial future were more important, which I will discuss further below. He could be regarded as an individual with entrepreneurial aspirations as discussed in the Literature Review section of this work.

My interviewee **B3** was a lady who had come from a large London practice where she had been a senior associate at fifteen years post qualification experience. Again, from interview, lifestyle was mentioned but was not a major motivator. In a similar way to **B2**, she liked the opportunity that Keystone offered, such as freedom to develop her practice without politics and not to be restricted by conventions such as only partners can make decisions. When asked about her motivations for considering Keystone model, she responded:

The freedom. Freedom is supposed to be able to do what I want to do and develop...”

Similarly, with **B2**, this response rather interlinks with the theme of Opportunities which will be developed below. **B3** did also cite flexibility of lifestyle as one of her determinators – in her case:

“Working as a lawyer 100% of the time and that didn’t appeal so.”

She also saw other opportunities aside from her legal practice.

B4 joined Keystone at the age of 54. He had come from a successful practice where he had been a senior partner. His primary reasons and motivations will be considered in another theme of Opportunities, but lifestyle was mentioned in interview as a draw for him, but more in the context of him being able to work when he wanted and mix that with other interests – flexibility, and entrepreneurial endeavour and opportunity, and in his words:

“What I liked about Keystone was that there were no targets, so no billable, no chargeable hours and one had complete authority over one’s WIP. And of course, no financial targets.”

He also acknowledged:

“It [Keystone] was kind of the vehicle. It gave flexibility. Do you know, one doesn’t have to work five days a week.”

For him, the flexibility of the Keystone model enabled him to work as he wanted alongside his other interests, so in that respect, important as it gave him that capability. He also wistfully noted that it was good not to have the politics he had experienced in his previous firm.

My final interviewee in Group B was **B5**, a female lawyer aged about 38 upon joining and six years qualified. She was looking to move as she considered

herself to be entrepreneurial and because she was not a partner. Her viewpoints, in her opinion, were taken for granted, and this she considered restricted her own business plans. She wanted a more dynamic and flexible place to develop, and she considered the platform model was worthy of consideration. She was also aware of others in her niche area who had joined, which was an added incentive. The theme of Lifestyle Benefit was discussed as a motivating factor, but more so as it provided flexibility and certain freedoms she wanted. This person lived abroad, so the flexibility Keystone offered fitted in with her lifestyle.

In common with other members of Group B, with **B5** the lifestyle benefits were linked to the ability to engage with other business interests. Whilst lifestyle was a factor, its importance was in this group of individuals more so that they could control their legal work lives and have an opportunity to explore other opportunities, which is the subject of my next Theme identified from the thematic analysis of the Group B interview transcripts.

Theme Two – Opportunities

The theme of Opportunities is a propitious label, as it encompasses quite a broad church of interests found when undertaking the thematic analysis of the Group B transcripts. In most instances, the opportunity benefit was that employment at Keystone enabled the practitioners to further other pursuits in conjunction with their Keystone commitments. These included non-legal pursuits, alternative consultancies, and judicial appointments – as well as the more lifestyle nuances interlinked with business opportunity which were discussed in Theme One.

All the lawyers interviewed from Group B, highlighted Opportunities as a significant factor in their personal motivations when considering a change. In this group there was quite an age range from 25 to 54 (on joining Keystone) but this theme was

quite prevalent. The group came across generally as business minded and with an entrepreneurial mindset.

B1 had been a senior associate and based in a foreign office of a well-known London shipping firm. He had contacts in his own right and wanted to develop his own practice, but did not consider in the traditional firm model of this particular practice that he would be able to – not least until he was promoted to partner, and as he opined, this was open ended and a reason why he was looking to move:

*“...so, I guess, a lack of upward mobility or chances of promotion and I had doubts about the team’s longstanding survival within the [**] office and I wanted to come out from under the shadows of the partners I was working for.”*

In our discussion, the generational changes in employment were discussed, and as previously highlighted in the literature review in Chapter Two. **B1** was asked if he considered employment mobility to be a factor in his decision-making process. He replied that some younger lawyers, in his experience, were leaving traditional firms and exiting the profession. However, the platform model enabled people like him to stay in law – which they trained hard a long time for - but be in a more flexible environment which enabled them to pursue other interests as well. He said:

“It can do. Not only me but Gen X above me who have joined Keystone as they also have a side business, and they want to keep in the law but develop side interests in addition or they are working in some sort of start up.”

He went on to say that he felt that Keystone would enable him to have space to:

“Go and develop a practice in the way that would suit me, or to follow opportunities.”

B1 clearly had opportunities at Keystone in his mind when considering his personal position, and the phenomena of what was the largest commercial platform practice, and the flexibility it allowed, a positive draw for him.

B2 was another younger entrant, and many of the arguments raised by **B1** resonated with him and were also a factor in his decision-making process.

However, unlike **B1**, he had joined Keystone as a team of three, although they all had their personal motivations which were, he said, discussed at length to ensure they reached an accord. Whilst Keystone suited this team’s ambitions in their high net-worth practice, they had also considered setting up their own firm. Upon reflection, they thought they would have more flexibility at a larger platform firm with the added benefit of referral opportunities. As to his personal motivations, **B2** stated that being allowed to pursue other business activities was a big determiner for him:

“... I already had two businesses on the side, which I was running, but it was really difficult because of my previous employer, and I always sort of knew that I wanted to have the ability to sort of do this, not the strict 9-5 culture and so like just in case my other business needed attention, then I could sort of cater for that...”

This lawyer, by his own admission, is of an entrepreneurial bent, but also wanted to stay in law. The Keystone structure gave him this flexibility and the opportunity to progress what he had already started. He was clear that he considered younger lawyers would not be constrained by staying in a traditional practice. He volunteered that he was frustrated, even at his junior level, at the strictures put in

place which stifled his entrepreneurial spirit. He said he, *“loved the idea that they [Keystone] were breaking the mould.”*

Another self-confessed business focussed individual was **B3**, a female of 15 years' experience. Whilst in an older age bracket than the two interviewees above, she was focused on building her practice without the confines of a traditional firm's boundaries where she was a senior associate. When asked why she was considering moving from her previous firm, a large international practice, she was somewhat succinct:

“Because that I was a little bit too entrepreneurial for them, I gave them a business plan of what I needed to do and they, not being an ABS [Alternative Business Structure], couldn't get their heads around any of it and so I said, OK that was fine. Then I would take my business plan and my contacts and my referrers. And the clients.”

B3's view was that bureaucracy stifled enterprise at her firm – especially her firm. She had a vision, but the board (partners) were not prepared, in her view, to go outside their comfort zone. As she discussed during the interview, Keystone gave her the opportunity to realise her ambitions in building up a certain type of practice – where she accepted the risk (financial) was hers but at least she was able to pursue such options. As **B3** also stated:

“I don't think I am the kind of person that's just happy with one gig, as I said its options outside the firm, so not just being a lawyer. If I'd have to work as a lawyer. 100% of the time, and that didn't appeal.”

This lawyer joined Keystone because the structure and work ethics allowed her to combine her pure legal work along with other business interests – something she was not able to do in her last firm.

B4 was another individual with several interests in addition to his legal practice. He was about 30 years qualified and in his 50s when he joined Keystone simply to allow himself this flexible option. He wanted to practise law in his niche field where he was an acknowledged world expert, but on his terms. His main motivation for leaving his last practice was that it restricted one of the main interests he had nurtured, namely a part time-judicial post:

*“I was financially secure. I wanted to do more judicial work. The firm I was at was not supportive of doing more judicial work. So, Keystone gave me the opportunity and the flexibility to continue my love of [**] law, but plenty of space to sit in the Court...”*

This gentleman was secure in his position, both from a practice point of view and financial. He had reached a position whereby he wanted to do other things which included the judiciary, and joining Keystone as a consultant without politics and restrictive covenants enabled him to combine them both.

The final interviewee (**B5**), a female lawyer in her late 30s when she joined Keystone, also wanted to have more control over what she did. Whilst she was relatively junior in post qualification terms, she was very experienced in business having worked in her father’s shipping business prior to becoming a solicitor. In her previous firm, a niche practice, she was not encouraged to develop the business and was confined to a junior fee earning role. She had a broad range of international clients and contacts, given her pre legal career, and was frustrated that she was unable to properly develop a business model within the firm. She

wanted more control over her clients and contacts, and as she said during discussion:

“I didn’t feel like my opinion mattered. My opinion wasn’t taken into consideration when decisions were made.”

This was the main reason she looked to move to an environment that would allow her to grow. Having discussed her business plan with Keystone, and this was accepted, she realised that she could develop the opportunities she had espoused both with her legal practice and other commercial opportunities that she was considering. She said that a big motivation for her was that she would have client control and have options outside the legal work.

In this theme, it very much stood out that the lawyers in this group were pretty business minded; not just lawyers but individuals who wanted to (or had already) developed other outside interests aside from the practise of law.

Theme Three – Brand Significance

Brand was a theme also identified in the evaluation of Group A transcripts. In Group B, I identified similar characteristics where brand significance in the personal opinion of the interviewees were contradictory, some considering the benefit, others that the Keystone brand was rather irrelevant. The difference here though is that by the time Group B were considering their options, Keystone had been in the marketplace for some time (nearly twenty years) and had become well known, and the platform structure accepted by the established firms as an innovative and proven alternative way to practise law.

During interview, **B1** responded to a question relating to awareness of the Keystone name:

“I did consider the branding but more in trepidation and some hesitation. I saw it as not an entirely positive thing. Although Keystone was seen as new, up and coming and innovative, that also worked against it. In my sector, shipping, my old firm had over 130 years to gain its reputation and a staple of the shipping market, but Keystone had less of a reputation in my area, although this has changed in the time I have been at the firm. But in 2019 if you mentioned Keystone in a shipping market context a lot of clients will say they have never heard of it.”

B1's perspective on brand awareness was noteworthy. Whilst he accepted that the Keystone brand had evolved (albeit post joining), he did not consider it constructive for his own business, and as such, he had to make decisions based on his own ability to market his services within his own legal sector. In this regard he stated:

“I was concerned about clients following me, but I also thought I had a personal brand – I don't like the expression, but it has attracted some and dissuaded others.”

He noted that his sector was quite traditional with a relatively modest number of established firms in the market whom clients knew and trusted.

B2 joined Keystone as part of a team. He was enthusiastic about the firm and considered brand to be important as to the overall status of the firm in the marketplace. However, he affirmed the comments made by B1 in that he and his team had garnered their own brand in their niche sector of law, and he was confident that existing clients would follow the lawyers rather than a consideration as to what the name of the practice was. He did admit to some initial concerns in explaining the platform model concept to clients:

“We were worried about how we would explain this sort of idea or the ideology of the virtual law firm to clients. But we were quite lucky in our field and it’s something that we underestimated - we deal with individuals...”

He did elucidate the above with a further comment:

“Individuals follow lawyers. They develop relationships with lawyers. They don’t follow law firms as such...”

Whilst **B2** thought the reputation (as he saw it) of the firm was of importance to his team and his own feelings, but with respect to clients and contacts, it was more the reputation of the individual lawyers that were key, and the type of firm was not really an issue.

The self-professed entrepreneurial lawyer, **B3**, rather followed what the other individuals identified, in that the Keystone brand was not a major factor in her pre-joining deliberations. She did not think brand (of the firm) as important:

“No, because I don’t think Keystone had a brand as such then.”

She also considered that she had her own brand, and her clients and contacts would use her because of relationships built up over time and her track record. She was quite self-confident. This point rather succinctly overlaps with the theme of Risk discussed further below.

B4 was similarly of the view that he had his own reputation so clients would follow him, as would referrals of work. Equally, he did accept that the firm suited him because it was well known and established. When **B4** was looking at his options as to which firm to consider, Keystone was, in his opinion, the best platform firm

out there. When asked specifically if the firm's brand was important to him he replied:

"Yes, it was because I did look at a few others and I was really not impressed by the others. Whereas you know, Keystone, offered a professional image and the resources so, yes."

Interviewee **B5**, a female lawyer of six years qualification when she joined, considered Keystone as against other potential opportunities such as a traditional national law firm, or setting up her own practice, but having discussed her business plan with the directors, she considered the best fit for her was Keystone. She had heard of the firm from other lawyers in her specialist areas she knew who had joined. With regard to brand importance, when that was discussed in interview, she responded:

"I didn't even think there was a brand to be honest. I mean, before I looked into it I always kind of looked really negatively upon it because I always thought, it's just like independent lawyers. But now I know that it's different, but this is the kind of the impression that I got, like it's just like independent you know."

To **B5**, the firm and its other benefits (such as flexibility and opportunity) outweighed her concerns as to brand or name. It had a good department in her sector, and she was confident that her clients and contacts would follow her, irrespective of the firm, but the benefit was other lawyers she could work with on projects.

The concept of Brand Benefit was interesting in this group – most of whom relied on their own reputation and expertise to attract both clients and third-party work

provider. This notwithstanding, the fact that Keystone was also a well-known name certainly assisted.

Theme Four – Finance and Risk

Finance and Risk I found to be interrelated in my analysis of the lawyers in Group B. The individuals interviewed all had a healthy attitude towards their risk profile in joining Keystone, for two reasons; being able to earn money and to enhance their own brands both in the legal field and other interests they professed to have.

These they wished to develop with the flexibility the firm offered them.

B1 was about ten years qualified on joining Keystone and felt the burden of “dead man’s shoes” at his previous firm which stymied his aspirations and ability to establish himself. He was prepared to take the risk of moving to a firm not too well known in his sector. He had a financial cushion to assist this transition, but he was aware he had to go out of his comfort zone to make it work:

“I had a cushion of money to fall back on and I could use that to build up the practice and work and get there eventually. It was a balancing act and Keystone won in the end even with the uncertainty of knowing what was coming in every month and bearing in mind in a tradition firm I would get a certain salary every month.”

B1 was also pragmatic about his financial opportunities and ability to make more money than as a salaried associate:

“I saw the potential that if I could build up just half the amount of work I used to do at the traditional firm, I could still earn a considerable amount more. I saw the potential to earn more money was certainly there.”

This individual was quite clearly prepared to take risks in moving from a comfortable salaried position to take advantage of the Keystone structure of the individual getting 75% of invoiced work, whereas at a traditional firm it would be about 33% using the supposed model of the rules of thirds – for every pound a solicitor invoices, a third goes to overheads, a third to the partners, and a third to the lawyer in salary (Pickup, 2015). With **B1**, however, money was not the primary driver but more the flexibility the Keystone model offered him.

