

Strategic Planning Checklist for Professional Firms

Expert knowledge means success

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Note: This publication has not been updated since it was last published. Some of the hyperlinks may have changed and may need updating. In addition, some of the information in this publication may be out of date.

Introduction

Running a professional practice has its challenges. Too few practices are run as a business. Partnerships are the norm for most professional firms and the structure of the modern partnership usually conspires against valid business management techniques. Little wonder then that most firms fail to completely satisfy their partners - let alone their clients.

The last ten years have been a period of extraordinary change for most professional firms. The rapid growth of corporate law and accounting firms and the emergence of global mega-firms have combined to test the continued existence of the traditional partnership model of management. Successfully meeting the challenges of the new business environment is essential if professional firms are to thrive.

This publication doesn't attempt to decry the existence of professional practices but rather to provide the opportunity for new thinking, plus new management and marketing ideas - all designed to provide high levels of satisfaction and outcome for the partners and those they serve.

In his brilliant book, "Managing the Professional Service Firm", David Maister asks the questions listed in this publication. He is the leading authority on the management of professional service firms, consulting to many prominent firms in a broad spectrum of professions, including consulting, accounting, actuarial services, law, investment banking, executive search, advertising and public relations.

Ian Brindle, Former Chairman, PricewaterhouseCoopers, U.K., put the value of Maister's work into clear focus when he said:

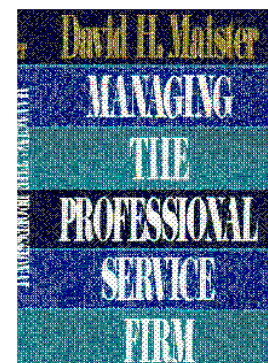
"David Maister's thoughts and writings apply original strategic insight combined with practical management advice to the difficult area of professional service management. I can think of no higher compliment than that his thinking and advice is being used on a daily basis in practice management across Europe."

Here are the questions that David Maister poses²:

- How well do we balance the goals of profitability, client service and employee development?
- How well do we match our management practices to the different needs of different businesses?
- How well do we manage the various profit-drivers, both those that impact short-term profits and those that drive long-term profitability?
- Do we perform our work in the most efficient way possible? Do we have high-value people doing low value tasks?
- Do we have a correct balance in the allocation of our business development time between the many competing types of business development activities that we do and can perform?
- Do we (or should we) have a structured programme of gathering market intelligence and understanding how clients think?
- Are we routinely serving our clients in a way that leads to unprompted referrals? How might this be done?
- What would a structured management programme look like that would systematically raise client satisfaction levels?
- How well does our programme of nurturing existing client relationships work? How could it be improved?
- Do we understand what it feels like to be a buyer? What does that imply for our business development process?
- What are the best tactics to generate leads and inquiries from new prospects?
- How well are we using teamwork and collaboration in deciding where to put our business development efforts?
- How well are our people balancing the need to generate income while simultaneously building skills and advancing their careers?
- What management approaches work in developing people?
- How to sustain motivation in a changing world. What motivates our kind of people?
- How is the process of staffing/scheduling client assignments done? How could it be improved?
- What rewards (financial and non-financial) do we offer people as they move through their careers? How can we learn to manage the mix of rewards?
- Has the people market changed? Does what worked for us still apply to the newer generations?
- How does a manager of professional people best get superior performance out of the team? How should s/he spend



David Maister



his/her time?

- How does a group leader develop a strategy for the team? What is the process?
- Can strategy be done as an ongoing process? If so, How?
- How do you provide counselling to senior professionals? What are/should be performance criteria?
- What process should be followed in setting partner pay?
- What performance areas do professional firms reward?
- How should you divide the partnership profit pie?
- How should professional firms be governed?
- What policies and practices are needed to create the true "one-global firm?"
- Can you get the benefits of both individual entrepreneurialism and firm-wide collaboration?
- Which approaches have worked best in integrating multisite/multidisciplinary firms?
- What are the key principles that breed collaboration?
- How do you manage in a matrix environment?
- How do you create a balanced scorecard?

So, how well do you think your firm is managed? Are you doing things right? Or, better still, are you doing the right things?

See how well you're doing on the remaining pages of this publication – based on David Maister's Strategic Planning Questionnaires at:

<http://davidmaister.com/index.php?nav=resources&data1=20&data2=43>

Your Views on Practice Development in the Firm Today

Part 1: About the Firm's activities now³

Indicate your agreement or disagreement by scoring each question using the following scale:

- 1 (strongly disagree);
 - 2 (somewhat disagree);
 - 3 (neither agree nor disagree);
 - 4 (somewhat agree);
 - 5 (strongly agree).
- (Circle the number that most applies.)

