Making law firm strategy do work

What I've built for law firms deciding whether their strategy is any good, or whether it is time to build a new one

General briefing · Alt-V Law

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In short. Most of the trouble with law firm strategy sits downstream of the writing. The strategy is intellectually fine; the firm then under-resources it, measures the wrong things, and runs recruitment and promotion on reflex, which quietly re-plans the firm around whatever is easiest. I've built a Strategy Review that reads an existing strategy against four tests, and a Strategy Development process for firms where "the strategy" has become the budget plus the lateral programme. A sample pack is included: a Target Operating Model Map for an invented regional firm and the Strategy Diagnostic run on the same scenario.

What makes a strategy real

Four tests. The Kernel Test (diagnosis + guiding policy + coherent action - Rumelt). The Cascade Coherence Test (where to play → how to win → capabilities → systems - Martin). The Trade-off Test (what has it chosen *against* - Porter). The Competitor Swap Test (if a competitor's name on the cover reads as sensible, the document is an industry sermon).

Two field diagnostics. The 30-second partner test; three randomly-selected partners should state the strategy in substantially the same words. The realised-strategy test; the last 24 months of headcount, capex, promotions and lateral hires *is* the strategy the firm actually has. The gap to the stated strategy is the honest diagnostic.

Where law firm strategy differs. The partner pay model is a strategic constraint: a firm cannot choose a strategy its pay model punishes. Zero retained earnings caps multi-year investment appetite more sharply than most strategies admit. Partner autonomy means strategy runs on a coalition of the willing. The three-year MP cycle produces one strategy per MP term. The billable hour is the de facto default strategy by absence.

The operating-model side. Five archetypes - Counsel House, Process Factory, Product House, Platform Firm, Integrated Advisory - plus the undesigned blend that many mid-market firms live in. Picking an archetype deliberately is the step that most reliably removes the quiet friction a firm has been living with.

The sample pack

The pack carries two artefacts from one invented scenario: **Haldane Pryce LLP**, a UK top-50 regional firm (400 fee earners, eight offices, £85m fees, MP two years into a three-year term). The Target Operating Model Map reads the current blend, names the target archetype the strategy implies, and lists the three bridging moves. The Strategy Diagnostic scores the strategy on five dimensions (Clarity, Coherence, Alignment, Execution capacity, Measurement) and gives a verdict on the weakest dimension, not the average.

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Where this tends to be useful

1. **A review before the next MP election** (nine to twelve months out - once candidates are declared, the diagnostic turns into a referendum on them).
2. **A diagnosis before a strategy day.** Firms that run strategy days without a diagnosis produce the strategy they already had, with better slides.
3. **A sense check for firms that have grown through laterals.** The realised-strategy audit against the stated strategy is usually enough to show whether the drift is deliberate.

How confident are you that the last 24 months have made meaningful steps towards your strategy, and the next 12 months will continue that trajectory? And how do you know?

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