My interviewee **B2** joined Keystone only two years after qualification, but as noted above, came as part of a team but additionally had to show he had the ability to source work on his own account. He was prepared to take a risk as he saw both financial and business prospects at Keystone, as discussed in the theme of Opportunity. In a similar vein to **B1**, he saw the ability to make more money than if he had stayed at a more traditional practice. He declared during interview:

“... if I keep my head down and work hard, then I am not going to be capped at a certain amount of money. I’m going to be able to earn as much as I want from whenever I want and work in my own sort of capacity.”

This lawyer had done his homework. He had reviewed his billing in the last year at his previous firm and compared against his salary, and in his words:

“...I just knew that if I had maintained my same level of work then at Keystone, it was a no brainer to join pretty much.”

B2 saw the earning opportunities and felt the hazard in moving was outweighed by his own assessment of his ability to get work. Moreover, he could refer work from his business contacts to others at Keystone and earn commission that way –

which the firm's policy catered for. Whilst very focussed on earning more, when asked about his priorities, lifestyle and flexibility came ahead of money.

Interviewee **B3** was quite experienced when she joined Keystone at fifteen years qualified. She came across as very entrepreneurial during interview, as can be seen in the above theme on Opportunity. She did not really discuss risk other than saying that she did have a six-month saving plan to ease her passage until new instructions came, but she accepted that she was a risk taker, and felt her existing clients would follow her, or she would re-invent herself, so seemed fairly relaxed. Money was, however, one of her motivations for change along with lifestyle and options outside the firm.

B4 was a very experienced lawyer, who by his own admission, was financially secure when he joined, and as such, earning more money was not a prime motivator:

"...without financial stability, I wouldn't have made the leap."

He was candid in that by being at Keystone and then being able to indulge his other opportunities, he still wanted to practise (when a high value case came in) as there were large pay-outs – so money still held an importance to him.

In one sense, **B4** had less risk than the others in his group as he had both little financial worry by changing firms to one where he only got paid when he invoiced, and secondly, he was confident that in his sector he would pick up new instructions based on his reputation. He came across as very confident in his position. As an ex-barrister, he was familiar with the remuneration system which he said was akin to that Keystone employed.

Interviewee **B5** was quite unambiguous when discussing risk during interview. She declared herself as a risk taker. She went on to volunteer that as she did not have children it was easier to take career chances. She did acknowledge that she thought carefully about her finances as she did not have significant financial security but was confident in her ability to source new work at Keystone:

“It was obviously scary and that’s why I kind of wanted to pay of my debts before I joined. But I knew that I had clients that would stay with me, and I was 100% sure that my clients would stick with me. And even if I didn’t, I can get new clients you know in the first year or two. Then I could live off my clients you know.”

B5 went on to say that money was not a prime motivator as she did not consider happiness came from money and put aside business options and lifestyle with financial security as her prime determiner for joining the firm.

Summary

As a synopsis, I analysed the transcripts of Group B, later joiners to Keystone, and examined the themes and sub-themes chosen during the thematic analysis procedure. In the next chapter, I will discuss and compare these Group B themes together with Group A, along with my conclusions.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION AND OUTCOMES

Introduction

In the last chapter, I deployed thematic analysis to identify appropriate themes in my data set. This was accomplished in two phases with my two time period distinguished groups of Keystone lawyers. Several themes were identified, and these were discussed in detail with illustrations and citations of the individual interviewee's personal motivations in the period when they were contemplating joining Keystone Law.

In this chapter, I will consider in more detail the common themes and distinguish my findings in the previous chapter between the two groups. Furthermore, I will consider these conclusions with due consideration to recent research into the platform law firm expansion, whilst also taking into consideration the changes in working methods that have arisen predominately since the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic lockdown occurred during the later period this work was being undertaken. It has had a considerable impact on the workplace environment, fundamentally changing the mindset of both employers and employees. It has consequently had an impact on the future of legal business – something this work based project seeks to explore.

The themes I will discuss in this chapter are not essentially as organised in the last chapter, but in some instances merged to enable improved analysis. For instance, the theme of "Circumstances" identified only with Group A will be explored in conjunction with the theme of "Opportunities" identified only in Group B, as I

consider that the two themes have common interlinking elements worthy of further consideration.

LIFESTYLE BENEFIT

Lifestyle Benefit was a general theme that all the interviewees in Groups A and B cited as an important and dominant motivation in their personal career change decision making process.

Whilst lifestyle was mentioned by all participants in interview, I observed in my analysis of the transcripts differing explanations for the attraction of the platform model, and how each individual defined lifestyle or work life balance. This I found to be quite indicative of a phenomenological study as individuals had their own interpretation on their world of work. Therefore, whilst lifestyle or work life balance was a common factor, my analysis identified several sub-themes which were interesting, and which rather intertwined with other themes identified. These demonstrated important differences within the thought processes of the personalities that comprised my dataset, and which reflected the demographic of the groups.

Childcare

Historically, law practices were well known for prolonged working hours, formal dress codes, office only working, and competitive working conditions, as well as poor track record for gender equality. Fortunately, in recent years, numerous larger law firms gradually implemented more flexible work options for their lawyers (Clark, 2022). This trend had actually begun prior to the COVID-19 pandemic but was still a concern for many. Female lawyers in particular faced disapproval for requesting flexible work options and better work-life balance for family reasons

(Ofomata, 2021). This was highlighted with my Group A interviewees; **A3** and **A5**. These female lawyers cited the difficulty (at that time in circa 2009) of being able to ask their seniors for more flexible work times so that they could spend time with their children (see pages 115 and 117). It was not an accepted norm, especially the more senior one was. Ofomata (2021), a director of Major Lindsey & Africa said, “*The scepticism about remote and flexible working negatively impacted law firm culture, with presenteeism seen as indicative of contribution.*” The stigma of working from home, as against in the corporate office resulted, she argued, in the loss of female lawyers after they had children – which ultimately led to significant gender diversity issues, in particular within the large corporate firms. This was a factor in the Group A female lawyers’ reasons for considering Keystone, which at that time presented a refreshing alternative to what they knew, and which offered them the flexibility to combine work and family life.

As discussed, law firms were offering a degree of more flexible work for women pre the recent pandemic, but paradoxically many women still considered that taking up such opportunities (if offered) might still affect their career prospects. A study by McKinsey & Company (albeit a US study) advised that law firms must actively encourage lawyers to take advantage of such schemes, but it did not provide any findings as to whether the firms in question wished to do this (Brodherson et al, 2019). A study in 2019 found that 41% of women working in the legal sector argued that resistance to flexible working practices by employers had affected their career progression (Harrar, 2019).

Women have long faced difficulty in the workplace, generally when it came to childcare and loss of promotion opportunities. However, as time has progressed, and particularly in recent years, employment legislation and education has evolved. More women than ever have higher qualifications and want to have both

career and family (Goldein, 2021). Goldein also highlighted that flexible working should not only be a female “enclave”, but that it should be offered in such a way to ensure both males and females can take it. The legal profession has also had to come to terms with the increasing number of women qualifying. 1993 was the first time that there were more female lawyers than men in the industry in the UK. More than 50% of students reading law at university degree level are female, and more entrant barristers are female (Onafuye, 2020). A survey by PwC noted that, in the top 100 firms in the UK, more females than males are recruited each year at trainee level which will, it is hoped, redress the balance in senior roles and ensure more women progress to partnership irrespective of whether the roles are more flexible to cater for childcare (PwC, 2018).

Flexible working is still cited as one of the most major hindrances to women progressing across all industries, but with the consequential changes during and following COVID lockdowns, flexible working is now enabling more women to pursue their careers – especially with more agile working practices and technology. It is worth considering how the post pandemic evolution has affected flexible working, although my Group B participants joined Keystone at about the time of the pandemic so were not so affected by the changing attitudes since. There appears to have been quite a variation in approach. A large London law firm (where I trained) announced it would give employees the option to work from home – but for a 20% pay cut. The Government is pushing for civil servants to go back to the office, whilst Airbnb has advised its staff that they can, in effect, do what they want (Seavers, 2022).

The University of Warwick research by Stephanie Seavers on flexible working, and the benefit for women to combine career and family, concluded that the potential for more flexible work offers a step forward for women in their journey to enjoy

equality at work and at home. Importantly, Severs, (2022, p1) stated, *“But the choices employers make now will affect the steepness of the climb.”*

The female lawyers in Group A with younger children at the time they joined Keystone law, both cited family reasons as a predominant influence on their considerations of a change in lifestyle. This contrasted with my discussions with Group B female participants who did not raise childcare motivations (although they had young children). I made some significant observations on this distinction. The Group A interviewees were working, as noted above, in a period where flexible working in large law firms was very difficult, and indeed seen as career limiting (especially for partners). Interviewee **A3** stated that the notion of working away from the office was just not an option she was offered. This was the prime motivator for her looking to see if Keystone would extend her that choice, having heard about the firm from an ex-colleague. Solicitor, **A5**, had similar experiences where, although there was an element of flexibility offered at her firm, the reality was very different, and she felt overtly pressured to be in the office.

Factors such as more recent legislation revisions (statutes such as the Equality Act 2010 (as amended), amendments to the Employment Act 1996, and the Shared Parental Leave Regulations 2014), as well as industry pressure has allowed women to be better represented and protected in the workforce (Wheeler, 2019). Therefore, in the years after Group A joiners, an increasing number of traditional law firms started to introduce more initiatives to develop female advancement, including shared parental leave and working hours flexibility (Clark, 2022). However, as considered above, perceptions were so engrained, that if a person requested say, home working, it could in effect be a glass ceiling to advancement. Unsurprisingly, there was an ever-increasing desire for more flexibility amongst female lawyers (Reynolds, 2022). A McKinsey & Company

report in 2022 found that only one in ten women wanted to work primarily in an office, with many pointing to remote and hybrid work options as one of their top reasons for joining or staying with a firm (Coury et al., 2022). Until the Keystone platform model became established, there were generally only two options; put up with it or leave. Keystone provided choice and, in the period, when Group A were looking at career alternatives, the firm had grown to a reasonable profile to attract attention.

Contrastingly, none of the female lawyers in Group B allude to family/childcare reasons as a predominant lifestyle factor. By this time (circa 2020) the legal world, as with other industries was adapting. Nevertheless, in 2021 although 61% of solicitors were female, just 35% were partners (up from 34% in 2019) so still a slow path (SRA, 2021). By the time of Group B, there were several alternative business models like the platform model in the legal sector which offered flexibility. Such businesses were now regarded as mainstream and offered alternatives to women if flexibility was still problematic in their previous firms. Although my Group B lawyers were not overtly affected in their decision-making process by the pandemic, the enforced flexibility of home working, even with the largest firms, further challenged traditional orthodoxies on office-based work. To illustrate this, a study by Atlas, Codex Edge in its Alternative Law Firm Report found that there are now more women working in platform law firms than men, and more women than men are moving to such firms (Codex Edge, 2022).

In summary, I concluded that whilst childcare was a prime motivator with my Group A female interviewees for a more flexible work life, it was not with Group B as by the time these women joined there were several alternatives with well-established models, notwithstanding the COVID-19 affect, which amplified by default, flexibility in most work settings. Consequently, it could be reasonably

concluded that childcare was not such an important point as against other pull factors that made flexible working an important concern for joiners to Keystone, and which will be discussed below.

Opportunities and Circumstances

The platform law firm model is predicated on flexible working and absence of a target culture, which the participants of both groups acknowledged to be a significant determiner for contemplating the alternative as against a traditional law firm structure. Although reviewed in the Introduction in Chapter One, it is worth summarising the general *raison d'être* for the platform model, of which Keystone is a key participant. It is straightforward; the consultants (also called partners) via their own service companies, but with the law firm brand (e.g., Keystone Law or Taylor Rose), focus on their legal work and client relations; they receive support services and the firm provide all else like insurance, administration, and marketing. There is no hierarchy or financial/hours targets (Codex Edge, 2022).

Flexibility

Independence, flexibility, and less administrative stress are core values that Keystone Law espouses (Avery, 2022).

Personal lifestyle flexibility was a fundamental wish of all the participants interviewed. There were motives that were easily identified during the interview process, one being a desire to combine work life and childcare for female lawyers, examined above. This was identified in Group A. Other interviewees had their own rationales when it came to flexibility of work, independence, and opportunity. The common proposition in both groups was the ability not to have to be engaged in their fee earning work (as solicitors call their client facing work) to the detriment

of all else. The other common, and interrelated, factor raised in interview by most interviewees was the wish to break away from the culture of targets and hierarchical ethos as highlighted in the Literature Review in Chapter Two. The platform model firm provided that freedom, but only for individuals who had an existing client base or the ability/wish to succeed, given one was in effect self-employed and reliant on client work for remuneration.

Of importance, in my analysis were the two themes of “Opportunities” and “Circumstances”. The latter was only prevalent in Group A and the former with Group B. Opportunity was, I determined, interconnected with Lifestyle Benefit. The value of a work life balance – the ability to enjoy a flexible legal career, if personal finances allowed, enabled participants to engage in other pursuits, be that other legal consultancies, in house legal opportunities, family office, hobbies, business ventures, or non-executive positions. One interviewee in Group B, namely **B4**, cited flexibility, opportunity, and independence as a pull factor to Keystone Law. He had a growing commitment to a judicial career, something his previous firm did not encourage (as it reduced his chargeable hours for the firm). By joining Keystone, he was firstly allowed to pursue other interests, and secondly with no financial target to achieve, he could still undertake his solicitor’s role whilst also enabling him to carry out his judicial appointments, which consequently brought kudos to the firm.

Other Group B participants similarly mentioned this notion of flexibility to enable them to expand their portfolios, some within the law and some as an adjunct to their practice. Solicitor **B1** saw opportunity as a significant draw. He was 36 when he joined Keystone and was, by his own admission, a Millennial/Generation X, and he had not wanted to remain part of the traditional law firm structure with its rigid (as he saw it) promotion criteria. He wanted to have other options in his career

whilst remaining within the area of law that he enjoyed. He wanted to develop a certain business but as he was not a partner his efforts were thwarted. Showing the typical millennial traits noted below, he was not prepared to stay put and looked at his options in firms that may be more adaptable.

Millennials and Generation X

The individual **B1**, discussed above, had all the traits of a Millennial. The demographic cohorts known as the Millennial (those born between circa 1980 to 2000) or even the generation before, Generation X (those born between circa 1965 and 1980) are now important groups in society and thus law. Millennial characteristics are said to include being advocates of working in various occupations and placing less prominence on job title and status. This means that they may be best suited working with a more collaborative approach rather than a traditional hierarchy. A characteristic is also that they may have worked in several roles before they settle on a career of choice. This is because of a better understanding of a good work-life balance. (Indeed Career Guide, 2021).