1.	We devote enough time to practice development	1	2	3	4	5
2.	We waste significant portions of our practice development time	1	2	3	4	5
3.	There is enough incentive to spend time on practice development	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Our existing clients represent the best source of new business for us	1	2	3	4	5
5.	In this firm, those who are good at practice development help others acquire the necessary skills	1	2	3	4	5
6.	We have enough opportunities to propose our services to new clients	1	2	3	4	5
7.	We win an acceptable percentage of those opportunities we choose to pursue	1	2	3	4	5
8.	We use teamwork well in our practice development efforts	1	2	3	4	5
9.	We chase too many opportunities. (We should pursue fewer with more concentrated effort.)	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Our brochure(s) is effective for the purposes it is (they are) meant to serve	1	2	3	4	5
11.	We have a distinctive competence – in some things we can do a markedly better job than our best competition	1	2	3	4	5
12.	We do a good job in ensuring that, for the client, using us is a comfortable, supportive "user friendly" experience	1	2	3	4	5
13.	We frequently ask satisfied clients to refer us business	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Our level of repeat business from existing clients is acceptable	1	2	3	4	5
15.	We do a good job of cross-selling in this firm	1	2	3	4	5
16.	Clients perceive our firm as differentiated from our major competitors in significant ways	1	2	3	4	5
17.	We are targeting the right kind of clients	1	2	3	4	5
18.	Our practice development efforts are sufficiently focused on our best opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
19.	We are well known in those market segments in which we are interested	1	2	3	4	5
20.	Practice development skills in this firm are too highly concentrated in a few people	1	2	3	4	5
21.	Being good at business-getting is important in getting on in this firm	1	2	3	4	5

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Part 2: Possible Changes⁴

Indicate your agreement or disagreement by scoring each question using the following scale:

1 (strongly disagree);

2 (somewhat disagree);

3 (neither agree or disagree);

4 (somewhat agree);

5 (strongly agree).

(Circle the number that most applies.)

1.	We should be trying to get different kinds of assignments than those we currently do	1	2	3	4	5
2.	We should be trying to get different kinds of clients	1	2	3	4	5
3.	We need to reward business getting more	1	2	3	4	5
4.	We need to re-allocate our practice development efforts based upon an analysis of the profitability of different kinds of work and different kinds of clients	1	2	3	4	5
5.	We should formally organise cross-disciplinary teams to market to specific industries	1	2	3	4	5
6.	In our procedures for accepting new business we should rely more on profitability or strategic considerations, i.e. turn down some business on grounds other than conflicts or credit risk	1	2	3	4	5
7.	The Managing Partner (or some other member of the Management Committee) should spend more time visiting the clients of other partners to obtain feedback and conduct general client relations activities	1	2	3	4	5
8.	We should organise more formally to develop explicit "client level" practice development plans to generate more work from key existing clients	1	2	3	4	5
9.	We should have a system for routinely obtaining client feedback on their satisfaction with our services	1	2	3	4	5
10.	We need to spend more time researching clients before proposing	1	2	3	4	5
11.	We need a better system for monitoring and reporting on practice development efforts (as well as results)	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Our senior non-partners should be actively involved in our practice development efforts	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Our different practice areas need to cooperate better in the development and execution of practice development plans	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Partners should be required to have (and to declare to practice leaders or firm management) a personal practice development plan	1	2	3	4	5
15.	We need to improve our presentational skills	1	2	3	4	5
16.	We need to rethink how we write proposals	1	2	3	4	5
17.	We make too much use of standardised materials in our practice development efforts	1	2	3	4	5
18.	We should conduct and/or participate in a market research effort to study client perceptions of our "Image"	1	2	3	4	5

Part 3: Marketing Tactics⁵

Here is a list of possible practice development tactics. Taking into account both out-of-pocket costs and the costs of time invested, please rank these items in the order that you think your firm should be increasing its investment and level of activity. Place a "1" by the six tactics you think the firm should focus on most, "2" by the six tactics next in priority and a "3" by the six tactics of least importance.

Please Assign Exactly Six "1's", Six "2's", and Six "3's".

1.	Newsletters	1	2	3
2.	Firm Brochures	1	2	3
3.	Brochures for particular service areas	1	2	3
4.	Seminars for non-clients	1	2	3
5.	Community activities (churches, boards, civic activities, etc.)	1	2	3
6.	Free in-house seminars for existing clients	1	2	3
7.	Social activities with referral sources ("networking")	1	2	3
8.	Advertising	1	2	3
9.	Public Relations	1	2	3
10.	Articles in trade press of client industries	1	2	3
11.	Articles in professional journals	1	2	3
12.	Writing proposals	1	2	3
13.	Presentations	1	2	3
14.	Speeches at client industry meetings	1	2	3
15.	Attendance at client industry meetings (when not on the programme)	1	2	3
16.	Cold Calls	1	2	3
17.	Direct Mail	1	2	3
18.	Participation in professional association activities	1	2	3

Part 4: Possible Routes to Success⁶

Listed below are some ways to improve practice development success. Place a “1” by the five tactics you think the firm should focus on most, a “2” by the five tactics next in priority, and a “3” by the five tactics of least importance.

Please Assign Exactly Five “1’s”, Five “2’s”, and Five “3’s”.

