



**Core matters:** DLA Phillips Fox chief executive Tony Crawford

After all, the strategy's success would rely on employees' support.

Crawford decided he needed external expertise. He approached Melbourne internal communications consulting firm Manage by Design, which specialises in developing programs to assist staff to understand and participate in the implementation of strategic plans.

The founder and chief executive of Manage by Design, Peter Dyson, says his job is to help employees see the business case behind an initiative. "Everybody wants to know why these things need to occur and everyone has to assess that in their own way," he says.

Organisational leaders go through an extensive decision-making process when they develop a new strategy, Dyson says.

To understand and support a strategy, employees need to experience that thinking process, too.

Dyson and a team of consultants worked with DLA Phillips Fox's management team to understand the rationale behind the new strategy. Six months later, Manage by Design developed a series of team-based activities that simulated the legal services market, complete with shifting market parameters that reflected the changes under way in the legal sector.

Crawford and his management team took the simulations on the road. Over 10 days, they travelled to the firm's six offices in Australia and two offices in New Zealand, speaking to the firm's 1500 employees.

The employees participated in two-hour simulation sessions, working in teams.

Through various scenarios, they were able to consider where the firm should sit in the market.

The sessions encouraged employees to understand how the legal services market was changing and the decision-making process that management had taken in mapping out a new strategy.

A central part of DLA Phillips Fox's strategy was to focus on core legal services instead of high-end strategic legal work.

"We concluded that around 80 per cent of the legal work required by large corporations and government departments fell into core legal services," Crawford says.

Getting employees to understand this was important, Dyson says.

"They all want to be a Mallesons [Stephen Jaques] because they are the benchmark. But Mallesons act in a totally different sector. We wanted employees to learn to focus on client needs rather than their perceived performance against competitors."

In November 2006 – the same year Crawford embarked on his three-year strategy – Phillips Fox entered into an alliance with the DLA Piper Group, a global alliance of independent law firms, and changed its name to DLA Phillips Fox. (It was not the first name change for a firm that traces its origins to 1864.)

"It has been a very exciting part of us achieving our business plan objectives," Crawford says. "We now have a global dimension so we can provide local clients with global aspirations the very best legal services anywhere in the world."

The true value of the arrangement, he believes, is the recruitment boost the firm has experienced.

"It is a real differentiator in terms of the people we now attract to the firm. This is marked by higher levels of interest from graduates and the frequency and quality of ... partner prospects we are seeing."

The international alliance also provides employees with good reason to stay at the firm. An international secondment program gives lawyers from Australia and NZ access to positions in any of the 25 countries in which DLA Piper operates.

So far, 10 local lawyers have taken up positions in London, Dubai, Chicago and Washington. And two Australian lawyers working at DLA Piper in London returned home recently and took up jobs at DLA Phillips Fox.

The firm's staff engagement has grown steadily since 2006.

External research shows that our staff engagement has improved, year-on-year, for three years," Crawford says. "We are scoring in the high-performance bracket."

The alliance is proving lucrative. Inbound work from the alliance has added almost 20 per cent to revenue.

The three-year strategy expires soon and Crawford says a merger with DLA Piper is a consideration. "The relationship would not have developed to where it is if that was not an option." **BRW**

## THE LAW

# ASPIRATION AND REALITY

Keeping employees in the know about corporate strategy is one way to bolster their support.

**Report: Georgina Dent**

● Facing a rapidly changing market for legal services, Tony Crawford, chief executive of national law firm DLA Phillips Fox, embarked on a three-year plan to reposition the firm.

In doing so, Crawford was determined that each employee fully understand the changes and the reasons for them.

Only then, he reasoned, could each employee feel confident about contributing to the strategy's success – and more importantly, wanting to.

"We needed to communicate in a manner that enabled staff to understand what the plan said, but more importantly why it said what it said," says Crawford, who has been chief executive since 1999 and before that the firm's Sydney managing partner.