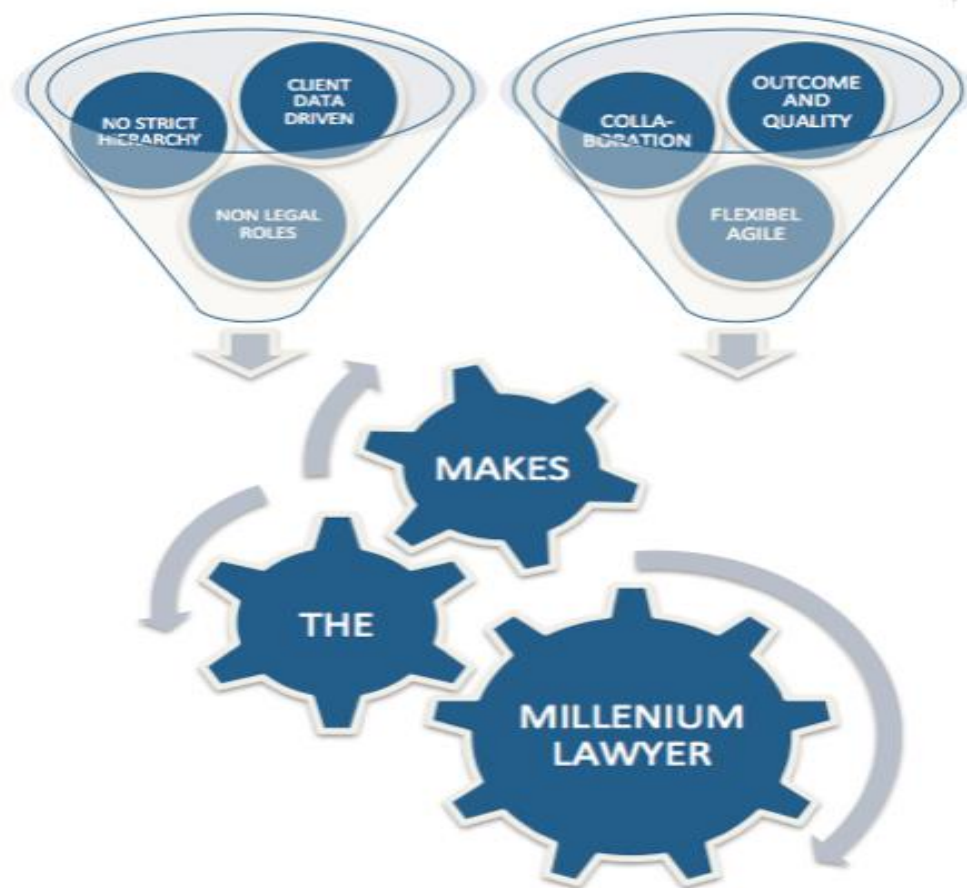
Generation Xers are typically described as being creative, independent, and keen on maintaining work-life balance (McKenna, 2022). Both these definitions reflect, in particular, the Group B lawyers who wanted to look at other opportunities and whilst wishing to remain in law practice (where they studied for years to achieve qualification). They were not fixated on partnership, the traditional law firm approach to promotion, and opportunity. Consequently, the platform model of working appealed. As **B2** revealed in interview – he had two other businesses on the side and these needed his time, which the flexible working approach of Keystone allowed. He stressed that he liked being a solicitor but did want to pursue other opportunities too. An interesting study for Thomson Reuters on millennial lawyers (with a contribution by Professor Dean Perlman, of Suffolk

University Law School), opined that that the legal industry should enable and create an environment where people are judged on their competence and quality of work, not on work schedules and billable hour goals. These points were raised by several of my interviewees. Perlman went on to argue that providing incentives for millennial lawyers with a better work-life mix can nurture creative solutions and could keep them at a firm longer (Silno, 2020). This has generally been in the form of ever-increasing salaries and signing on bonuses which has had little effect on retention issues (Peart, 2022).

Millennials currently make up the largest cohort of the legal profession. Consequently, their work approach has shifted workplace dynamics. A collaborative survey undertaken by Major, Lindsay & Africa and Above the Law looked at work-life goals of such lawyers. The results bear out the attraction of the platform law firm and my interview responses, particularly in respect of Group B. 50.9% of the lawyers surveyed considered that the traditional law firm business model was fundamentally broken, over 75% were either open to new job openings or actively pursuing them. Work-life balance remained the top priority for the 1200 millennial lawyers approached. Nearly 75% stated that they might set off part of their salaries for either more time off, a flexible work schedule, or a reduction in chargeable hours (Fivel and Bhatt, 2019). Retention of younger lawyers has been a growing problem faced particularly by the large City firms. Fieldfisher partner John Linneker summed up the issue succinctly, *“All City firms have had staff retention problems. People decide there may be more to life than coming to the office nine to five, becoming a partner and [even] becoming a lawyer”* (Taddia, 2022, p.17). This statement also relates well to the flexible working and traditional law firm strictures discussed.

A research paper by the universities of “Leeds” and “Manchester Met” on Millennial lawyers in the UK found that such lawyers were not work shy or lazy as was a common assumption. They were committed to the profession, nevertheless, these lawyers were more inclined to challenge organisational and professional norms, in particular on work-life balance and management practices. This work-life balance point recurs in line with my interviews with Group B lawyers. The study asked the lawyers what the primary thing their firm could do to improve their work life balance. 52% wanted flexible working, however, partners and HR departments were concerned about supervision and management practices and were not so keen. Nearly 60% of questionnaire respondents said that they had contemplated leaving the profession (Blaisdell and Francis, 2019). A survey of two thousand law students, by F-LEX in 2018, found that in answer to a question “What is the most important thing that you look for in your career as a lawyer?” 36% mentioned work-life balance and only 22% said they wanted to progress to become a Partner (Bonsor, 2019).

For the lawyers interviewed for this study, the ability to stay in the law was important. The attraction of Keystone was because it facilitated their desire to depart from the traditional firm approach to targets and culture, but additionally allowed them the flexibility to permit them to consider new, or pursue existing, ventures as well – which fitted in with the apparent Millennial/Gen X mind set. The diagram below well sets out the points discussed above.



Source: Legal Business World (Bonsor, 2019)

Circumstances

I identified the theme of Circumstances with Group A in my study. It did not recur with my analysis of Group B. It is, however, worthy of discussion as it does resonate with lifestyle, a theme common to both groups.

Three of my Group A interviewees alluded to circumstances in their private lives that made their consideration of moving to Keystone apposite. **A1** was admirably frank. He was looking for a new position as he had been made redundant. He was at a crossroads and was mooting options within the law or outside. He had had a poor experience in his previous firm and was dismayed at the lack of organisation and management. He considered setting up a debt collection agency amongst other thoughts, but not another traditional law firm given his experiences.

A friend mentioned Keystone. He was not concerned about the remuneration structure as he thought he might get referrals from within the firm. In short, he had run out of options and at that time Keystone, in its earlier days, offered him an opportunity – which he took. He also liked the idea of remote working and lack of formality.

A2, a female lawyer, also cited circumstances as the push for her to consider her options. She had resigned her job, and because of other personal circumstances in her life, she was at a crossroads generally and was not even certain that she would stay in the law. She practised in a very niche area, and she mentioned that a few of her clients asked her to continue. As such, she thought of setting up her own practice, but the regulatory and insurance hurdles were more than she could contemplate at the time. She also had, in her words, other creative projects, so her legal work would be an adjunct to that. Keystone came up in conversations although she had not heard of them. She saw it more of an agency or like a barrister's chambers where she could have freedom and independence. It suited her mentality and was not, she said, difficult to get into.

Individual **A4** was also at a point in his career where he was considering his options. His last firm had been very political, and with the traditional culture it espoused, it was hard to move up the ladder. He had been tainted by the experience and did not really wish to find employment in a mainstream practice. He heard about a new type of practice (Keystone) from an ex-colleague, he considered that he might have opportunities there especially as it professed to have a flat hierarchy and no politics – something that this interviewee was very exercised about.

Lawyers I interviewed in Group B did not consider personal circumstances as a particular motivation for change, but more the opportunities that the Keystone model had opened up for them. Group A interviewees, I concluded, were more looking for options at a crossroads in their careers or due to childcare commitments as discussed above. I found this quite a notable distinction with the two groups.

Remote Working

Home or hybrid working, at the time of writing this study, has become increasingly mainstream, particularly in the service industries, and as discussed under the Childcare subparagraph above. Whilst there has been a growing trend for flexible working – which many equate to more work from home, this has been largely enabled by the development of technology both by law firms themselves and in the ever-developing internet and smart mobile phone accessibility, allowing connectivity in most areas of the country or abroad (Gould, 2022). This has led to more industry flexibility, which has resulted in more productive part-time work and work share, but note the caveats in the dialogue above on promotion prospects and an individual firm's culture.

When considering my two groups of Keystone Lawyers, the majority opined that flexibility of work was a key factor in their decision-making process. As examined in Group A, flexibility for childcare was prominent. In Group B, it was more flexibility to pursue their own agenda and other interests they had, examples being the judiciary mooted by **B4** and other business ventures by **B2** and **B5**. In Group B, two of the lawyers interviewed were resident outside the United Kingdom (as are numerous Keystone lawyers) and they cited the ability to work from anywhere, enhanced by the technology which enabled this and mentioned above. Actual

home working was an interesting point which I observed during the interviews and subsequent analysis. This has been brought into stark focus following the pandemic, where lawyers who might not have considered working away from an office environment had no choice and subsequently found the concept not so challenging – other than the IT sophistication of an individual's practice.

Working from home, or client offices, had been the foundation of the platform law firm business model. Notwithstanding COVID-19 outcomes with working away from a central office, Keystone had to grapple with a shifting landscape two or three years before the pandemic. More lawyers were joining as groups, or departments from other firms, bringing with them their own senior lawyers and assistants. In several instances, they preferred to work from a centralised location. It was seen by the Keystone management that this was rather a halfway house to full remote working for individuals used to commuting to an office to work with their teams and were coming to terms with a change of working lifestyle. Consequently, the firm accommodated this wish by renting more office space and workstations which these lawyers could utilise and pay rent for. This was an interesting consequence of some lawyers joining as teams, which was not something the firm had accounted for previously. The pandemic has rather stymied this evolution, but offices are still made available at the firm's head office in London.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this transformation to home/remote working. A report by the IT consultancy Atlas Cloud considered home working post pandemic lockdown. This survey of 3,000 individuals' working habits in the UK post lockdown found that 79% considered they can work at home effectively. When it came to legal services, 77% said the same. Interestingly, pre pandemic, only 41% of those in the legal sector said they had the ability (either equipment or

permission) to work from home when they wanted. Also, 44% did not consider their firm made adequate provisions for home working (Codex Edge, 2022).

Whilst this research went on to focus on equipment availability, it did highlight the changes in mindset. A Thomson Reuters survey in 2021 identified that 63% of UK lawyers wanted to work flexibly, which was three times the number observed before March 2020 (Taddia, 2022). This linear increase is notable.

A study by “Major, Lindsay & Africa” in 2021, highlights some interesting facts post pandemic. Whilst in line with other studies, in that hybrid working was preferred, 51% of male lawyers interviewed wanted to go back to the office for three days or more a week, whereas with women this was 33%. Interestingly, 67% of respondents said that remote working was just as problematic, so not the panacea some thought it might be – which conservative traditional law firms may benefit from (Hanover, 2022).

The Codex Edge research into platform law firms generally in 2022 (discussed previously,) did note a significant change in attitudes towards working arrangements and considered there will be further boost to the platform sector as traditional law firms aver employees returning to the office (one reason given was that they were renting expensive office space), despite many firms having also adopted hybrid practices. This notwithstanding, many lawyers questioned considered that in time the office workplace will once again dominate (Marshall, 2022).

In another progression, the UK Government in 2022/3 is set to give employees the right to request part-time hours or remote working arrangements from the first day of a new job, under measures to promote flexible working. Ministers identified a

range of flexible working options, including job-sharing, flexitime, and working compressed, annualised, or staggered hours (Financial Times, 2022)

Keystone's founder, James Knight, stated in an interview with the legal journal City A.M., that the lockdowns in recent years had increased the legitimacy of the firm's operating model, as he suggested the pandemic has swept away the concerns some clients may have had working with platform model firms (Goss, 2022).

Summary

Within my two groups of Keystone lawyers, working remotely, (which primarily with my interviewees was from home) was fundamental in their prerequisite for flexibility to enhance their lifestyles. The recent pandemic has reinforced the prevailing wish of many in the legal sector to have more flexibility for the reasons cited. Several interesting comparisons between the two groups, and their thought processes, have been discussed and will be summarised in the conclusions in Chapter Seven.

BRAND

Introduction

Brand was a theme that was identified in discussions with both Group A and Group B participants and examined in Chapter Five. It was interesting how different interviewees considered the term brand. I found that the relevance of brand, to the lawyers interviewed, was worthy of further consideration, especially given the contrasting viewpoints. I found in my analysis that brand was considered in two primary ways. My interviewees, in the semi-structured questions, were asked to comment on brand and its importance to them when considering joining Keystone Law. I received some thought-provoking responses,

which I considered to be significant for the firm when it considers its business plans and processes in the coming years. Moreover, brand (and image) has been of significant import to the management team as the firm has developed into a mainstay of the legal marketplace in the UK. I identified two viewpoints on brand; one was that of the firm and its profile, and the second meaningful finding was that of self-brand. The term culture also a matrix within branding, and in my discussions thought of in a similar way. I will discuss these two concepts together with my findings between the two data sets, Group A and Group B.

Firm Brand

The Branding Journal has defined brand or branding as the method of providing importance or meaning to a company, a product, or a service. This is accomplished by creating and defining a certain brand in a customer's/client's mind. In a rather succinct summary, the article goes on to state that a brand is the perceived image of the product or service you are trying to sell (Andrivet, 2022). The American Marketing Association characterised brand as something that identifies your name, goods or service, or other features that are distinctive from that of your competitors. It is the "character" of products and services (Muñiz Jr, 2015). A company brand is well known to be important for a variety of reasons. Such branding has been defined as bestowing products and services with the power of a brand (Kotler et al, 2021). This applies to whatever type of business is being considered.

When Keystone Law was set up in 2002, it was an entirely new concept for law firms. It was not office based, and as such, did not have the large City premises that defined large London law firms. It was initially called Lawyers Direct, but the creators soon became mindful that the name was overly associated with personal

injury work, commonly known as “ambulance chasers” in the profession, and contrary to the broader and higher-level expertise of its lawyers (and those it wished to recruit). As such, the name conjured up an image that the founders did not wish to be associated with, therefore in 2008 they rebranded to Keystone Law to better define the services they wished to promote (Smith, 2010). The brand had, in effect, been established.