1.	Spend more time and money on practice development activities	1	2	3
2.	Reallocate more time to marketing to existing clients, and less on new prospects	1	2	3
3.	Change reward system to increase weight given to practice development success	1	2	3
4.	Get more people involved in practice development activities	1	2	3
5.	Improve selling skills	1	2	3
6.	Focus more time on fewer opportunities	1	2	3
7.	Devote more resources to generating new opportunities to present/propose/pitch	1	2	3
8.	Spend more time researching prospects and their business	1	2	3
9.	Spend more time on creative content of presentation/proposals/pitches	1	2	3
10.	Spend more time on production values of presentation/proposals/pitches	1	2	3
11.	Hire additional/different marketing specialists	1	2	3
12.	Develop new services	1	2	3
13.	Cross-sell other services	1	2	3
14.	Generate additional PR for the office	1	2	3
15.	Educate partners and non-partners in importance of new business	1	2	3

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Part 5: This section related to the way the Firm deals with clients⁷

Indicate your agreement or disagreement by scoring each question using the following scale:

- 1 (strongly disagree);
- 2 (somewhat disagree);
- 3 (neither agree or disagree);
- 4 (somewhat agree);
- 5 (strongly agree).

(Circle the number that most applies.)

1.	Our people are accessible	1	2	3	4	5
2.	We offer fast turnaround when requested	1	2	3	4	5
3.	We keep our promises on deadlines	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Our communications are free of jargon	1	2	3	4	5
5.	We keep clients sufficiently informed on progress	1	2	3	4	5
6.	We have a good understanding of the client's business	1	2	3	4	5
7.	We listen well to what the client has to say	1	2	3	4	5
8.	We involve the client at major points in the engagement	1	2	3	4	5
9.	We let the client know in advance what we're going to do	1	2	3	4	5
10.	We don't waste the client's time	1	2	3	4	5
11.	We keep the client informed on issues affecting their business	1	2	3	4	5
12.	We make our clients feel as if they are important to us	1	2	3	4	5
13.	We show an interest in the client beyond the specifics of our tasks	1	2	3	4	5
14.	We don't wait for the clients to initiate everything: we anticipate	1	2	3	4	5
15.	We give good explanations of what we've done and why	1	2	3	4	5
16.	We deal with problems in our relationships openly and quickly	1	2	3	4	5
17.	We notify the client promptly of changes in scope, and seek approval	1	2	3	4	5
18.	We are thorough in our approach to our work	1	2	3	4	5
19.	We show creativity in our proposed solutions	1	2	3	4	5
20.	We document our work activities well	1	2	3	4	5
21.	We are helpful in diagnosing the issue in the clients situation	1	2	3	4	5
22.	We are helpful in redefining the client's view of his situation	1	2	3	4	5
23.	We don't jump to conclusions too quickly	1	2	3	4	5
24.	We make it our business to understand the client company	1	2	3	4	5
25.	We are up to date on what's going on in the client's world	1	2	3	4	5

Part 6: About You⁸

Indicate your agreement or disagreement by scoring each question using the following scale:

- 1 (strongly disagree);
- 2 (somewhat disagree);
- 3 (neither agree or disagree);
- 4 (somewhat agree);
- 5 (strongly agree).

(Circle the number that most applies.)

1.	I would like to spend more time personally on practice development	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I would like to develop further my business-getting skills	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I am comfortable introducing my partners in other areas to my clients	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I would like some coaching in selling skills	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I would like some coaching in how to interview prospective clients	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I would like some coaching in presentation skills	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I have a personal list of prospective clients I am targeting	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I receive the guidance I need to fulfil my practice development responsibilities	1	2	3	4	5

You spend ___ hours per month (on average) on some form of practice development.

Of all the non-billable time you spend on any form of practice development, approximately ___% is spent on trying to get new clients and ___% is spent on trying to get more business from existing clients. (Must sum to 100%).

Of all the non-billable time you spend on any form of practice development, estimate what proportion you would guess you spend targeting individual, specific clients or prospects versus time spent in “broadcast” activities trying to reach a broader audience. (Seminars, speeches, general community activities, newsletters, etc. would all constitute broadcast activities).

___ %Single Prospect Efforts

___ %Broadcast Efforts

100% Total

Part 7: Final Thoughts⁹

If you could spend (personally) 100 more hours in a year on some form of additional activity related to new revenue growth, how would you spend it?

The single most important thing we could do to improve the Firm's marketing efforts is:

The single biggest barrier for us in improving business development is:

Strategic Planning Questionnaire¹⁰

Section (A): Possible improvements in your career and working life that you might desire

You are asked to rank these possible goals, to indicate the improvement in your working life that you would like to achieve in the next few years (say, 3 to 5 years). Note that you are indicating your preference for changes from today, not what is important to you in some absolute sense. Please note that “1” is your top-rank (i.e. most important priority) and “12” is your lowest priority.

