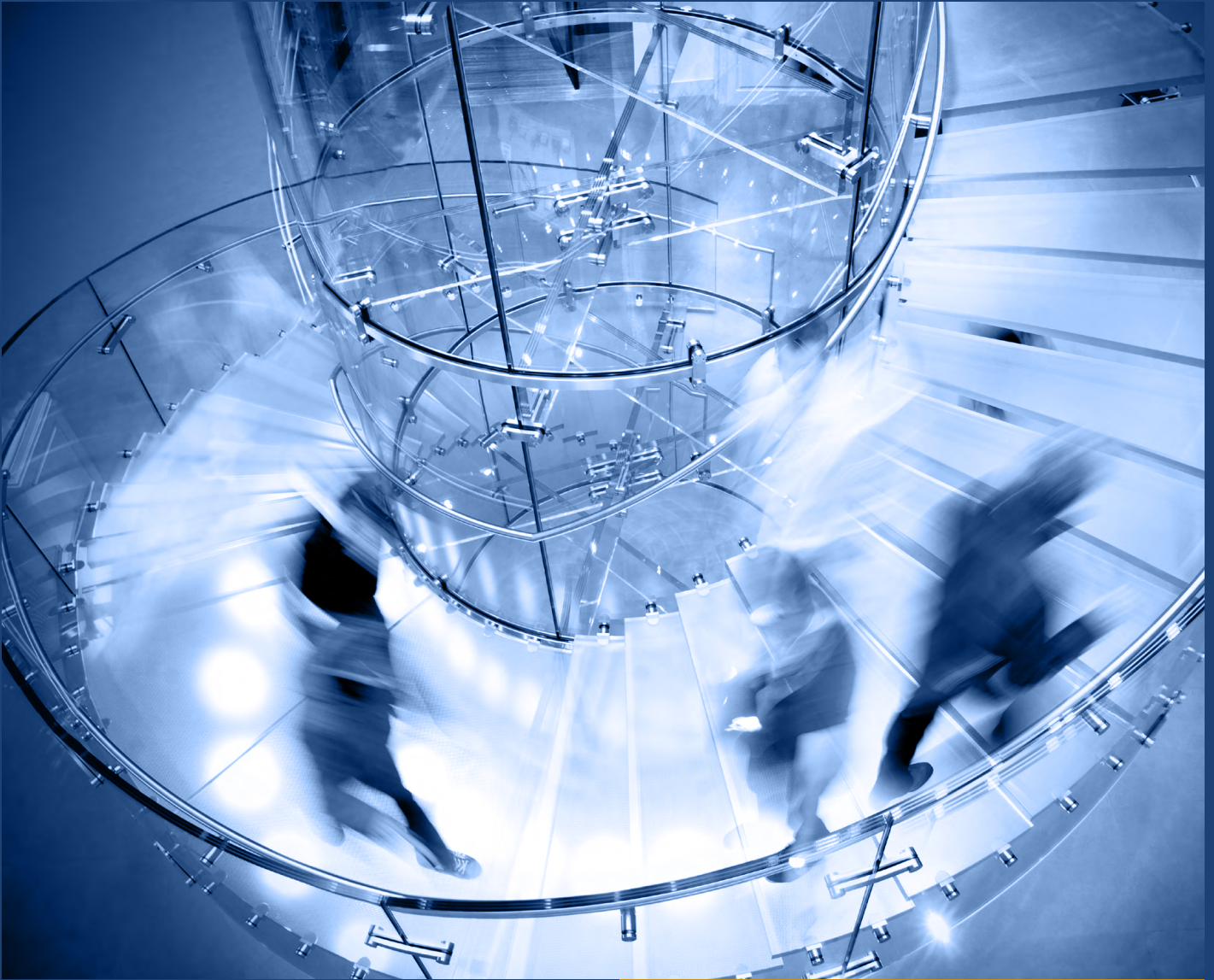


Integrating lateral hires: what drives success in today's professional firms?



By The Results Consultancy

Integrating lateral hires: what drives success in today's professional firms?

Lateral hires continue to rise across UK professional services firms, but success rates remain inconsistent. This paper explores the integration challenges faced by both firms and individuals. It also examines the factors driving outcomes (both positive and negative) and how onboarding and integration can be structured to unlock long-term value.

In this paper:	Page
Lateral hires: the gap between strategy and success	1
The firm's challenge: unlocking the value of laterals	2
The individual's challenge: navigating complexity and ambiguity	3
What's working: building a structured, human-centric onboarding process	4
Summary	5



Lateral hires: the gap between strategy and success

Lateral hiring remains a key recruitment strategy for professional services firms and shows no signs of slowing. Recent research by The Lawyer, using Atlas Codex Edge data, revealed that in 2024, 50% of new partners at the UK's top 50 law firms were lateral hires.

The London legal market alone recorded 548 partner moves in 2024 – the highest figure on record (surpassing the previous year's record by 7%) and up 15–18% from the five- and ten-year averages, respectively ([Edwards Gibson, 2024](#)).

But while the volume of lateral moves is high, the success rate is less favourable. According to [US-based Decipher Investigative Intelligence](#), 48% of lateral partners leave their new firm within five years – which underscores the ongoing retention challenge, albeit in the US legal market.

In their [2025 LinkedIn article](#), Burwood Partners noted that the average tenure of an externally hired partner in consulting firms was often under 3.5 years, with many leaving or underperforming within the first 18–24 months.

Our own coaching and development work supports this trend, with a growing number of lateral hires and firms seeking tailored support with the transition to make it a success.