Notwithstanding the above, the firm was, from its inception, conscious of its need to have a recognised brand and identity in the legal sector. It prioritised its unique profile. An example being when at one of its first promotional endeavours, its members dispensed 1,000 bags of peanuts at a Department of Trade and Industry awards ceremony with its logo and the slogan, *“These days you have to be nuts to pay for overheads”* (Bridge, 2010 p103). The owners were very aware that they had to make a name for the firm in a very traditional sector. This has been a successful strategy, and in line with general branding requirements discussed above. The firm has since won a wealth of industry accolades (i.e., Law Firm of the Year at The Lawyer Awards 2020) and has established its brand, such that it is deemed by many in the legal industry as the premier platform law firm in the UK – and the most successful. Since 2018 (to 2022), the firm has doubled its rankings in the prestigious Legal 500 UK publication of the best lawyers (nationally from 21 to 42, and in London from 14 to 28). The 2022 edition gave the firm four top tier rankings (Avery, 2022). In the recent Citywealth awards, Keystone Law won the Best Employee Brand at its Brand Management and Reputation Awards 2022. Of note, in the awards ceremony, the firm’s marketing director stated,

“We have invested heavily in creating a culture and a brand that stands out in the legal market. By providing greater autonomy to our lawyers with unparalleled

support in a collaborative community, we have created a firm which our lawyers are proud to work for, but also continues to attract some of the best lawyers in the UK. We are thrilled to have been recognised by Citywealth as a top employee brand.”¹⁶

This statement reflects all the brand goals documented by Muñiz Jr. (2015) mentioned above; not only for the brand to be known by prospective clients and competitors, but importantly to potential recruits – which brings me to the two groups of Keystone lawyers interviewed, and their own perception of the importance of the Keystone brand when contemplating their decision-making processes.

As previously observed, brand and culture were discussed in interview, primarily to ascertain whether the Keystone name and reputation had any bearing on the interviewee’s reasons for approaching the firm. In its earlier days, and before the Keystone name and brand had developed, some lawyers were hesitant about joining as their clients might not appreciate the firm’s ethos and its *raison d’être*. As one potential recruit stated, *“It would be much easier to join Keystone, but I can’t do that because it would be a brand pollutant for me.”* (Avery, 2022, p9). This perception has clearly changed as platform type law firms became more mainstream and established. This is evidenced at Keystone by the quality of its client base in 2022, which includes well-known brands such as, Sunseeker Sales Group, Nationwide Building Society, the BBC, Siemens, RBS, and Bosch.

There was a thought-provoking mix in the responses received during the interview process. The lawyers that comprised Group A (the joiners in circa 2010) did not believe brand was a motivating factor. This was not entirely unexpected as the

¹⁶ Source: Kristina Oliver – director of marketing and business development, Keystone Law, 2022.

firm was not that well developed in the marketplace at that time, and as noted in the comment above. As identified in my analysis in Chapter Four, the platform model was not particularly known about, with only Keystone and one or two others in business at the time. Some of the traditional law firms disparaged the type of offering (the “Keystone cops” point previously discussed). As such, for Group A, the corporate brand was not a pull factor, and as some interviewees noted, as much a negative point. I observed, however, that several Group A lawyers were at career crossroads and were just looking for a new firm as much as their own personal requirements. That said, they had the option of staying in the traditional firm or perhaps becoming in-house advisers, but they still chose to move to Keystone as it offered them something new, without politics and targets as picked up in interview; perhaps a refuge for frustrated and demoralised lawyers from a traditional law firm culture (Avery, 2022). Interviewee **A3** (at page 125) rather interestingly summed up that whilst there was no discernible brand pull, the firm offered a new and clever idea which was, for her, a motivation to join. **A4** referred to the “Keystone Cops” analogy he had heard about the firm – as he said, it suggested a place for “homeless lawyers” – hardly a positive brand image at that time, to some.

With Group B there was a subtle difference. By the time of these joiners (circa 2020), the firm (and the type of firm generally) was well established in the marketplace, evidenced by the awards and rankings it had achieved in the various legal publications, and as discussed above. Prospective recruits would be aware of the type of firm, and indeed there were, by that period, a number operating as well as Keystone (i.e., Gunnercooke, Setfords, and Taylor Rose). It could reasonably be assumed that Keystone had a significant brand image. Indeed, more recently, James Knight founder of Keystone stated that, “...*we are rigorous*

in who we take on, possibly more than conventional law firms. Keystone is responsible for the work, and we have to protect the brand and integrity of the firm.” (Avery, 2022).

With my Group B interviews, although the firm’s brand was acknowledged, and Keystone generally accepted as the premier firm in this space, the brand of the firm was still not a significant pull factor. **B1**, a shipping lawyer, was concerned that the Keystone brand might have a negative effect on his potential work sources, as shipping was a niche sector and shipping law firms well established and known, with discernible brands even to the extent that a certain firm was known for a certain type of work (i.e., hull insurance, admiralty). He acknowledged that Keystone did not have a reputation for shipping, as against his old shipping law firm that had been in practice for 130 years, (see pages 141/2). **B1** believed in his own ability (and risk) to influence traditional work providers to give him an opportunity. **B5** stated a very similar point of view when it came to brand awareness.

Another member of the Group B cohort, **B2** liked the Keystone brand – as he saw it as a large firm with a lot of commercial sectors, but to him, and the team he joined with, were more concerned with how well they could “sell” what he referred to as a virtual firm to providers in their traditional area (probate and trusts). Again, and which will be considered below, the team were convinced that once justified, clients would follow the individual lawyer whom they had a relationship with, irrespective of the firm’s name or reputation in the sector.

Other interviewees proffered similar viewpoints which are expounded in Chapter Five. Whilst they were aware of Keystone, and its growing standing (**B4** at page

144), the actual firm brand was not a primary causal factor in their personal decision-making processes.

Personal Brand

In this research project, the notion of self-confidence in the lawyers I interviewed was quite prevalent, particularly so with the Group B interviewees. This came through particularly when discussing the theme of brand benefit and risk.

Personal brand is a known concept. It has been defined as a process whereby an individual seeks to influence perception of his or her skill set. It creates an identity that sets that person apart from competitors. In brief, to make that person more recognisable in their sector to potential work providers or referrers (Julian, 2022). In law, this is generating professional opportunities by becoming an acknowledged expert in one's area of work and gaining a reputation amongst those in your sector with peers and work providers. This can partly be achieved by being noted in annual directories as being an expert in the field (Chambers High Net Worth, and Legal 500, as examples). There is extensive literature on self-branding, predominantly in media and by those in the media who wish to promote their status to the public (television and so-called celebrities), but in business it is also about confidence and building a reputation, and as such, brand image (Swift, 2019).

With the lawyers I interviewed, it did not appear that there was a conscious effort to develop self-branding but an awareness that they had established themselves in their chosen sector, and by doing so had sufficient self-awareness to be comfortable that their name would attract work from new and existing clients rather than the reputation of the firm that they were considering joining. This was noted in both my Group A and Group B individuals. Swift, (2019) stated that it is personal

branding that allows, in her words, “entrepreneurial” people to remain in the limelight irrespective of the organisation they belong to. With my interviewees having this self-awareness, it enabled them to discount, to a degree, the issue of corporate brand when making their decisions.

Self-awareness or self-branding to the extent noted above, was evident in both groups of interviewees but significantly more so in Group B. **A2** believed that as she had trained in a well-known firm and had worked with good clients, she was fairly sure that they would follow her, irrespective of the new firm (page 126). **A4** considered himself as quite “*entrepreneurial*”, and **A5** stated that she has her “*own brand*” (page 127).

With Group B, I noted that all the participants came across as very business focussed with a self-confidence of their own worth in their particular legal sectors. **B1** considered that he had a “personal brand” (page 142). **B2** considered it was the reputation of individual lawyers, not firms as such, which gave him comfort (as a younger lawyer in his 20s) (page 143). **B3** confessed to being a very entrepreneurial lawyer and that she would attract her own work without difficulty. She considered herself to have her own brand and was very self-confident of her abilities to attract work. The theme continued with interviewee **B4**. He had a reputation, so clients and referrals of work would follow him irrespective of the firm. The final interviewee, **B5**, did not consider the corporate brand at all, other than to discount it as against her own self-led confidence that her clients and contacts would follow her.

Summary

Corporate branding was important to the management of Keystone Law from its earliest days to identify the type of firm it aspired to be, and to get the new type of alternative business model recognised in a long-established traditional industry. In this, it was successful. It has maintained this trajectory to the present day, and the directors take the business of entering for various legal awards seriously – an important criterion for the firm and its business model.

Contrastingly, the corporate brand was not a draw to either of my groups of lawyers. Not unexpectedly, interviewees in Group A did not recognise a particular brand, although the firm had been established some ten years, mainly because it was, in legal terms, still a new concept and in some ways untested. By the time of Group B joiners, the firm was far better established, and the business model well known with several such firms trading in the English legal space. However, the corporate brand was still not a pull factor – those interviewed all had a strong sense of their own self-brand which, effectively to them, eclipsed the firm itself.

Whilst corporate brand is seen as a draw to clients generally, as it denotes success – especially so when clients are noted on a website to show effectiveness (Rodrigues et al, 2011), it was not however a meaningful draw to the individuals interviewed, which was of import.

RISK

Introduction

The theme of Risk was considered and developed in Chapter Five. It was apposite to both my groups of Keystone lawyers. The interview transcripts were noteworthy, as the interviewees were primarily concerned with their own approach towards risk – that is personal risk considerations about joining a new type of law practice. Examples were, risk of financial detriment, a risk of clients not moving to the new practice (irrespective of what representations were made), and indeed whether the individual considered the move as a risk at all.

Attitude towards risk in business has been well researched. Four general risk attitudes have been documented. Pragmatists who consider the world to be uncertain and changeable; Conservators, who view life as a world of peril and high risk; Maximisers, who view the world as low risk and self-correcting; and Managers, whose own world is moderately risky, but not too hazardous if guided correctly (Ingram and Thompson, 2012). Law firms and lawyers would generally fall into the “Pragmatic” and/or “Manager” criteria for reasons I will discuss below.

Lawyers have a professional reputation of being risk averse (King, 2013). It could be contended that in practice, a lawyer’s most important role is to advise clients against risk, and to ensure risk exposure either in business or personal cases are minimised by the legal advice provided. The personal risk profiles of lawyers have also been debated. A legal practitioner could be regarded as a luddite and resistant to change (as mentioned earlier in this work), or indeed be imbued with a measure of scepticism in their general personality traits (Salomon, 2014). Carol Dweck wrote in the Stanford Magazine that, with lawyers, each task they take on is a challenge to their self-image and setbacks become to them a personal risk.

Consequently, they only pursue activities where they consider they will do well or will shine (Thomson Reuters, 2016). In essence, a fear of failure and reluctance to go outside their comfort zone. The Thomson Reuters article also stated that, in a traditionally risk-averse occupation, a lawyer who does not wish to adapt to change is taking the biggest risk as the whole business of law evolves.

A person's attitude towards risk has been defined as a particular state of mind concerning those doubts that could have a good or negative effect on a person's objectives. They are implemented subconsciously; however, it can be a choice for an individual or business (Rogan, 2020). Interestingly, a study by the University of Massachusetts found a link between risk tolerance and variables including education, income, and self-employment status. Moreover, females tended to be less risk tolerant than males (Xiao et al, 2001).

With the consensus on lawyers as personalities being disinclined to take risks, the responses on this theme in interview were enlightening. Some of my Group A data set did not really consider the risk element of moving. **A1** thought that as he had little work pre-Keystone, anything that could be gained was a benefit and possible referral work from other lawyers somewhat negated any financial or client retention considerations (page 128). The individual **A2** had volunteered that she was not generally a risk taker, but as she had a very niche and loyal client base, she did not perceive much risk – and she had financial stability. **A5** took a similar position in interview – her main concern was her children, and she had monetary constancy. Conversely, **A3** (somewhat younger than the aforementioned) was a risk taker and looked at risk in a calculated way, measuring up her options. **A4** offered a similar viewpoint, and these two lawyers more attuned to the consensus in Group B.

Group B interviewees largely followed similar traits to the theme Brand considered above. A couple of Group A interviewees had similar attitudes. As opined in Chapter Five, most of the lawyers in this group took a somewhat robust view to risk. Whilst they appreciated the operating model did not provide regular salaries (being paid only when a client paid), they considered that they would be successful (they either had loyal followings or were assured of their ability to source work). This was the position of individual **B2**. Interviewee **B5** was a self-professed businesswoman as much as a lawyer and had always taken professional risks – which in her view had proved successful. These younger lawyers did have few personal responsibilities which assisted their risk profile considerations. Notwithstanding this, **B4**, a 52-year-old, had a similar perspective – he had other business interests, and enjoyed the cut and thrust of winning work. **B1** was more measured, but he had weighed up the risk as he saw it and decided the risk of little earnings in the early days was outweighed by the opportunities. The overall theme in this group was that of an entrepreneurial group of individuals (**B3** stated she was an entrepreneur with various interests), who were success driven and willing to take risks to achieve their goals. This was the same, irrespective of personal obligations, and most had other commercial interests they wished to progress, along with their legal practice, which mitigated any perceived risk in any event.

Summary

In this research, I found that the risk profile of my interviewees did not, in most instances, accord with the generally held perception of lawyers being, both personally and in their business approach, risk averse. Moreover, they did not present as being of a sceptical nature. Given that the Keystone model was always regarded as being ground-breaking and innovative, it could be reasonably

assumed that these findings were not remarkable. Lawyers who looked to join a new (and perhaps in the earlier period) risky venture, and who, for some, wished to pursue other opportunities as well, would have a higher personal risk profile and be of an entrepreneurial and business focussed disposition, rather than just being legal practitioners. This premise has flowed through the theme discussions and conclusions, and my findings were not unexpected, this was a characteristic with most of the Keystone lawyers interviewed, and particularly so with those in Group B.

COMPARISON PROFILES

Introduction

In the last few months of working on this thesis, new research into platform law firms in the UK has been published. Some of these have been referenced earlier in this work, such as Codex Edge, and PwC. This research provides an opportunity to consider some aspects of these investigations in direct comparison with some demographic data from Keystone Law, such as can be found in Appendix Seven together with data I have collated such as in Appendix Five, and more recent data supplied upon request by the Keystone HR department. This will, I believe, bring meaning to the conclusions reached in the next chapter.