Please Rank All 12 items, No Ties

		Rank 1-12
1.	Earn more money	
2.	Achieve higher position within the firm	
3.	Obtain more autonomy in my work-life	
4.	Greater recognition and respect from clients	
5.	Greater recognition and respect from colleagues inside the firm	
6.	Greater recognition and respect from others in the profession	
7.	Get more interesting / challenging / prestigious clients	
8.	Get more interesting / challenging work from the types of clients I do have	
9.	Become more involved in decision-making in the firm	
10.	Have better juniors to work with	
11.	Learn new things / build new skills	
12.	More teamwork / collegueship inside the firm	

Section (B): The Business Processes of a Professional Firm

Rate how well we are doing on the following processes. Use the following scale:

5 = We are the dominant firm at this

4 = We are ahead of our competitors at this

3 = We are typical compared to our competition

2 = We are a little behind our competitors at this

1 = We are weak at this

		Rank 1-5
1.	Creating Innovative Solutions to Client Problems	
2.	Finding New, Efficient Ways to Lower Cost of Performing Professional Tasks	
3.	Earning Unprompted Referrals from Client Work	
4.	Turning Individual Client Assignments into Long-Term Relationships	
5.	Continuously Gathering Market Intelligence and Tracking Emerging Client Needs	
6.	Generating Awareness of Capabilities in Important Markets	
7.	Turning Inquiries into Assignments (“Sales Process” Effectiveness.)	
8.	Developing New Services	
9.	Attracting High Quality New Recruits	
10.	Transferring Skills to Junior Professionals	
11.	Developing and Growing New Partners from Junior Ranks	
12.	Disseminating and Sharing Skills and Knowledge Among Partners	
13.	Helping Partners to Continue to Grow and Develop their Capabilities Throughout Their Careers	

What other action category would you put on this list?

Section (C): Competitive Advantages

Please rank from 1 (best shot) to 10 (unlikely to work) what you consider are the most practical ways for the Firm to become more valuable to its clients than the best competitors. You will want to take into account cost, likelihood of coming up with something effective, ability to implement, etc.

Please Rank All Items, No Ties

		Rank 1-10
1.	Hire better / different types of people	
2.	Train people faster / better / in additional types of skills	
3.	Do more productive research and development	
4.	Develop methodologies for doing our work that are more effective or thorough than the competitors'	
5.	Develop ways of being better client counsellors in addition to top technicians	
6.	Staff projects in innovative ways that render extra value	
7.	Be better at accumulating, disseminating and building on our accumulated expertise and experience	
8.	Be better at being "close to the client" through more systematic listening and tracking of emerging needs	
9.	Develop superior quality assurance mechanisms that provide greater confidence and reassurance to clients	
10.	Reorganise and redeploy our resources in ways (e.g. cross-disciplinary industry teams) that create extra values for clients	

What other categories would you put on this list?

Section (D): Prioritising

Please rank the following actions according to the degree to which you think we should give them priority. Put a "1" by the action that you think we should give most attention to and "12" by the action we should give least attention to.

Please Rank All Items, No Ties

		Rank 1-12
1.	Change the incentive system to influence partners to act differently	
2.	Invest more in new services development	
3.	Change our approach to building knowledge and skills; in technical matters, knowledge of clients' business, consultation skills	
4.	Implement new approaches in tracking and capitalising on emerging client needs	
5.	Change our approach to disseminating intelligence on market needs around the practice	
6.	Change our recruiting patterns to obtain the right non-partners for our current and future practice	
7.	Change the means by which we generate awareness of our capabilities	
8.	Reorganise our practice to serve our clients better	
9.	Enhance our ability to be "advisors" to our clients	
10.	Change our current approach to targeting market segments	
11.	Change our approach to targeting specific clients	
12.	Change the degree of specialisation of our people (at any level)	

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Section (E): The Firm's Goals

The following are some statements about some of the firm's goals. Please rate how well the firm is achieving each goal on the following scale:

1 = Not at all

2 = A little

3 = We're OK

4 = We're doing well

5 = We excel at this

N/A = not applicable

1.	Clients perceive us as the quality leader in the areas in which we practice	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
2.	We are well-known among the market segments we are interested in	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
3.	We are good at developing future leaders for our practices	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
4.	We establish and maintain strong long term client relationships	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
5.	We are innovative in the services we bring to market	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
6.	We invest sufficient time and money in the development of new services	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
7.	We communicate openly and honestly with our people	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
8.	We respond quickly to changing client needs	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
9.	We function well as team players	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
10.	We take advantage of our firm wide network	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
11.	We encourage risk-taking	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
12.	We reward our people for their performance	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
13.	We develop and implement effective business plans	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
14.	We maintain a balance between short term and long term	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
15.	We motivate our people to do the best possible job for clients	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
16.	We are sensitive to local and cultural differences between practice areas	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
17.	We attract and retain our fair share of the best individuals	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
18.	We are successful in fostering commitment and loyalty	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
19.	We provide challenging work to our partners	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
20.	We provide challenging work to our non-partners	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
21.	We provide good training opportunities to improve skills	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
22.	We provide rapid opportunities to take on more responsibilities	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
23.	We reward people at levels at least as high as they could obtain elsewhere	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
24.	We keep our people informed about what is happening in the firm	N/A	1	2	3	4	5

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Section (F): Goals Revisited

Here is the same list of goals. This time, please give each goal one of three scores:

1 = Important

2 = Very important

3 = Critically Important

Here's the catch:

Please give exactly eight 1's, eight 2's and eight 3's!