Obviously, the cost implications of getting a lateral hire wrong can be substantial – not just because of the recruitment fee and salary investment, but also in terms of lost revenue and potential reputational damage. In this paper, we highlight the organisational and behavioural dynamics that support or inhibit success and what truly makes the difference in helping laterals thrive.



The firm's challenge: unlocking the value of laterals

Lateral partner hires are brought in to unlock access to sectors, geographies and high-value clients, or to enhance existing offerings. These hires have the potential to deliver substantial value and drive meaningful growth. What many firms encounter, however, is one or more of several mismatches.

Mismatch #1_ Business case expectations vs results

A major challenge faced by firms is the portability of the partner's book of business. Lateral hires frequently experience barriers to bringing across clients – whether due to relationship complexity, legal conflicts, or client hesitancy. These can quickly unravel even a robust business case.

In some firms, the recruitment process itself lacks proper stress-testing of a lateral's business plan. Has the plan been validated with target clients? Are the revenue projections realistic?

Mismatch #2_ Integration support provided vs required

A thorough onboarding process is essential to fully realising the client revenue that lateral partners bring – and to unlock new opportunities by connecting them to the firm's existing client base.

If the firm doesn't actively help them build those internal bridges, the opportunity is lost. Too often, the optimism of the hiring process is followed by a slow and fragmented integration period, leaving the lateral to operate in isolation.

Mismatch #3_ Shifting client expectations

Moreover, the client dynamic is shifting. Today's clients expect innovative thinking, fresh perspectives, and commercial value. For new laterals, delivering this requires a deep understanding of their new firm's resources – and fast. Without a programme that helps laterals quickly grasp the firm's people, expertise, assets, systems and client solutions, integration falters and the firm's ability to deliver true client value suffers.



The individual's challenge: navigating complexity and ambiguity

From the lateral's perspective, onboarding can feel more like conformity than integration. Despite seniority, they may be left to sink or swim.

Early days are typically filled with system inductions and back-to-back introductory meetings. These can lack direction and fail to progress beyond superficial relationship-building. There may also be little clarity or support around which internal stakeholders are critical, or how best to engage with the firm's existing clients.

Differing expectations

Even when a 100-day plan is in place, alignment can falter. Differing expectations around timeframes, involvement of key partners, and measures of success can create confusion. Without open, structured conversations, frustrations build – especially when legacy systems, reward structures or CRM limitations act as blockers.

Confidence dips when structure and commitment are missing

Behaviourally, many high-performing laterals experience a dip in confidence during this transition. Their past success can create pressure to “prove themselves” quickly. Yet they often carry the weight of their previous firm's culture and scars – which, left unchecked, can manifest as perfectionism, procrastination, or imposter syndrome.

The Thomson Reuters Stellar Performance studies have revealed that lateral partners bring an average of just 22% of their book of business to a new firm – but this can range from 0% to 100%, depending heavily on how well the integration is managed. Integration quality also plays a critical role in whether they stay.



What's working: building a structured, human-centred onboarding process

The good news is that firms are starting to move beyond surface-level inductions and are investing in more robust, commercially focused integration strategies.

In the Thomson Reuters Stellar Performance 2023 report, the most appreciated elements from laterals in onboarding were:

- Facilitated introductions with partners, team leaders and stakeholders.
- A clearly articulated induction and training plan, tailored to the lateral's business focus.
- Dedicated admin or support resource to ease onboarding.
- Assigning integration mentors or regular check-ins with firm leaders.
- Structured opportunities to present their capabilities to other practice areas.

Extended onboarding

Successful integrations are also extending beyond the first few months. Some laterals are gaining sustained support over a full annual cycle. They report that this has helped them truly understand the workings and culture of their new firm, which has accelerated their ability to contribute meaningfully.

The rise of dedicated integration specialists

Elsewhere in the market, some larger firms have appointed Heads of Integration to oversee lateral transitions – particularly where lateral hiring is frequent or linked to strategic growth and acquisitions.

These roles typically coordinate cross-team collaboration, address potential friction points early, and help ensure alignment between a lateral's business plan and firm priorities.

Supporting a smooth and successful transition

At The Results Consultancy, we've developed the Integrate & Grow programme specifically to support firms and lateral partners through this high-stakes period. The programme combines coaching, training and facilitated peer discussions to help laterals:

- Build momentum with their business plans and go-to-market activities.
- Navigate internal networks and clarify priorities.
- Sharpen consultative selling and influencing skills.
- Reflect on personal behaviours and develop sustainable habits.
- Establish clear expectations with sponsors and track progress.

By focusing on both the behavioural and strategic dimensions of integration, the programme helps laterals thrive – and allows firms to realise the full value of their investment.

Integrating lateral hires: what drives success in today's professional firms?



Summary

With lateral hiring a core component of growth strategy for many professional firms, it's time to treat integration as a critical enabler – not a 'nice to have'.

Successful integration is not about a better welcome pack and a quick-fire induction in the first week; it's about aligning expectations, accelerating trust-building, and creating the conditions for commercial success.

The Results Consultancy works with law firms, accountancy practices, real estate and consultancy businesses to help lateral hires integrate more quickly and effectively.

Find out more at winningbusiness.net or contact us to explore how our Integrate & Grow programme could benefit your team.

Contact

The Results Consultancy Ltd™

6 Christopher Court
97 Leman Street
London E1 8GJ

T: 44 (0) 20 7488 4419
results@winningbusiness.net
winningbusiness.net

Also catch us on [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-results-consultancy)