Numbers and Profile

Data, compiled by Codex Edge in the ATLAS Alternative Law Firms Report in 2022, determined that more women than men work at platform law firms (they refer to Alternative Law Firms or ALFs). The figures were 1,099 women and 1,055 men. Not a great difference, but this has been a growing trend (Marshall, 2022). Some firms (such as Setfords) have a far higher female to male ratio. In 2022,

64% of the consultant lawyers at Setfords (the biggest platform firm by head count) are women. This is one of the highest female-to-male ratios in a UK top 100 Law Firm (Codex Edge, 2022).

In late 2021, when considering my research participants for interview, I compiled a list of all lawyers at Keystone Law (Appendix Seven). The male female ratio key statistics provided to me by Keystone management in 2021 for the period of my Group B joiners, was that 44% of lawyers were female and 56% male. This compared with 42% female and 58% male in 2010, the time of my Group A joiners. This has increased to 55.5% male and 45.4% female in December 2022¹⁷. Whilst not as close as the Codex Edge figures for such firms overall in the UK the trend is similar with a growing number of women joining. The recent Keystone figures are, in comparison, more than 50% higher than in the top 10 UK law firms illustrating the demographic attraction of the model (source Keystone Law, 2021).

The changes are, in part, due to the factors discussed in Chapter Five, for women in particular with flexible workplace options and childcare priorities. It is also partly attributable to the practice areas worked in. According to the Codex Edge (2022) survey, there are more men than women working in the specialisms of corporate finance, commercial property, commercial litigation, corporate M&A, and contract law. In contrast, more women than men practise in family law, residential property, personal tax, trust and probate, and intellectual property. Firms such as Keystone have more significant work sectors in the former, whereas firms such as Setfords and Taylor Rose have much larger departments in residential property and family law. For example, across the UK platform firms, in residential property

¹⁷ Source: *Keystone Law, 2022*.

62% of lawyers are female as against 38% male. By comparison, in corporate M&A, 33% of lawyers are female and 67% male (Codex Edge, 2022).

The largest platform law firm in 2022 was Setfords, mentioned above, with 419 consultants. Keystone law was second at 405, but note the different operational models where Keystone is more of a commercial than private client model (Codex Edge, 2022). Further details of the top ten such firms can be found at Appendix Eight. Between them, the top ten firms employ 2,150 people.

Chris Hume, a CEO of a platform law firm, contributed to the Codex Edge report of 2022. In this statement he confirmed that the platform sector (or Alternative Law firms, or AFLS's as described by Codex Edge) are experiencing considerably higher expansion than traditional law firms. He noted that, whereas the top five hiring ALFs have a compound annual growth rate in lawyers of 15%, the top five hiring traditional law firms are diminishing, with a figure of -1%. Based on these current growth rates, the report's authors predict that up to 25% of lawyers could be working at ALFs by 2025.

Summary

Having considered the data from recent research and that obtained from Keystone Law, and my own investigations, it is reasonable to assume that an increasing number of lawyers are realising the advantages of working in platform law firms. In particular, female lawyers are seeing the advantages of the flexibility presented to lawyers working under the consultancy model. I gave an example above of Setfords, where, as of July 2022, 64% of its lawyers were female. The more corporate focused firms, such as Keystone, and Gunnercooke, have not achieved this kind of ratio, but the numbers are growing year on year, evidenced by the figures presented above.

Moreover, platform firms have better retention rates for their lawyers compared to traditional law firms (Marshall, 2022).

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS & CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

The platform law firm model attracts a wide range of lawyers for a variety of reasons that have been considered in the previous chapters. One of the prevalent motivations is that of choice and flexibility. As Nigel Clarke, Chief Executive of the platform firm Nexa, opined,

“... people now have choice and there is potential for a much less linear legal career. ... it’s all about non-exclusivity and collaborative working both internally and externally. That freedom attracts certain lawyers who were previously in more structured environments, not only in law firms but also those working in-house”
(Codex Edge, 2021 p33).

Investigations undertaken by Arden Research concurs, in that there is a move away from traditional partnership models – driven by an ability to attract external investment (private equity) and operate more effective business models, such as the consultancy type of firm of which Keystone is a key proponent (Arden, 2021). The attraction of flexibility and remote working is a significant draw to potential employees (Atlas Cloud, 2021). Moreover, the COVID-19 lockdowns have further accelerated the move to more flexible working which the platform firms offer. Notwithstanding this, many traditional legal practices now advocate hybrid working, but they are not consistent, with numerous firms encouraging a move back to office working (Arden, 2021).

In this qualitative research paper, I wished to explore the personal rationales of lawyers when considering a move from traditional law firm structures to that of a new model platform law firm. I undertook semi-structured interviews with my two research data sets, (Groups A and B); two sets of individuals who joined the firm at different periods in its growth trajectory. I wished to investigate personal decision-making deliberations from a phenomenological standpoint. I then drew inferences which allowed me to respond to my research question, “has the demographic of joiners, and reasons for joining Keystone Law changed and/or developed between the time period of Group A and Group B interviewees, and if so how and why?”

This work considers ten individuals within the two groups of men and women who joined Keystone approximately ten years apart. I have examined their personal rationales discussed in interview and analysed several themes that were extrapolated by thematic analysis of the data obtained.

[Contribution to Professional Practice and Keystone Law](#)

Platform law firms and their business models are disrupting the legal services sector in a very similar way as St James’s Place did in the 1990s, and as discussed in Chapter One. The parallels to the St James’s Place model are apparent, and indeed what the Keystone founders used as their benchmark when establishing the practice in 2002.

However, such personal working practices are not for everyone and far from a comfortable option. Lawyers must have certain skills and mindsets that are not necessarily expected for those on permanent employment contracts (Nervkla, 2019). Such individuals must be confident that they can generate business, make money, and work without colleagues in proximity. Additionally, they must have the

ability to manage their time effectively. Aside from this, the platform firms of recent years have become more selective in recruitment. As Nervkla (2019) pronounced, one firm, Varios, employs a business psychologist to assess potential recruits for suitability – in their terms, a requirement to be self-motivated, organised, and efficient amongst other attributes.

This work encompasses the legal revolution of the platform model, which to many has surpassed all expectations, and which is well placed to capitalise on the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst the emphasis of this thesis and my research question is centred on just one firm, Keystone Law, I consider that my findings will resonate for those in management in the platform or dispersed law firm sector generally. The conclusions I have drawn may, I consider, apply generally to this new branch of legal business, although more particularly to those firms having a consultancy model in the corporate/commercial legal field, and by definition, the type of lawyer attracted to such a practice.

One important consideration in the research has been the ability for Keystone lawyers to engage in other business opportunities in parallel with their consultancy agreement with Keystone. That is, to have a non-exclusive arrangement with the firm. This was a particular draw for the Group B joiners. This group in general could be regarded as having entrepreneurial endeavour and a wish to have the opportunity (whilst remaining in the legal profession) to be more than risk advisors to clients but to explore their various considerations of the legal and non-legal business-oriented opportunities, that working at Keystone Law provided. The consultancy contract that the firm has with its consultants does not demand exclusivity – lawyers having but one job at Keystone. Whilst not unique, the firm most closely associated as a competitor in terms of numbers and work type

(corporate bias), One large platform firm requires its lawyers to only work with that firm (exclusivity). One reason Keystone allows third party income streams for its lawyers is the spectre of legal conflicts. By allowing a lawyer to be a consultant at two firms reduces this issue (and loss of income to the firm and consultant alike). Given that this research has found that many of its more recent joiners do have other business interests, not just in law, it is considered that it is imperative that Keystone should retain this flexibility. It has encouraged the recruitment of entrepreneurial and enterprising individuals, and to consider a change to exclusivity may stymie future recruitment initiatives. Keystone Law was at the forefront of this new legal business model. Scott Gibson, a legal recruiter stated, *“I use Keystone almost as a generic term for alternative law firms. It’s like how everyone calls vacuum cleaners Hoover”* (Avery, 2022, p.9).

There are, nevertheless, in late 2022 a growing number of such firms operating in the UK. The leading ones can be seen in Appendix Seven. Of note, Keystone is no longer the largest, that being the firm Setfords. Taylor Rose which comes in at number three in terms of size in 2022 originated in Peterborough in 2009, and currently has 32 offices and a legal consultancy division that has doubled its number of lawyers in the last twelve months, with about 15 to 20 new recruits a month (Taddia, 2022).

Keystone in particular, faces stiff competition from consultancy model firms operating in the commercial legal world, and increasingly (such as Taylor Rose) in the more domestic market. Being no longer the biggest such firm, it faces significant opposition so must continually adapt. The firm cannot rest on its previous laurels as consequently it also faces competition for new recruits of the right calibre to best fit its future business plans. James Knight, the founder of

Keystone, opined on recruitment, “*We are rigorous in who we take on, possibly more so than conventional law firms. Keystone is responsible for the work and we have to protect the brand and integrity of the firm*” (Avery, 2022, p.9). Accordingly, this research is important for professional practices generally in this sector of the UK legal marketplace, but particularly for Keystone Law.

Main Findings

Key Themes

Several findings emerged from my research, and are discussed in a little more detail below, but clear and interlinking themes emerged which make a unique and important contribution in this work-based research project. Whilst this study focusses on one firm, my findings are, I submit, highly relevant to the other platform law firms that have, in their different sizes and styles, developed in recent years – and continue to change the legal landscape in the twenty first century.

- A. **Identity:** - This study was unique in that it looked at people and their motivations in one law firm, although I submit its findings have resonance in dispersed legal practices generally, given most follow the Keystone model (see summary). Those Individuals now coming into positions of responsibility (partner level) are from a distinctly different generational group to those of ten or twenty years ago (as are their clients). Their expectations and working ethos, somewhat different, and consequently firms must adapt their recruitment and workplace strategies to cater for these changing generational expectations.
- B. **Reward and Exclusivity:** - This research has rather debunked the existing mantra that many professional services companies adhere to that salary/money is the most important determiner of recruitment and retention.

My findings elucidated that whilst the lawyer's I interviewed expected a good income, their motivations for moving to Keystone (and it could be surmised other similar offerings) were not financially focussed but far more predicated upon lifestyle and autonomy/control over their working lives, and in the more recent joiners' entrepreneurial opportunities where the opportunity to have other interests paramount. Non exclusivity of working whilst at Keystone a prime motivator for joining and retention.

C. **Entrepreneurial Opportunity and Risk:** - The lifestyle advantages that being a consultant at Keystone allowed enabled more business and risk-oriented individual to thrive in a commercially minded work environment, repudiating the long-held view that lawyers by definition were not risk takers. At least in the platform legal environment I found new recruits to Keystone as much businesspeople as legal practitioners. The age demographic also showed that younger practitioners, with their developing views on career and lifestyle priorities were the predominant risk takers with a strong sense of personal identity (brand).

Remuneration

Whilst I made every effort to take account of potential insider research bias, (notably as I am a consultant at Keystone Law), I did harbour some preconceived notions that the platform model might appeal to potential recruits because of the possibility of increased earning potential. In fact, the recruitment marketing literature on the firm's website includes a section whereby interested candidates are encouraged to complete a lifestyle calculator, for want of a better expression. By doing so, they can insert their current billing amongst other criteria to ascertain what income they might receive at Keystone – as against their traditional

partnerships or in-house roles.¹⁸ Based on these incentive web calculators, which claim that one could earn more than in the traditional 30/30/30 model of remuneration (see Chapter Two), it could be reasonably assumed that increased monetary reward would be found to be a key influence within my two data sets of individuals. Whilst motivations of financial benefit were examined in the semi-structured interviews, and consequently an emergent theme for both groups (but closely linked to the theme of Risk), following my thematic analysis exercise I concluded that this was not essentially the case.

With Group A, personal circumstances (at the time) and job opportunity, I concluded, outweighed much consideration of increased financial gain. There was a correlation with financial stability to enable them to support themselves in the formative period at Keystone, but not significantly for future financial enrichment.

Finance and Risk was a theme I identified in Group B. In this later group, a similar position emerged to the earlier group on financial security on joining whilst developing a practice, but whilst there was more consideration of higher earning potential, it was not noted as a significant stimulus.

My research has found that with all my interviewees, all but one (the youngest and in Group B), did not consider significantly higher earning potential to be a primary personal consideration for the move to Keystone Law, which I found to be unexpected given the emphasis by the firm on the pecuniary benefit of joining. As such, the prominence that Keystone embraces on its recruitment webpage (and similar firms do likewise) may not actually be necessary – candidates would be

¹⁸ Source: Keystone Law, 2022 (<https://www.lawsetfree.com/lifestyle-calculator/>)

pretty much aware, by the time they consider such a move, of their primary motivations.

Age and Gender

At the commencement of this course in Part One, I had considered that age might be a factor to consider for my work-based project in Part Two. I wished to consider whether the average age demographic of Keystone joiners had changed in the ten years or so time interval between my two groups.

Whilst platform type model historically tends to recruit more senior lawyers, those who have client followings, and ability to attract clients, this research has shown that the average age of Keystone lawyers has reduced in the period between the two groups. In 2010 the average age was 49, and in 2021 it was 46,¹⁹ and this is also consistent with recent research of the alternative law firm market reports for the UK platform sector discussed in the preceding chapter (Codex Edge, 2021 and 2022). In the Codex Edge Alternative Law Firms Report of 2022, it found that in 2021/22 the peak PQE for moves to platform consultancy models was 13 to 18 PQE (women 10 PQE and men 14 PQE) which has reduced since their last report (Codex Edge, 2022). The age demographic I found in my research was not significant as between the two groups, but the trend is certainly there, and this research shows that younger lawyers find the platform model to be an attractive proposition (see below on Millennials and Gen X). The question Keystone faces is the public profile of the firm stating on its website that its lawyers have significant experience (20 years PQE). Therefore, the recruitment of younger and less experienced practitioners (if this is a trend), but whom have more entrepreneurial

¹⁹ Source: *Keystone Law, 2021*.

tendencies to attract work, may need to be considered on their web promotion to clients and aspiring candidates alike.

As with age, gender split was another demographic I wished to explore to respond to my research question. I identified with recent research, examined in chapter six, that the male/female ratios in platform firms were quite different from that of traditional law firms of similar headcount. Platform firms in general had a higher percentage of females in senior positions, and Keystone followed this trend, although I found that the ratio was not as high (female to male) than similar firms, Setfords being the leader with some 64% female consultants (Codex Edge, 2022). One reason found for the disparity within the platform firms is the male or female oriented work sectors identified in chapter six. Setfords, for example, has more legal sectors than Keystone where females predominate (family law for example). Keystone was, in comparison, about 42% female partners in 2021.²⁰ This is, however, increasing slightly year-on-year and particularly as between the two groups in this study.