		Rating 1, 2 or 3
1.	Clients perceive us as the quality leader in the areas in which we practice	
2.	We are well-known among the market segments we are interested in	
3.	We are good at developing future leaders for our practices	
4.	We establish and maintain strong long term client relationships	
5.	We are innovative in the services we bring to market	
6.	We invest sufficient time and money in the development of new services	
7.	We communicate openly and honestly with our people	
8.	We respond quickly to changing client needs	
9.	We function well as team players	
10.	We take advantage of our firm wide network	
11.	We encourage risk-taking	
12.	We reward our people for their performance	
13.	We develop and implement effective business plans	
14.	We maintain a balance between short term and long term	
15.	We motivate our people to do the best possible job for clients	
16.	We are sensitive to local and cultural differences between practice areas	
17.	We attract and retain our fair share of the best individuals	
18.	We are successful in fostering commitment and loyalty	
19.	We provide challenging work to our partners	
20.	We provide challenging work to our non-partners	
21.	We provide good training opportunities to improve skills	
22.	We provide rapid opportunities to take on more responsibilities	
23.	We reward people at levels at least as high as they could obtain elsewhere	
24.	We keep our people informed about what is happening in the firm	

Section (G): Forward Focus

All of the following goals are important. However, to the extent possible, please rank order their importance in your mind, as a guide to what you think the firm should focus on in the next few years. Which measures of success would you put as high priority, and which is the one that should get the least (direct) attention? A “1” means this goal is most important, and “12” means least important.

PLEASE RANK ALL, NO TIES
(This will be tough, because many goals are consequences of others: but that’s part of the point. Where should we first think of attacking this?)

Please remember, a “1” means this goal is most important, and a “12” means least important.

		Rank
1.	Increase growth in profitability above historical levels	
2.	Increase market share/growth rate above historical levels	
3.	Increase rate of innovations brought to market	
4.	Reduce cost of delivery on existing services	
5.	Increase level of client service	
6.	Increase degree of specialisation by partners	
7.	Speed up the integration of new technology in our firm	
8.	Increase rate of skill building among non-partners and partners	
9.	Change qualitative mix of practice, (different mix of clients)	
10.	Change qualitative mix of practice, (different mix of service)	
11.	Find new ways to improve partner satisfaction and motivation	
12.	Find new ways to improve non-partner satisfaction and motivation	

Section (H): Profit Improvement

Below are listed some ways in which our profitability might be improved. Please rank these “tactics” in order of what you see as the Firm's priorities. “1” should be the top priority, “2” the next, and so on.

PLEASE RANK ALL, NO TIES

As you assess these opportunities, note that you will be evaluating both the size of the profit impact, and the likelihood that we can make a change in this area. Note also that there is duplication on this list.

Please note: 1 is the Top priority, and 16 is the Lowest priority.

		Rank
1.	Charge higher fees	
2.	Increase utilisation (billable hours per person)	
3.	Increase leverage in the delivery of services	
4.	Drop unprofitable services	
5.	Drop unprofitable clients	
6.	Improve speed of billing	
7.	Improve speed of collections	
8.	Use marketing to get “better” work	
9.	Invest in new (higher value) services	
10.	Eliminate duplication of effort from the firm	
11.	Train project leaders in project management skills	
12.	Reduce turnover of non-partners	
13.	Speed up skill-building process in non-partners	
14.	Make greater use of paraprofessionals	
15.	Reduce overhead costs	
16.	Deal with under-performers	

What other tactics should be on this list?

Section (I): Investment Choice

If you could invest £1m in the next year (above and beyond the current level of investment) with the goal of improving the competitiveness of the Firm and make its future more secure, what would you spend it on?

If you could change one aspect of the firm-wide management practices and policies that affect the success of the Firm (measurements, reward systems, organisation, pay policies, selection and appraisal of partners etc.) and thereby improve the Firm's competitiveness, what would it be?

Response:

Rate Your Work Experience¹¹

Indicate your agreement or disagreement by scoring each question using the following scale:

- 1 (strongly disagree);
- 2 (somewhat disagree);
- 3 (neither agree nor disagree);
- 4 (somewhat agree);
- 5 (strongly agree).

1.	The organisation of work in this office is logically structured.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Our productivity suffers from lack of organisation and planning.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I have the freedom to make the necessary decisions to do my work properly.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I am kept informed about the things I need to know to do my job properly.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I am very satisfied with the ability to manage my own time.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I feel that the amount of work I am expected to do is reasonable.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I can generally decide for myself the best way to get my work done.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I am satisfied with the amount of input I have into my decisions that affect my work.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	My advice is usually sought on issues that affect my work.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Team meetings are conducted in a way that builds trust and mutual respect.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	I receive the appropriate help in balancing my workload with other demands on my time.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	I feel free to express my views on issues important to me.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	I am actively encouraged to volunteer new ideas and make suggestions for improvement of the practice.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	I am encouraged to initiate tasks or projects I think are important.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	I have access to the resources necessary to provide high quality client service.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	I am aware of the skills and resources available to me throughout the firm in my practice area.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	I am able to work productively with very little wasted time.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	The support staff in our firm are treated as valuable members of the "team".	1	2	3	4	5
19.	In my practice in the firm, we do a good job of delegating work to the appropriate level.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	The quality of work done by support functions (copying, administration, mail and distribution, desktop publishing, etc.) in the firm is consistently high.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	The quality of work performed in my practice area is consistently high.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	The quality of service delivered to clients by my practice area is consistently high.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	For an equivalent level of quality and service the costs of our services are far lower than those of our major competitors.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	The overall value of our services is far higher than that of our competitors.	1	2	3	4	5

Strategic Planning Checklist for Professional Firms

Indicate your agreement or disagreement by scoring each question using the following scale:

- 1 (strongly disagree);
- 2 (somewhat disagree);
- 3 (neither agree nor disagree);
- 4 (somewhat agree);
- 5 (strongly agree).

