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## Protecting your career in the face of a merger

The announcement that your firm is going to merge can be both exciting and daunting. Most of all, you will probably wonder, what does this mean for your job?

### Opportunity or crisis?

Consolidation in the legal industry continues apace with law firms using mergers and acquisitions to drive greater efficiencies, expand their geographical reach, and add to their offerings.

But, while M&A can be a time of great opportunity, it can bring with it considerable uncertainty with the threat of job losses and concerns over culture clashes. As a business services professional, you need to ensure that you are best prepared to turn what can be a tricky situation to your advantage.

The key is not to panic to the news of a merger. Act proactively but avoid knee-jerk reactions to speculation and gossip.

Working on your self-marketing strategy will stand you in good stead, whatever happens. Start to think about your skills, how you have contributed to the business, and how your experience can help the newly merged company achieve its ambitions.

Network at every level ? see if you can find allies in the other firm that may be able to open up opportunities for you or at the very least provide you with important insights into the company workings. This will help you work out what skills you can bring ? or any skills-gaps you need to work on. If you decide to leave or are made redundant then networking with current colleagues may be invaluable if they too are moving on to pastures new.

Make sure your LinkedIn profile is up-to-date, tailor your CV so that it is obvious why the new business needs you, and get your name out there. In a merger situation, the temptation is to keep a low profile in the hope that if you go unnoticed then you won't find yourself on the chopping block. But the opposite is often true. Volunteer for merger-related projects.

Mergers are a stressful time, and the process can go on for months, but stay positive and show enthusiasm and energy. Griping about what is happening will not impress bosses, old or new.

Read the trade press to see what information you can glean ? this might give you more of an understanding of what the merging firms' goals are and what the industry is saying about the move. Are there any perceived flaws? Is there anything you could do to mitigate them?

If your department will be duplicated by the merger, look at the potential implications. Ask for frank information but don't be surprised ? or angry ? if all cannot, as yet, be revealed. Look at all potential avenues ? are there other departments that will benefit from your skills?

Think about the cultures of the two merging firms and try to work out how they might mesh. If it is your firm that is being acquired, it is likely that the dominant culture will be that of the acquiring business. Will

you fit in? Do you want to fit in? It is worth considering now whether the newly merged company is something you want to be part of ? will it meet your career goals? Do you see yourself being part of it?

Consider all the likely outcomes of the merger but keep an open mind. It can mean a new boss, different colleagues, relocation and new challenges ? all of which can be positive or negative.

A merger provides an opportunity to assess where you are in your career, your aspirations, your skill-set and your connections. Spending time on your professional profile will pay off whichever way you go.

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