I have identified that women wanting flexibility are particularly drawn, hence this increase, but recent research also identifies that as traditional law firms adapt to hybrid working practices following the pandemic, some women prioritising financial security may elect to remain with their current firms.

This research has found that female lawyers are drawn to Keystone Law (and the sector generally) in both of my data set groups, primarily because of the flexibility afforded by the working model. Whether this draw, for women in particular, will change if the traditional law firm sector seriously embraces flexible work options is

²⁰ Source: Keystone Law, 2021.

outside the remit of this paper, but a consideration for future research – especially as I have identified that a number of City firms have a preference for a return to the office, irrespective of what they say in public. My Group B female lawyers, whilst drawn to Keystone because of the flexibility offered, were however primarily motivated by entrepreneurial opportunity.

The age of new joiners was a consideration when I began this thesis, and as noted below, also a limitation in this study.

Brand and Risk

Brand was an interesting finding in this research. It was a theme identified in my thematic analysis, but it was not an aspect that the interviewed lawyers viewed as an important consideration. With my Group A participants, the majority conclusion was that there was no real firm brand to speak of at the time they were considering a move. It was more an opportunity to practise in a more flexible environment and most had an expectation of finding client work or had contacts they hoped to utilise, irrespective of the firm's identity. With Group B, some cited that the firm not having a known brand in their particular sector (for example commercial shipping) at the time was, in fact, a negative point in their considerations. My research found, however, that the lawyers (primarily in Group B, the later joiners) were very self-aware and considered that they had a personal brand, and that outweighed the firm's name and/or the perception of others. In short, a self-brand in their areas of excellence. The point of view I identified was that irrespective of the firm, their clients would follow them. This was not, I found, prevalent in my Group A interviewees.

Irrespective of the Keystone journey, and its drive to promote its image and brand in the legal awards arena (and its lawyers cited as industry elites), lawyers joining in the later years did exude self-confidence and an awareness of their own brand identity, so

one could question whether Keystone needs to spend so much time, effort, and money on branding. Conversely, it could be contended that the Keystone position on branding is profitable as it may have encouraged such lawyers to consider the firm. Either way, it was considered unlikely that Keystone management would alter their business model based on the perceived success of its branding exercise in the last ten years or so. It is though, an interesting consideration.

This research has found that the risk profiles of its lawyers has changed. Group A participants were more risk averse – rather in the trait of the legal sector generally, a primary function to advise clients and protect from potential legal risk. On the contrary, my findings were different with most of the Group B interviewees. The predominant characteristic was that these lawyers wanted a challenge and were prepared to take risk (both financially and in business) in pursuit of their entrepreneurial aspirations. This was assisted by the firm's policy, in allowing third party business or legal interests. Within this group were people with families, and single, but a common thread was an entrepreneurial drive, whereas in Group A, the majority were looking more for work-life balance for everyday lifestyle not particularly associated with future legal or business success – which was the common mantra with Group B.

Lawyer Flexibility and the Millennial Question

A significant finding of this research is that, for both my Group A and B lawyers, flexibility of working practices was the primary motivator to joining, and these have been examined in detail in Chapter Six. Flexibility was identified with both groups, in the theme Lifestyle Benefit, but I found that there was a difference in how this was characterised by the interviewees. I noted a demographic difference, in whilst both Group B individuals, as with Group A, desired flexibility to develop their practices without the strictures of targets and hierarchical rigidity, the earlier joiners focussed

more on work-life balance. However, the later joiners in Group B desired, in addition to flexibility in their day-to-day working lives, the capability to explore other work opportunities. These have been examined and include other legal consultancy jobs, the judiciary, in-house legal roles, family offices, artistic and literary projects and an individual's other revenue producing streams. The Group B lawyers presented as more entrepreneurial and business savvy and wanted to mix their legal practices with other opportunities.

My research considered the rise of the Millennial and Generation X lawyer (and law firm). There has been research generally into the working practices and aspirations of this generation and how this may affect the work pace generally. A study in 2021, of practising junior lawyers (in the USA), found that the largest group of those surveyed (30.86%) testified that, ideally, they would only like to work at their firm for 3 to 5 years. An earlier survey had 31% (the largest group) who indicated that they wanted to make partner level at the firm they worked at (Major, Lindsay & Africa, 2021). Jordan Furlong, a legal commentator, presented a paper for "Lawyers on Demand" looking at this from the practice, the client, and the practitioner's point of view (Furlong, 2017). He was clear in that attitudes had to change to recruitment, retention, and how practices worked. Major, Lindsay & Africa (2021) also opined that the oldest Millennials turned 40 this year, and this generation's influence is being increasingly felt in the legal sector. This cadre of lawyers will play a key role in shaping the operations of the industry especially as it emerges from the pandemic lockdown. As with other industries, the legal world must adapt to a changing demographic and attitude to work. My research has found that the Keystone Law business model fitted well with the generational change in attitude towards work, and particularly so within my Group B lawyers who wanted to pursue other goals but remain in the law – something that traditional firms have had difficulty with, having

contracted employees who may only stay in a firm for a short period, and then leave to seek other adventures (not necessarily in the law) at their most fiscally (to the firm) productive time. With my Group A lawyers, this attitude was found not to be so prevalent, as the opportunities at that time was more limited, even with a fledgling platform firm.

Limitations of the Research

One consideration that I initially wished to develop in this research was whether the age demographic had altered to any significant amount during the period this doctoral research covered. As this study has identified, the platform firm, especially in its earlier seminal days, was perceived by some as being the home of semi-retirees seeing out their careers and without, for some, the spectra of “run-off insurance”,²¹ rather than a cutting-edge legal practice (the unfortunate “Keystone Cops” analogy). Whilst this to an extent may have been the case in its formative years from 2002, by 2010/11, the period for my Group A lawyers, this perception in the industry had changed somewhat, although still prevalent amongst a small hardcore of traditionalists. If there were Keystone lawyers in such a category, by 2010 (the time of Group B) many who had joined the firm in its early years had retired and as a consequence not considered in this project.

I found that with my two-year groups, in my data set there were no semi-retirees and the age demographic not as distinct as might have been expected. Had this research looked at a wider time span, it may have encapsulated this element, but once again several individuals would have left practice, so in hindsight I felt that

²¹ Solicitors in partnership or sole practitioners having to pay professional negligence indemnity insurance for at least six years post termination with significant cost.

with the other data gleaned during my research, the age demographic question was adequately covered.

Moreover, because of data protection considerations, I was unable to obtain the age demographic for all the lawyers in the firm in any event (see Appendix 5), save that with my interviewees all but one were happy in interview to provide their ages upon joining the firm. I did manage to obtain the average age of Keystone lawyers at the time of each group, which was 49 and 46 respectively, which I employed in this research.²²

One further limitation was on PQE where again, other than information volunteered during interview, the information was privileged, and data Keystone would not reveal.

My data set comprised ten individuals: five for each group. This number was deemed acceptable for a phenomenological study (Rowley, 2012, Gray, 2014) but, in a perfect world, I would have liked to have expanded the data set somewhat. However, at the time of the interview stage of this study, the world was anything but perfect and, in any event, I found that after ten interview I had reached a reasonable level of data saturation, as more particularly discussed on page 87.

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated periods of lockdown severely disrupted my research strategy. Analogous to other industries, the legal sector was experiencing considerable disruption – even within Keystone Law which, as noted in the introduction, was better placed than many to ride out this perfect storm with its remote working technological advances. Nevertheless, I found contacting lawyers to request participation more challenging, and in many instances, people

²² Source: Keystone Law, 2022.

were rightly more concerned with the survival of their legal practices and their home lives rather than give too much consideration to a research study by one of their peers. The environment was not conducive to a large-scale project, and most interviews ended up, by necessity, being undertaken by remote means (Teams, Zoom, and telephone) which was not what I had envisaged at the commencement of this doctoral work. Irrespective of the difficulties, most of the individuals within the firm (management and potential candidates) I managed to approach, willingly supported my research and contributed.

Future Research Considerations

Whilst undertaking this work-based project, several aspects of the Keystone journey were identified and which, in my opinion, whilst not covered in detail under the remit of my research question, could be pertinent for those in management at the firm to consider.

I have discussed the changing work ethics of the recent generations (the so-called Millennium, Generations X and Z populace), and these age groups now predominate in law firms, the latter making up about 36% of the legal workforce in 2020 (Peart and LeFebvre, 2020). As such, and as examined in Chapter Six, business culture must adapt to accommodate this diverse way of contemplating employment. The flexible working model of the platform firm does assist, but considering other ways to retain such workers could be a valuable source of new research - especially in a law firm setting such as Keystone Law. This in conjunction with the point raised above, and in my conclusions, the capability to have other business interests in parallel to their consultancy practices is a considerable draw to lawyers looking at platform alternatives.

My research has identified that the overall age of lawyers joining Keystone is reducing, albeit by a small degree. The platform model historically requires senior lawyers with followings consequential upon a client and industry profile built up over time. This study has though shown that entrepreneurial younger lawyers see opportunities, the model was initially predicated on practitioners of at least twenty years post qualification experience (PQE). Indeed, this is still noted on the firm's website.²³ As the firm recruit younger lawyers with less PQE, how might this affect the future business model with the current website strapline of "*Expertise from highly experienced lawyers*"?²⁴ Notwithstanding the website, Keystone now accepts that recruits should have at least ten years PQE, presumably to take account of the age demographic shift and the recruitment of more entrepreneurial practitioners. An interesting research project would be to see how a younger lawyer cohort may make a difference to the firm's business model which maintains it only has very experienced partner level lawyers. Will this make any difference or does the firm need to consider more training, and indeed how it presents its lawyers to potential clients? Is PQE so important to identify as the brand has developed so much, or should individuals' business and entrepreneurial influences be added to the presentation mix?

In recent years there has been an increase of lawyers joining in teams (or pods as they are called). How does the firm cater for training and supervision? Both require regulatory oversight as required by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA), and indeed in-house training facilities, and within the teams when such

²³ Source: Keystone Law, 2022. (<https://www.keystonelaw.com/about-us>)

²⁴ Source: *Keystone Law*, 2022.

groups are employed by the lead partner's service companies, not Keystone Law – but Keystone has the overall regulatory responsibility. This too is an area that could be further developed within the firm, and research undertaken to ensure best value is provided – something perhaps inconsistent with its model of only recruiting individuals of significant post qualification seniority as consultants. In such cases, there was less of a requirement on the aspect of training and supervision.

A recent development (particularly so in the legal industry) has been the progressing development of Artificial intelligence (AI). There have been, at the time of writing up this work, several very recent advances (in the legal sector), and the trialling of robot systems (such as ChatGPT) by both Magic Circle Firms and High Street offerings - with it appears mixed results. This I discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two in some detail, although technology in general was not a matter that had much resonance with my interviewees, and as such not analysed further in Chapter Six, the discussion section. Law firm IT and document management systems are reasonably standardised and AI an extremely new evolution, so these concepts not a motivator for change for the lawyers interviewed. It is however, an incredibly innovative area in the legal sector generally and not confined to the platform type of firm. It will though have repercussions on recruitment in the years to come as technology advances into all aspects of legal training and case management. For example, Taylor Rose, one of the largest dispersed law firms which focusses on the domestic sector (i.e., conveyancing) is well placed to reflect on how AI could streamline its commoditised services. This may result in hard decisions for the future where artificial intelligence could replace some legal fee earners. It is how, all be it as accepted by commentators I discussed, more so in the lower value legal sectors.

For the commercial law firms such as Keystone Law I do not consider AI will be such a “threat” as each lawyer is in effect a self-employed consultant and the use of AI would come at a cost which they would, in my view, be nervous of contemplating, considering the cost benefit analysis of this innovative legal tool. The growth and potential impact of AI in the legal space though a pertinent focus for future research generally and how it will undoubtedly affect legal practices across the board from the traditional high street practice through the dispersed sector to the international multi- disciplinary offerings.

Conclusion

To conclude this research paper, I believe that a quotation from a platform law firm’s Chief Executive, Christopher Hume, who took part in recent 2022 research into the sector in the UK, to be apposite to the conclusion of this study. *“What comes across so strongly in the data and in this report is just how significant an impact the challenger firms have had – and continue to have – in the UK legal services market. The growth is extraordinary, almost to the point where the terms ‘Alternative’ or ‘Challenger’ are no longer necessarily appropriate, as they become an established part of the landscape. Looking at our own moves data we can see that the trend for lawyers to opt for the platform model in increasing numbers is continuing at pace”* (Marshall, 2022 p.4).

This research has focussed on an English law firm, Keystone Law, the first, and until recently, the largest (by headcount) of the alternative business model legal practices, which, for ease of reference in this study, I have referred to as the platform firm.

My research question, to which this research was predicated, posed the inquiry as to whether there has been a demographic change in the type of individuals joining

Keystone Law in the approximately ten-year intervening period between my Group A and Group B data sets. Moreover, if so, why and how?

This work-based research has concluded that there has been a change. Individuals joining Keystone in circa 2020 (and in the firm generally) were a little younger and an increasing percentage were female. These findings were also replicated in other research studies into the sector generally (Codex Edge, 2021/2022, PwC, 2022). There were, as this work has identified, several interrelated factors at play, such as increased opportunity and a business focussed firm allowing third party business engagement. The trajectory was apparent. The later joiners (Group B) were more business oriented, open to opportunities both within the law and in parallel outside. Furthermore, they presented as having higher risk profiles than the earlier group, and indeed lawyers generally. This may be because I found the majority to have an entrepreneurial disposition, and in most cases (shared by a minority of Group A) a robust self-belief in their own brand, which would augur success – irrespective of the Keystone brand name in the marketplace.

I found that in Group B, the individuals were businesspeople as much as lawyers, and had no intention of staying with a firm or work type if it did not fit their personal long-term agendas – a typical characteristic of the Millennial generation which the traditional law firms are now significantly aware.

These findings are associated with only one firm; however, it is my considered opinion that similar platform firms in the UK legal industry, that have been in business for several years, will have witnessed similar demographic change in the cohort of legal practitioners joining them. This has been supported by recent research into the sector by organisations such as PwC, Codex Edge, and Arden, discussed in this study.

Keystone Law is justifiably regarded by many as the pioneer, and most prominent, embodiment of the platform or dispersed model of law firm. It is, however, now only one of an increasing number of such businesses operating in the UK legal marketplace. This trend is set to continue – particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic (Codex Edge, 2022). The recruitment of high calibre lawyers has become increasingly competitive, and as such, the management of Keystone Law must consider the changing demographic of such individuals, their interests, motivations, and working methods to ensure it can remain competitive and attractive to potential newcomers. It is anticipated that this work-based research project will assist, inspire, and challenge the firm's board of directors in this endeavour.

