



FSI Law

Background and Business Challenges

Finers Stephens Innocent LLP (FSI) is a high-profile corporate law firm that specializes in a wide variety of areas, including intellectual property and media, real estate, and employment law. As a comparatively small firm in terms of size, FSI prides itself on a dynamic and forward-thinking outlook. To maintain this, the firm needs energetic, interpersonally skilled individuals to take positions of influence in the firm and to help shape its future.

Historically, the process of being promoted to partner had been much like that existing in most law firms for decades, based principally around an individual's CV and proven technical competence. Promotions happened almost automatically after a certain number of years' service – resulting in candidates who perhaps were not always ready to make a higher-level contribution to the team.

Consistency in the right leadership behaviors and skill in innovative business development were becoming increasingly important for growth. Recognizing this, FSI approached IPAT's parent company, OPP[®] Ltd, for a more robust and reliable way of identifying and promoting the right leaders of the future. OPP worked with FSI to incorporate the 16PF[®] competency framework into their selection and development program for aspiring partners.

FSI's key objectives were to ultimately improve the overall skill set of partners in the areas of business development, commercial focus, building trust, teamwork and leadership.

A Carefully Planned Approach

Defining the Firm's Values

Before launching a selection and development framework, Emma Rush, Head of Training at FSI Law, realized that she needed to position this strongly in the context of both *what's important* to the business, and *why* it matters. She consulted with stakeholders on the firm's management committee, with the stated intention of supporting the firm's ability to deliver a competitive edge. It was agreed that the firm's existing 'building blocks', defining its areas of key strategic concerns, should form the basis of a competency framework. This framework would then be used both for selection and promotion through its integration into the firm's 'Partnership Track'.



Integrating the 16PF Questionnaire into the Partnership Track

Emma describes the reasons for choosing the 16PF competency framework for the Partnership Track: "I had worked with OPP before, and knew that we could trust

them to listen to our needs and wants. There is a strong cultural fit between OPP and FSI in that they challenge our thinking without pushing specific approaches or solutions.

“We chose the 16PF instrument over other trait-based instruments because the language used and the way the information is presented is accessible and engaging, and also because the theory and results are very resonant with people, even if they know nothing of psychometrics.

“For example, in the 16PF expert reports, the first areas of personality examined are warmth and intelligence. The most obvious aspect of someone’s personality when you first meet them is how warm they are, and then, as you get to know them better, you learn more about things like how rule-conscious or how tense they are. So the 16PF mirrors how people unfold when you experience them, and how strongly each trait influences others’ perception of them. It’s also exhaustive – it covers all aspects of personality, in accessible language, so you get a rounded picture of the ‘whole person’.

“When you explain this, people understand and buy into the hypothesis. This is especially important in the context of selection for promotion, where people might be anxious about career impact and can be nervous about or wary of taking a psychometric questionnaire.”

Gareth English, Innovation Consultant at OPP, worked with FSI to put together a custom Competency Report based on 16PF results, and designed specifically with FSI’s core values in mind. Gareth guided Emma and her colleagues through the following steps:

1. ***Job analysis***
An OPP consultant worked with a series of stakeholders at FSI, from managing partner to trainee, to find out exactly what was required of the ‘ideal’ partner, or recruit, as the firm was now envisioning it.
2. ***Shortlisting of competencies***
These skills and attributes were then shortlisted by the consultant into a manageable set of FSI-specific competencies.
3. ***Mapping the 16PF Questionnaire to the identified competencies***
Some of the FSI competencies were taken from OPP’s existing competency framework and some were adapted (a combination of IPAT’s ‘Match and Go’ and ‘Customized’ options for the 16PF Competency Report)
4. ***Logistical negotiations***
This stage included deciding on the appearance of the report being created for FSI, timescales and so on.
5. ***FSI’s 16PF Competency Report launched onto the Partnership Track***
The first five candidates completed the questionnaire and received feedback against the competency framework in conjunction with the results of 360-degree surveys.

Following this, Partnership Track participants benefit from one-to-one business coaching and a range of interactive workshops on self-presentation, negotiation, business development and management skills.

Challenges and Adjustments along the Way

Emma describes the cynicism that she experienced when proposing a psychometric instrument for the selection and development program: “There was a lot of resistance to the idea among the management team. They were worried that we’d end up with ‘clones’. But they were reassured by the approach OPP took – especially the job analysis stage, where they were consulted about the content of the reports in detail.”

The economic downturn has required that Emma re-scope somewhat her ambitious plans for the Partnership Track. Despite some organizational changes, FSI continued with the Partnership Track scheme, but had to rethink the extent of the Competency Report tailoring, moving away from the totally tailored and job-specific options toward a slightly more off-the-shelf option. Crucially, the flexibility of OPP’s offering allowed the scheme to continue in spite of the difficult conditions. Emma says: “We wanted to avoid ‘Survivor Syndrome’ in the people that were left. Despite the economic situation, this development still needed to happen and was still considered a worthwhile investment by the firm.”

Outcomes and Plans for the Future

Emma hopes that the Partnership Track will result in really outstanding candidates with something genuinely distinctive to offer the firm when succeeding to partner level. In the past, there had been some attrition of partners as a result of a mismatch of skills and motivations, which became apparent once they were promoted. While the use of the 16PF instrument may mean that fewer candidates are successful in entering the scheme, the intention is that once they do, candidates will represent a better, lasting fit with the firm’s values and requirements for the future. Ultimately, this should lead to a close-to-100% success rate in becoming partner for those who have entered the track.

Emma hopes that in the longer term, FSI’s 16PF Competency Report will be used for all new recruits, not just existing employees aiming at partnership. This will allow the firm to be sure that they have an excellent pool of people with potential, right from the outset of their life in the firm. In addition, the scheme may be used for lateral hires, where people are brought in from other firms. Since in this situation, lawyers bring their client list with them, this is potentially a very lucrative outcome from the use of the 16PF tool.

Measures of success for the scheme include retention rates, and Emma is confident that there will also be traceable links to the amount of new business generated. But she is emphatic that financial metrics are not the whole story. “For a business to continue to be successful, more is needed. We aspire to creating a partnership with a strong commitment to working together to really nurture the FSI culture and identity – that which differentiates us from others and makes us a market leader. With candidates better prepared for leadership and ready to be proactive in external and internal networking, we are confident that the Partnership Track will produce the people we need to achieve this.”

For information about how we could work with your organization to create a tailored competency framework or help you with your business challenge, please contact our Business Development Team at 800 225 4728 or by email at bizdev@ipat.com.