	The Work Itself					
1.	My work makes good use of my knowledge and ability.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I feel I am still learning and growing.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I am very satisfied with the sense of personal accomplishment my work provides.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I am very satisfied with the variety of tasks in my work.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I am very satisfied with the chance to do interesting work.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I am very satisfied with the overall challenge my work offers.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I am proud of the quality of work I do.	1	2	3	4	5
	Co-operation					
1.	When I am on a difficult assignment I can usually count on getting assistance from my superior and co-workers.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Knowledgeable people are available when I need advice or help with a particular problem.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	In this firm there is a lot of co-operation between departments.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	In general, co-operation is good within my practice area.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	In this office people pretty much look out for their own department's interests.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Colleagues outside my practice area with whom I have contact are generally co-operative.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I am satisfied with the teamwork in my practice area.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I am satisfied with the teamwork in the firm.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I am satisfied with the level of communication among the practice area in the Firm.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I feel that I am a member of a well-functioning team.	1	2	3	4	5
	Performance Evaluation					
1.	I have a clear understanding of my responsibilities.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I am satisfied with the opportunities to discuss my performance.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I understand the measures used to evaluate my performance.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	There are clear performance objectives and standards for me.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I think my performance is evaluated fairly.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	My performance reviews are conducted on a regular/timely basis.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Performance reviews have been useful in helping me improve my job performance.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I have a good idea of how the firm views my performance.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I am satisfied with the way my performance is evaluated.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	My performance review accurately reflects my performance.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	I receive useful performance feedback throughout the year.	1	2	3	4	5
	Firm Culture					
1.	The firm treats professionals with trust and respect.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	The firm is responsive to individual professional needs.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Most people in our firm do "whatever it takes" to do a good job for their clients.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	The quality of the professionals in our firm is as high as can reasonably be expected.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Communication between the firm's management and people at my level is good.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I feel free to voice my opinion openly in the firm.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Poor performance is not tolerated at the firm.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I am very satisfied with the friendliness of my colleagues and professionals.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	The level of politics and politicking around here is low.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	My colleagues and professionals have high enthusiasm and morale right now.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	In the time I have been part of the firm it has changed for the better.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	In our firm, we encourage professionals to develop new and better ways of doing things.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	I have a good understanding of the overall goals and objectives of my practice area.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	I have a good understanding of the overall goals and objectives of our firm.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	I would recommend the firm to others as a good place to work.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	I am proud to be a part of this firm.	1	2	3	4	5
	I think the Firm is successful in achieving the goals of:					
1.	Providing outstanding quality work and service to clients.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Providing a satisfying work experience to its professionals.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Being a financially successful organisation.	1	2	3	4	5

Survey On Human Resource Issues¹²

Question 1: HR Goals

The following is a list of goals related to human resources that you could strive for. Please indicate your assessment of the relative priority among these goals, taking into account both the importance AND the likelihood of making a difference. (E.g. you may conclude that raising quality of input is important but not practically achievable and thus rank it lower than if you judged only its importance.)

Please Rank All, No Ties.

Number “1” is your Top priority and number “9” is the Lowest priority

		Rank
1.	Improve calibre of new entry recruits to the Firm	
2.	Raise rate (speed) of skill building among non-partners	
3.	Change emphasis among types of skill building we do: e.g. increase emphasis on counselling, client skills, etc.	
4.	Increase level of motivation among non-partners	
5.	Reduce turnover rates among non-partners	
6.	Improve how productively we utilise our non-partner resources	
7.	Increase level of motivation among partners	
8.	Improve how productively we use partner resources	
9.	Increase ability to absorb “alternate career style” non-partners (e.g. working mothers)	

What other Human Resource Goals should be on the list?

Question 2: HR Priorities

Having chosen your priority Goals, now please indicate your priorities among the following list of human resource Actions.

To indicate your priorities, please allocate:

Exactly 8 “1’s” (top priority);

Exactly 8 “2’s” (next highest);

Exactly 8 “3’s” (third in importance); and

Exactly 8 “4’s” (lowest in priority).