Significantly, this research, its findings, and its unique contribution to the on-going debate as to the future of the law firm and practitioner, is already being evaluated by the directors of Keystone Law, and equally importantly is being utilised by a start-up platform law firm to assist the owners in their inaugural business strategy and recruitment processes given the competition for talent. This was exactly what I wanted to achieve from this study - a real world application to academic research.

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APPENDIX ONE

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT (Template)

Research Title	Keystone Law - A study of demographic change in an international platform law firm.
Research Question	What are the underlying reasons for demographic change? What changes (if any) does the future hold?

Researcher (R)	Jonathan Hadley-Piggin	Interviewee (I)	B1/A1
Date:	Location:	Method:	

Age on joining KL:	PQE on joining KL:	Year of joining KL:	Gender:

[Transcript]

R: []

I: []

APPENDIX TWO

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (Semi-structured Format)

Research towards the award of a Doctorate in Professional Studies (DPROF).

Research Title: **Keystone Law - A study of demographic change in an international platform law firm.**

As part of this research and to assist in the production of qualitative data to attempt to answer the research question posed, I will interview willing participants who are currently consultants/partners at Keystone Law.

Two groups of lawyers will be interviewed. Eight lawyers who joined the firm about ten to twelve years ago. and eight who are recent joiners. Interviews will be on a one-to-one basis with the researcher and undertaken face to face, via Zoom/Teams or by telephone, dependent on location and ease of access for the participant.

Each interview will be for approximately 30 minutes in length. The interviews will be on a semi-structured basis, thus allowing a series of question to be posed for consistency but also allowing participant engagement with follow-up ideas or thoughts that may not be covered in the initial question. Flexibility being the key.

The interviews will interrogate the reasons/rationale for the participants thought making process when they were considering leaving their last employment and joining a consultancy based disruptive style of law firm, a relatively new sector in the UK legal marketplace. Then to compare and contrast the responses received in the two groups to see if, and why, the demographic of lawyers and their reasons for joining Keystone law has changed.

The participants responses will be recorded, following prior permission, on the media platform (i.e., Teams) or by means of digital recording device. Each interview will then be transcribed by the researcher and will form a schedule to the research project.

Confidentiality will be paramount. Participants names will not be used such that anonymity is assured. Participants will be identified in the final work by a unique number. If any background information provided during interview might possibly identify the participant, names/places will be altered for the purpose of transcribing, as this will not affect the validity of the questions posed and answered. The transcribed notes will not mention names or previous firms' names. At the conclusion of the transcribing process, all data will be erased, and no further record retained save what is in the research papers schedule.

The research project will be available following submission, and publishing, should participants wish to see a copy.

Participants are thanked for their co-operation and time in assisting with this research-based work project.

Initial Interview Points.

Name: (to be redacted):	
Gender:	Male / Female
Are you happy to be interviewed?	YES / NO
Media for interview:	In Person / Teams - Zoom / Telephone
PQE upon joining Keystone Law:	
Age upon joining Keystone Law:	
Year Joined Keystone Law:	Group A / Group B
Previous employment:	Magic Circle / Top 100 / Regional / In-house / Barrister / Boutique

Structured Questions:

1	What was your job title / position at your previous firm?	
2	Why were you looking to move?	

3	What elements of your previous firm made you consider a change?	
4	What options did you consider before Keystone?	
5	How did you first hear about Keystone?	
6	Were you aware of the type of firm Keystone was?	
7	Why did you consider Keystone as against the more traditional firm?	
8	Was the “brand” an important factor in your decision-making process?	
9	How did you feel about the “ <i>eat what you kill</i> ” remuneration system?	
10	Can you set out your motivation for choosing Keystone?	
11	Can you put answers to Q10 into a list of say three in order of priority? – Examples (for interviewer) to discuss -	Money / Lifestyle / COVID / Work balance / Options outside firm /

		Flexibility / Retirement planning / More client engagement / less structures (targets etc) / Glass ceiling on promotion and money earning potential at previous firm / Remote working
12	Did you wish to work for other firms / businesses hence being a consultancy?	
13	Did you have a good client base pre joining?	
14	What were your thoughts on the remuneration only when client pays structure – was this a concern and how/why did you balance the risk?	
15	Were you concerned about client following you?	
16	Additional points arising	

APPENDIX THREE

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

UWTSD

Participant Number/Initials

/

Title: *Keystone Law - A study of demographic change in an international platform law firm.*

Consent Form for Interview

Thank you for reading the information sheet about the research study and interview. If you are happy to participate then please complete and sign the form below. Please initial the boxes below to confirm that you agree with each statement:

*Please
Initial box:*

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet attached and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and will not be identified in the research findings completed work.

I agree for this interview to be recorded. I understand that the audio recording made of this interview will be used only for analysis and that extracts from the interview, from which I would not be personally identified, may be used in the production of the final research project or journal article developed as a result of the research. I understand that no other use will be made of the recording without my written permission, and that no one outside the research team will be allowed access to the original recording.

I agree that my anonymised data may be kept for future research purposes such as publications related to this study after the completion of the study.

I agree to take part in this interview.

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

To be counter-signed and dated electronically for telephone interviews or in the presence of the participant for face to face interviews

Copies: *Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, and the information sheet. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the main project file which must be kept in a secure location.*

APPENDIX FOUR

INTERVIEW INFORMATION SHEET

Research towards the award of a Doctorate in Professional Studies (DPROF)

As part of this research and to assist in the production of qualitative data to attempt to answer the research question posed, I will interview willing participants who are currently consultants/partners at Keystone Law.

Two groups of lawyers will be interviewed. Five lawyers who joined the firm about ten to twelve years ago and five who will be recent joiners. Interviews will be on a one-to-one basis with the researcher and undertaken face to face, via Zoom/Teams or by telephone, dependent on location and ease of access for the participant.

Each interview will be for approximately 30 minutes in length. The interviews will be on a semi-structured basis thus allowing a series of questions to be posed for consistency but also allowing participant engagement with follow-up ideas or thoughts that may not be covered in the initial questions. Flexibility being the key.

The interviews will interrogate the reasons/rationale for the participant' thought making process when they were considering leaving their last employment and joining a consultancy based disruptive style of law firm, a relatively new sector in the UK legal marketplace. Then to compare and contrast the responses received in the two groups to see if and why the demographic of lawyers and their reasons for joining Keystone law has changed.

The participant's responses will be recorded, following prior permission, on the media platform (i.e., Teams) or by means of digital recording device. Each

interview will then be transcribed by the researcher and will form a schedule to the research project.

Confidentiality will be paramount. Participants' names will not be used such that anonymity is assured. Participants will be identified in the final work by a unique number. If any background information provided during interview might possibly identify the participant, names/places will be altered for the purpose of transcribing, as this will not affect the validity of the questions posed and answered. The transcribed notes will not mention names or previous firms' names. At the conclusion of the transcribing process all data will be erased, and no further record retained save what is in the research papers schedule.

The research project will be available following submission, and publishing, should participants wish to see a copy.

Participants are thanked for their co-operation and time in assisting with this research-based work project.

Jonathan Hadley-Piggin

APPENDIX FIVE

KEYSTONE LAWYERS (As of 2022)

(Pool for Group B candidates) (Pool for Group A candidates)

(Names redacted for confidentiality purposes)

NAME	AGE	PQE	LAW FIRM/INHOUSE	MALE/FEMALE	AREA	JOINED
		2015 (Russia 1999)	In house (Hotels)	F	Commercial	2019
		1992	Cubism Law	F	Litigation	2019
		2013	Irwin Mitchel	M	Private Client	2018
		2001	Squire, Sanders & Dempsey	F	Litigation	2013
		2021	Edwin Coe	F	Employment	2020
		1984	Brown Rudnick	M	Commercial	2019
		1997	BLP	M	Litigation	2012
		1986	Monro Wright	F	Private Client	
		1998	Osborne Clarke	F	Commercial	2008
		1986	Thomas Eggar	M	Litigation	2016
		2012	Fletcher Day	M	Property	2021
		1991	Darwin Law	M	Litigation	2019
		1999	Greenwards	M	Corporate	2021
		2017	Linklators	M	Property	2021

		2005 (barrister)	Fox Williams	M	Commercial	2020
		2005	Stewarts Law	M	Employment	2019
		2003	Simmons & Simmons	M	Insolvency	2018
		1993	Watson Farley & Williams	F	Employment	2018
		2000	Reed Smith	M	Property	2020
		1977	Collyer Bristow	M	Litigation	2016
		1999	Tollers	M	Corporate	2010
		1996	Above Net Communications	F	Commercial	2007
		1997	McFarlanes	F	Property	2009
		2000	Watson Farley & Williams	M	Employment	2018
		2014	Cains	M	Litigation	2020
		2008	Herbert Smith	F	Employment	2019
		2010	Gough Law	M	Litigation	2018
		2006	Jeffrey Green Russell	M	Litigation	2015
		2006	Simmons & Simmons	F	Corporate	2020
		2016	Jeffry Green Russell	F	Licensing	2016
		2006	Penningtons	M	Property	2019
		1999	Farrer & Co	M	Commercial	2015
		1993	DAC Beachcroft	F	Property	2020
		2005	Samsung	M	Construction	2016

		2008	TLT	F	Shipping	2017
		1993	PwC Legal	M	Property	2021
		2009	Taylor Wessing	F	IP	2018
		2005	Bond Dickinson	M	Banking	2017
		1986	Mishcon De Reya	M	Property	2019
		1981	SGH Martineau	M	Corporate	2014
		1984	Edwin Coe	M	Corporate	2021
		1997	Payne Hicks Beach	M	Property	2018
		1992	McDermott Will & Emery	F	Insolvency	2019
		1994	McDermott Will & Emery	M	Corporate	2019
		1989	Simmons & Simmons	F	Employment	2021
		2003	Gordan Dadds	M	Licencing	2016
		1989	Moore Blatch	M	Tax	2019
		2016	Cubism Law	M	Litigation	2019
		2016	Systech Solicitors	M	Construction	2016
		1996	Clifford Chance	M	Banking	2017
		1999	Charles Russell	M	Planning	2008
		2000	Denton Wilde Sapte	M	Pensions	2016
		1993	Clifford Chance	M	Corporate	2019
		2000 (barrister)	Inces	M	Commercial	2017

		1990	Rosenblatt	M	Employment	2015
		1995	Memery Crystal	M	Corporate	2007
		1998	Ocado Group	F	Commercial	2021
		1992	Greenwoods	M	Commercial	2020
		1991	JMW Solicitors	M	Insolvency	2021
		1997	Oracle	F	Commercial	2008
		2010	DMH Stallard	F	Probate	2021
		2008	Slaughter & May	F	Litigation	2019
		1999	FCA	M	Banking	2020
		2007	Manches	F	Family	2017
		2000	Edwin Coe	F	Employment	2021
		2008	Stewarts	F	Family	2016
		2010	Crisp & Co	F	Family	2018
		2005	Herbert Smith	M	Construction	2020
		2002	Parker Bullen	M	Corporate	2019
		2003	Stephenson Harwood	M	Commercial	2019
		1988	Clifford Chance	M	Employment	2019
		1995	PwC Legal	F	Corporate	2010
		2004	Field Fisher	M	Commercial	2020
		1988	Slater & Gordan	M	Employment	2021
		2009	Mishcon	F	Family	2018
		2001	Stewarts	F	Family	2015
		1999	Motorola	F	Commercial	2012
		2004	Manches	F	Family	2013
		1991	Kennedys	F	PI	2012
		1991	GE Global Investigations	F	Litigation	2017

		2004	McGuire Woods	F	Family	2014
		2010	Freshfields	M	Commercial	2018
		1999	Osborne Clarke	F	Corporate	2012
		1988	Mundays	M	Employment	2013
		1999	Druces	M	Corporate	2020
		2000	Freshfields	F	Construction	2008
		1980	Norton Rose	M	Employment	2013
		1996	Greenwards	M	Banking	2012
		2006	Geoffrey Searle	M	Planning	2014
		2000	Ashurst	M	Probate	2009
		1984	Ashfords	M	Corporate	2019
		1980	DWF	M	Corporate	2018
		1993	DMH	M	Employment	2008
		1989	McMahon	M	Property	2017
		2001	Squire Patton Boggs	M	Shipping	2018
		1998	Eversheds	M	Employment	2016
		1993	Reed Smith	M	Banking	2017
		1998	Addleshaw Goddard	F	Corporate	2013
		1994	Howard Kennedy	F	Property	2008
		1991	Chares Russell	M	Property	2019
		1999	Harbottle & Lewis	M	Commercial	2021
		2003	Baker and McKenzie	M	Commercial	2015
		2001	DAC Beachcroft	F	Competition	2021

		(Germany)				
		2001	Sherrards	M	Commercial	2010
		2003	BLM	F	Litigation	2020
		2002	Allan & Overy	F	Employment	2018
		1988	Squire Patton Boggs	M	Corporate	2019
		1994	Slaughter & May	F	Corporate	2018
		2005	DAC Beachcroft	F	Property	2016
		2011	Goldman Sachs	M	Corporate	2018
		2003	Dechert	F	Employment	2016
		2000	Ince	F	Shipping	2019
		1999 Malaysia	Clydes	F	Banking	2020
		1986	Bristows	F	Commercial	2020
		1987	Squire Patton Boggs	M	Employment	2016
		2005	Radcliffes	M	Litigation	2014
		2008	Fletcher Day	M	Property	2020
		2004	Cairns	F	Litigation	2016
		1993	Lewis Silkin	F	Commercial	2010
		1980	Kingsley Napley	M	Commercial	2019
		1972	Lewis Silkin	M	Corporate	2019
		1976	CMS Cameron McKenzie	M	Corporate	2005
		2001	Berwin Leighton Paisner	M	Property	2010
		1978	Shepherd and Wedderburn	M	Litigation	2019

		1984 (Barrister)	Jeffrey Green Russell	M	Licensing	2016
		2001	Cains	M	Banking	2015
		2004	Thomas cooper	M	Shipping	2018
		2003	Bond Pearce	F	Commercial	2020
		2006	Lewis Silkin	M	Shipping	2018
		1979	Taylor Wessing	M	Litigation	2015
		2008	In Family Law Group	F	Family	2018
		2011	Metcalf solicitors	F	Family	2018
		2009	Slater and Gordon	F	Family	2020
		2008	DQ Advocates	F	Commercial	2019
		2001	Bird and Bird	F	Corporate	2020
		2006	Bond Dickinson	M	Property	2017
		2006	Brown Rudnick	M	Insolvency	2020
		1991	Clifford Chance	F	Commercial	2016
		1975 Barrister	Ince and Co	M	Aviation	2016
		1988	Rosenblatt	F	Family	2012
		1994	Herbert Smith	F	Employment	2009
		1977	Sidley Austin	M	Banking	2017
		1997	Spencer Wyatt	F	Employment	2017
		2015	Bargate Murray	F	Shipping	2021
		1993	Charles Russell	M	Property	2019
		1988	Hamlins	M	commercial	2014
		1997	Beachcroft	F	Insolvency	2008

		1972	Ashurst	M	Commercial	2017
		1989	Pitmans	F	Family	2019
		1985	Clifford Chance	M	Litigation	2017
		2006	Denton Wilde Sapte	M	Litigation	2016
		2002	Herbert Smith	F	Employment	2017
		1973	TLT	M	Commercial	2012
		1998	TLT	F	Commercial	2018
		1992	Clintons	F	Litigation	2011
		1993	Kingsley Napley	F	Employment	2018
		2005	Osborne Clarke	M	Construction	2016
		1988	Taylor Wessing	M	Litigation	2018
		2004	Goodman Derrick	M	Property	2020
		1995	McGuire Woods	M	Corporate	2020
		1996	Taylor Wessing	M	Commercial	2016
		1992	Ince & Co	F	Corporate	2018
		1979	Goodman Derrick	M	Property	2020
		2013	Macfarlanes	M	Property	2019
		2013	Cubism Law	M	Property	2019
		2005	Reed Smith	M	Property	2016
		1995	Dundas & Wilson	M	Property	2010
		2008	Kennedys	M	Litigation	2015
		1995	Shoosmiths	M	Marine	2016
		1996	Bond Dickinson	M	Property	2018

		1983	Stephenson Harwood	F	Litigation	2017
		1991 Barrister	Stewarts Law	M	Aviation	2021
		1999	Ashfords	M	Litigation	2020
		1989	Collyer Bristow	M	Property	2017
		2003	Clifford Chance	M	Commercial	2017
		2000	DAC Beachcroft	M	Construction	2013
		1992	Trowers and Hamblins	M	Commercial	2002
		1981	Greenwoods	M	litigation	2019
		1997	BLP	M	Commercial	2007
		1998	Pitmans	F	Employment	2014
		2003	Barker Gotelee	F	Litigation	2013
		1993	Appleby	M	Commercial	2017
		1994	Appleby	M	Corporate	2018
		2001	Dentons	M	Corporate	2006
		2006	CMS	F	Employment	2019
		2001	Shell Int	M	Commercial	2019
		1999	Slater and Gordon	F	Employment	2020
		1995	Mundays	M	Litigation	2014
		1986	Shakespeares	M	Probate	2014
		1986	Clifford Chance	M	Commercial	2017
		1977	Clarke Willmott	M	Property	2013
		2003	Bond Dickinson	M	Litigation	2017
		2004	Forsters	F	Employment	2019
		1993	Bond Pearce	M	Construction	2017

		2009	Clifford Chance	M	Construction	2018
		2007	Bircham Dyson Bell	F	Family	2017
		1994	Collyer Bristow	F	Commercial	2018
		1988	Farrer & Co	F	Commercial	2007
		1999	HFW	F	Banking	2021
		1987	Hill Dicks	M	Litigation	2019
		2000	Dechert	F	Employment	2021
		2002	Prettys	F	Employment	2020
		1996 Barrister	Shakespeare Martineau	M	Banking	2017
		1998	Fladgate	M	Litigation	2014
		2001	Sotheby's	F	Litigation	2019
		2003	Howard Kennedy	F	Litigation	2021
		2002	BBC	F	Commercial	2016
		2000	Eversheds	F	Property	2013
		2002 Barrister	Trowers & Hamlins	F	Construction	2021
		1981	Lawrence Graham	M	Corporate	2011
		1992	Withy King	F	Construction	2014
		2006	Eversheds	M	Property	2014
		1990	Herbert Smith	F	Employment	2006
		1999	Stephenson Harwood	F	Litigation	2014
		2004	Osborne Clarke	M	Corporate	2017
		2007	Thomas Eggar	F	Probate	2019

		2004	Nabarro	F	Litigation	2015
		1997	Blick Rothenberg	M	Employment	2021
		1993	DAC	F	Property	2009
		1998	WFW	M	Corporate	2005
		2007	Blake Lapthorn	F	Litigation	2018
		2006	Linklaters	F	Family	2013
		2017	Irwin Mitchel	M	Probate	2018
		1996	Mastercard	M	Litigation	2019
		1999	Addleshaw Goddard	M	Banking	2018
		2004	Clifford Chance	F	Litigation	2018
		1991	DMH Stallard	M	Employment	2015
		1992	Kennedys	F	Litigation	2007
		1981	Reed Smith	M	Corporate	2020
		1990	SJ Berwin	M	Commercial	2009
		1997	Allen & Overy	M	Tax	2019
		1995	DMH Stallard	M	Corporate	2017
		1996	Devonshires	M	Litigation	2018
		1983	Been Brittan	M	Construction	2014
		1995	Cancer Research	F	Commercial	2009
		2008	Travers Smith	M	Corporate	2020
		2004	Stevens & Bolton	F	Employment	2015
		2008	Gregg Latchams Barrister	M	Licensing	2018

		1992	Simmons and Simmons	F	Pensions	2014
		1975	Eversheds	M	Employment	2015
		2011	Freshfields	F	Litigation	2020
		Non sol	Smith & Williamson	M	Tax	2019
		1978	Leighton Paisner	M	Banking	2020
		1992	Reed Smith	M	Insolvency	2019
		1996	Freshfields	M	Litigation	2013
		1994	Farrah & Co	F	Commercial	2005
		2006	Imperial College	F	Commercial	2021
		2007	Sanders	M	Litigation	2016
		2009	Weil, Gotshal & Manges	M	IP	2020
		2018 Barrister	Brown Rudnick	M	Litigation	2018
		1999	DLA	M	Litigation	2008
		1982	Dechert	M	Litigation	2009
		2002	Eversheds	M	Litigation	2017
		1999	Candys	M	Employment	2015
		1976	Stephenson Harwood	M	Litigation	2014
		2001	Macfarlanes	M	Corporate	2020
		1990	Mundays	M	Property	2009
		1998	Collyer Bristow	M	Employment	2018
		1999	Salans	M	Property	2012
		1979	Wallace	M	Employment	2017

		1994	Eversheds	M	Employment	2020
		1980	Trowers	F	Probate	2013
		2003	Reed Smith	M	Licensing	2019
		2000	Penningtons	M	Property	2018
		2009	Doyle Clayton	F	Employment	2019
		1988	Mayer Brown	M	Employment	2021
		1992	Ince & Co	F	Litigation	2015
		1993	Clifford Chance	F	Litigation	2006
		1995	Marriott Harrison	M	Property	2021
		1999	Speechly	M	Commercial	2013
		1992	Pinsents	F	Commercial	2009
		1996	Fladgate	M	Employment	2017
		2003	Control risks	M	Commercial	2018
		2015	Clintons	M	Media	2020
		2004	DLA	M	Corporate	2016
		1984	Mishcons	M	Planning	2013
		Barrister				
		2012	Stewarts	M	Litigation	2019
		1999	Withers	M	Corporate	2018
		1993	Rosenblatt	M	Litigation	2011
		2004	Fletcher Day	F	Property	2021
		1970	Ashurst	M	Property	2011
		2004	Muckle	M	Property	2021
		1991	Slater and Gordon	M	Litigation	2018
		2005	Else Solicitors	M	Litigation	2014
		1997	Brown Rudnick	M	Insolvency	2019

		1981	Cripps Harries Hall	M	Litigation	2012
		1990	Gatley	M	Banking	2010
		2004	RPC	M	Commercial	2016
		1989	Taylor Wessing	M	Litigation	2012
		1975 Barrister	Pinsents	M	Commercial	2014
		1985	Addleshaw Goddard	M	Banking	2020
		1987	Addleshaw Goddard	M	Commercial	2009
		1983	HFW	M	Litigation	2009
		1999	Mishcons	F	Family	2020
		1997	Olswang	F	IP	2007
		2020	Deloitte	F	Banking	2021
		1994	Eversheds	F	Litigation	2005
		2007	Appleby	F	Litigation	2016
		1999	RPC	F	Litigation	2020
		1996	Charles Russell	M	Family	2018
		1998	McFarlanes	M	Commercial	2018
		1994	Memory Crystal	F	Property	2019
		1982	Leighton Paisner	M	Employment	2019
		1994	Taylor Vinters	F	Employment	2015
		1999	Hill Dicks	F	Property	2014
		1998	SJ Berwin	F	IP	2018
		1999	Clyde & Co	M	Corporate	2007

		1999	Addleshaw Goddard	M	Litigation	2014
		2010	WFW	M	Marine	2020
		1996 Barrister	Irwin Mitchell	M	Litigation	2020
		1999	Charles Russell	M	Property	2018
		2007	DMH Stallard	M	Litigation	2015
		2003 Barrister	Cloisters	M	Probate	2019
		2008	Mundays	F	Family	2020
		1995	Eversheds	M	Corporate	2009
		1998	Joseph Donnelly	M	Commercial	2019
		1991	Hewitsons	M	Property	2017
		1998	Simmons & Simmons	M	Education	2002
		1996	TLT	F	Commercial	2007
		1979	Bates Wells	F	Probate	2009
		1989	Sendo Holdings	M	IP	2005
		1983	Fenwick	M	Construction	2016
		2001	Investec	M	Employment	2021
		1985 Barrister	Jeffry Green	M	Licencing	2014
		1989	CMS	M	Commercial	2018
		1999	Vertex Law	F	Litigation	2015
		1999	Hogan Lovells	F	Employment	2014
		1996	Joelson	M	Licensing	2019
		2020	Russell Cooke	F	Family	2016
		1994	DAC	F	Family	2020

		2001	Travers smith	F	Corporate	2020
		2003	DAC	F	Property	2020
		2010	Slaughter & May	F	Corporate	2020
		2000	DAC	F	Tax	2011
		1989	Field Fisher	M	Commercial	2020
		1991	Wiggin	M	Litigation	2020
		1984	Moore Blatch	M	Corporate	2017
		1991	Nabarro	M	Litigation	2017
		1998	Browne Jacobson	M	Litigation	2016
		2003	Cairns	F	Banking	2017
		2016	Davenport Lyons	M	Property	2015
		1996	DLA	M	Banking	2005
		1995	DLA	F	Litigation	2020
		1998	Pinsent Masons	M	Property	2007
		2001	Gateley	F	Employment	2021
		2002	Lester Aldridge	M	Corporate	2018
		2000	RPC	M	Banking	2016
		2000	Eversheds	M	Litigation	2008
		1978	Bird & Bird	M	Property	2018
		2003	Slater and Gordon	F	Property	2015
		1995	Cubism Law	M	Property	2019
		1999	CMS	M	Property	2019
		1995	Dentons	M	Commercial	2020
		1992	Farrer & Co	F	Employment	2020
		2002	Salans	F	Banking	2021

		1998	Clifford Chance	M	Marine	2015
		2003	Taylor Wessing	F	Commercial	2016
		2013	Addleshaw Goddard	M	Employment	2021
		1994	DWF	F	Property	2020
		1999	Charles Russell	F	Property	2019
		2008	Clifford Chance	F	Property	2020
		1993	Cobbetts	M	Corporate	2018
		2000	Cains	M	Commercial	2014
		2002	Speechly Bircham	F	Commercial	2016
		1998	Addleshaw Goddard	F	Commercial	2011
		2010	Mellon bank	M	Banking	2016
		1999	Mundays	F	Employment	2017
		1993	Charles Russell	F	Property	2020
		1998	Slater & Gordon	F	Family	2021
		2008	Lewis Silkin	F	Employment	2019
		1992	Clifford Chance	M	Property	2010
		2004	Ashfords	M	Insolvency	2016
		2003	Emigra Worldwide	F	Employment	2016
		2007	Herbert Smith	F	Employment	2017
		1983	Stallards	M	Property	2004
		2002	Knights	M	Construction	2018
		2005	Taylor Wessing	F	Probate	2021
		1989	Moon Beever	M	Insolvency	2017

		1972	Davenport Lyons	M	Litigation	2013
		2003	Vardags	M	Family	2020
		2005	Motorola	F	Commercial	2016
		1992	Barclays Bank	M	Commercial	2007
		2001	Charles Russell	F	Commercial	2016
		1997	Bristows	F	Commercial	2010
		2009	Corbridges	F	Property	2019
		1983	DLA	F	Property	2009
		2009	Brachers	F	Family	2019
		2008	Close bank	M	Corporate	2016
		2006	Red Kite law	F	Family	2015
		1997	Charles Russell	M	Property	2021
		2004	Reed Smith	M	Corporate	2021
		2005	Bond Dickinson	M	IP	2017
		2003	Field Fisher	F	Planning	2020
		2004	McGuire Woods	F	Family	2010

APPENDIX SIX

SOLICITOR'S CAREER PATH IN TRADITIONAL LAW FIRM



Source: Flex Legal Blog 2022

APPENDIX SEVEN

KEYSTONE LAW STATISTICS – OVERVIEW (2022)

No. of senior solicitors: 394

No of fee earners: 481

Size of central team: 52

No. of practice areas: 29

No. of sectors: 19

No. of rankings in Chambers and Partners: 38

No. of rankings in Legal 500: acknowledged in 29 practice areas with 79 lawyers highlighted and 11 awarded Leading Lawyer status.

Position in the UK 200 law firms: 72

Winner of The Lawyer's Law Firm of the Year Award 2020

RollOnFriday Firm of the Year 2021

Male to Female ratio: 60:40

Average age: 45

Turnover 2021 to 2022: £69.6m

Office locations: London, Isle of Man, Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Brisbane, and Abu Dhabi.

Source: Keystone Law (<https://www.lawsetfree.com/about-us/key-stats/>)

APPENDIX EIGHT

TOP PLATFORM FIRMS BY LAWYER HEAD COUNT (2022)

Setfords	419
Keystone Law	405
Taylor Rose MW	353
Gunnercooke	296
Spencer West	115
Excello Law	110
Nexa Law	87
Scott-Moncrieff & Associates	33
Bexley Beaumont	33
Saracens Solicitors	30
Other	269
Total	2,150

Gender

Female	1,091
Male	1,055

Source: Codex Edge, (2022)