1.	Improve/revise formal training programs on key skills	1	2	3	4
2.	Institute (Spread) para-professional programme	1	2	3	4
3.	Change our selection criteria in hiring	1	2	3	4
4.	Change our promotion policies below partner level	1	2	3	4
5.	Modify career counselling system below partner level	1	2	3	4
6.	Modify career counselling system above partner level	1	2	3	4
7.	Modify performance review process below partner level	1	2	3	4
8.	Modify performance review process at partner level	1	2	3	4
9.	Change alumni relations program	1	2	3	4
10.	Encourage increased (different) approach to specialisation (below partner level)	1	2	3	4
11.	Encourage increased (different) approach to specialisation (at partner level)	1	2	3	4
12.	Change pay structure (salary and/or bonus) below partner level	1	2	3	4
13.	Change pay system at partner level	1	2	3	4
14.	Change approach to cross-office resource allocation (below partner level)	1	2	3	4
15.	Change approach to cross-office resource allocation at partner level (partner redeployment)	1	2	3	4
16.	Modify partner admissions policies	1	2	3	4
17.	Hold offices/practices accountable for success on explicit human resource measures	1	2	3	4
18.	Engagement experience reviews by non-partners on every engagement	1	2	3	4
19.	Annual firm-wide non-partners satisfaction/attitude surveys	1	2	3	4
20.	Increased emphasis on senior hires	1	2	3	4
21.	Become more accommodating to part-time / flexi-time work preferences	1	2	3	4
22.	Change work assignment processes to ensure that all are put to “highest and best use”	1	2	3	4
23.	Speed up use of technology as a substitute for labour	1	2	3	4
24.	Speed up use of technology as a tool to enhance value of non-partners efforts	1	2	3	4
25.	More emphasis on hiring non-traditional candidates, e.g. lower grade-point averages, wider range of schools, different majors, re-entrants to workplace, etc.	1	2	3	4
26.	Institute career positions short of full partnership	1	2	3	4
27.	Explicitly reward partners/non-partners and managers for good coaching/skill transfer	1	2	3	4
28.	Introduce greater performance differentials in pay schemes for non-partners	1	2	3	4
29.	Make greater use of formally designated industry teams in offices	1	2	3	4
30.	Train practice leaders in human resource management skills	1	2	3	4
31.	Train partners in human resource management skills	1	2	3	4
32.	Train managers in people management skills	1	2	3	4

Feedback To The Senior/Managing Partner¹³

To provide feedback to the senior / managing partner, please complete the following questions. Most require you to indicate your agreement or disagreement, using the following scale:

- 1 (strongly disagree);
- 2 (somewhat disagree);
- 3 (neither agree nor disagree);
- 4 (somewhat agree);
- 5 (strongly agree).

	The Senior/Managing Partner...					
1.	Is more often encouraging than critical	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Is accessible when I want to talk	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Keeps informed about what I am doing	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Is fair in dealing with partners	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Causes me to stretch for performance goals	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Is concerned about long-term issues, not just short term profits	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Conducts team meetings in a manner that causes involvement and commitment	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Is consultative in his/her decision-making	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Is sufficiently involved with non-partners and their issues	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Provides constructive feedback that helps me improve my performance	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Is a source of creative ideas about our business	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Gives me the freedom to set my own goals	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Makes me feel that I am a member of a well-functioning team.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Acts more like a coach than a boss	1	2	3	4	5
15.	Helps me understand how my tasks fit into the overall objectives for the firm	1	2	3	4	5
16.	Keeps me informed about the things I need to know to perform my role properly	1	2	3	4	5
17.	Actively encourages me to volunteer new ideas and make suggestions for improvement of the practice	1	2	3	4	5
18.	Helps me to grow and develop	1	2	3	4	5
19.	Encourages me to initiate tasks or projects I think are important	1	2	3	4	5
20.	Is publicly generous with credit	1	2	3	4	5
21.	Is prompt in dealing with under performers	1	2	3	4	5
22.	Is good at keeping down the level of "politics and politicking"	1	2	3	4	5
23.	Encourages innovation and calculated risk-taking	1	2	3	4	5
24.	Relates the total reward system (pay, recognition, promotion, etc.) to job performance rather than things like position or seniority	1	2	3	4	5
25.	Emphasises co-operation as opposed to competitiveness between work groups	1	2	3	4	5
26.	Is effective in communicating with partners	1	2	3	4	5

Compensation (Pay) Questionnaire¹⁴

Part 1: The situation now

Indicate your agreement or disagreement by scoring each question using the following scale:

- 1 (strongly disagree);
- 2 (somewhat disagree);
- 3 (neither agree nor disagree);
- 4 (somewhat agree);
- 5 (strongly agree).

1.	The pay-setting group is thorough in collecting performance information	1	2	3	4	5
2.	There is sufficient recognition of performance differentials in pay	1	2	3	4	5
3.	There is too much recognition of performance differentials in pay	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I understand what factors affect pay	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I have the power to control the factors that influence my pay	1	2	3	4	5
6.	The level of consultation prior to partner pay decisions is satisfactory	1	2	3	4	5
7.	In general, I understand why I get what I get	1	2	3	4	5
8.	The right people get rewarded around here	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Performance appraisals are thorough	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Different groups are treated appropriately	1	2	3	4	5
11.	There is too much reliance on seniority	1	2	3	4	5
12.	I know what I must do to earn higher pay	1	2	3	4	5
13.	The right people determine pay	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Our current system is satisfactory	1	2	3	4	5
15.	There is currently enough incentive for bringing in new clients	1	2	3	4	5
16.	There is currently enough incentive to market to existing clients	1	2	3	4	5
17.	The pay system is fair	1	2	3	4	5
18.	The range of high-to-low pay is too great	1	2	3	4	5
19.	The range of high-to-low pay is too small	1	2	3	4	5
20.	If I were at a competitor I would be earning at least 10 percent more	1	2	3	4	5

Part 2: What you'd like to see

Indicate your agreement or disagreement by scoring each question using the following scale:

- 1 (strongly disagree);
- 2 (somewhat disagree);
- 3 (neither agree nor disagree);
- 4 (somewhat agree);
- 5 (strongly agree).

1.	Pay should be based more on group performance and less on individual contribution	1	2	3	4	5
2.	We should move to a system that has a greater judgement component, less formula driven	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I would support a system which included mandatory client feedback (satisfaction) scores as part of pay-setting	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I would support a system which included feedback from non-partners in pay-setting	1	2	3	4	5
5.	We need to reward collaboration more within practice groups	1	2	3	4	5
6.	We need to reward collaboration more between practice groups	1	2	3	4	5
7.	We need to pay more attention to the profitability of work performed in our pay system	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Our system should give more weight to short term performance	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Our system should give more weight to long-run performance, and rely less on short term results	1	2	3	4	5
10.	To encourage participation in practice development, we should acknowledge and reward efforts as well as results	1	2	3	4	5
11.	We need to change the way in which the pay committee is chosen	1	2	3	4	5
12.	We need to encourage more delegation of work	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Building skills in others should be explicitly rewarded	1	2	3	4	5
14.	I would prefer a system which had clear weights given to measurable factors, rather than a judgement system	1	2	3	4	5
15.	The system should allow for individual roles, rather than the same criteria applied to all partners	1	2	3	4	5
16.	We should give more reward for successful contribution to firm activities such as recruiting or management	1	2	3	4	5
17.	Practice leaders should have more input on pay of partners in their practice area	1	2	3	4	5
18.	We should impose a limit on the ratio of high-to low partner pay	1	2	3	4	5

Rate Your Governance System¹⁵

Indicate your agreement or disagreement by scoring each question using the following scale:

- 1 (strongly disagree);
- 2 (somewhat disagree);
- 3 (neither agree nor disagree);
- 4 (somewhat agree);
- 5 (strongly agree).

1.	It maximises chances that people with the right skills are placed in positions of responsibility	1	2	3	4	5
2.	It provides a role for important players	1	2	3	4	5
3.	There is an avenue for those outside the official structure to participate	1	2	3	4	5
4.	There is a clear, shared sense of who is responsible for what	1	2	3	4	5
5.	The governors are good at consensus building	1	2	3	4	5
6.	There is a vehicle or forum for dissatisfaction to be expressed	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Policy functions are separated from executive functions	1	2	3	4	5
8.	The governing body is decisive	1	2	3	4	5
9.	There is speedy decision making	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Decisions do not get "lost" due to lack of attention	1	2	3	4	5
11.	People charged with responsibility have the time to perform the function	1	2	3	4	5
12.	There is procedure or vehicle to remove those no longer effective	1	2	3	4	5
13.	The process is capable of setting clear goals and holding people accountable for them	1	2	3	4	5
14.	The governing body is able to make decisions on basis of merit, not power	1	2	3	4	5
15.	Decision-making processes don't waste people's time	1	2	3	4	5
16.	Issues get confronted, not avoided	1	2	3	4	5
17.	Governors have trust of, and credibility with, those governed	1	2	3	4	5
18.	Controversial issues can be surfaced early	1	2	3	4	5
19.	"New" issues are sought out, rather than awaited	1	2	3	4	5
20.	"Committee-itis" is avoided	1	2	3	4	5
21.	Power is not excessively concentrated in a few hands	1	2	3	4	5

Further Information

David Maister is widely acknowledged as one of the world's leading authorities on the management of professional service firms. In 2002, he was identified as one of the top 40 business thinkers in the world (BUSINESS MINDS, Financial Times/Prentice Hall.)

Some of the books he has written are:

- Managing the Professional Service Firm, by David H. Maister, published by The Free Press;
- The Trusted Advisor, by David H. Maister, Robert Galford and Charles Green, published by The Free Press;
- True Professionalism: The Courage to Care about Your People, Your Clients and Your Career, by David H. Maister, published by The Free Press;
- Practice What You Preach: What Managers Must Do to Create a High Achievement Culture, by David H. Maister, published by The Free Press;
- Strategy and the Fat Smoker: Doing What's Obvious But Not Easy, by David H. Maister, published by The Spangle Press;
- First Among Equals: How To Manage A Group Of Professionals by Patrick J. McKenna and David H. Maister, published by The Free Press.

If you would like to receive further information about this subject or other publications, please call us – see our contact details on the next page.

References:

¹ Managing the Professional Service Firm, by David H. Maister, Paperback - Reprinted June 1997, published by Free Press, ISBN: 0684834316. Contact Maister Associates, Inc (Julie O'Leary, Business Manager), P.O. Box 946, Boston, MA 02117, Tel 001 617 262-5968, Fax 001 617 262-7907, or e-mail to: David_Maister@MSN.COM

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