



Making internationalisation work

As professional services firms expand internationally, the challenge is rarely capability alone. The real test is how to work across borders in a way that is coherent, commercially effective and culturally credible, without creating complexity or unintended consequences elsewhere in the firm. PSFI supports firms to design, lead and operate internationally by helping them navigate the tensions between global consistency and local effectiveness, so they can grow internationally with greater clarity, profitability, stronger cross-border collaboration and a more consistent client experience.

Most firms face recurring internationalisation dilemmas:

- How do we create a new and high-performing culture post-merger?
- How global should we really be, and where does local discretion matter most?
- How do we avoid over-standardisation while maintaining clarity, quality and brand?
- How do partnership dynamics, rainmakers and local leaders affect what works in practice?
- How do cultural differences play out in governance, client relationships and decision-making?
- How do we strengthen cross-border collaboration without slowing the firm down?

There is no single “right” model. What matters is being intentional, explicit and aligned about how the firm operates internationally. PSFI takes a pragmatic, evidence-based approach, combining organisational design, leadership behaviour and cultural insight. Our work recognises that local decision-making remains critical, particularly in how strategy is applied on the ground. We help firms:

- Step back from premature solutions and understand the full global–local picture
- Define what is non-negotiable globally, and where local flexibility is essential
- Make implicit cultural tensions visible and discussable, rather than leaving them to play out informally
- Build shared frameworks that create clarity without stifling what works locally
- Revisit and rebalance models over time as firm strategy and partnership dynamics evolve

Our internationalisation work spans four interlocking areas:

1. Global–local operating models

- Clarifying the firm’s global “backbone” (brand, quality, ethics, risk, core methods)
- Defining where local autonomy applies in areas such as pricing, talent, delivery and client development
- Creating governance and decision rights that are workable in practice, not just on paper

2. Cross-border leadership and collaboration

- Developing leaders’ ability to work across cultures, hierarchies and time zones
- Strengthening trust, communication and expectation-setting in international teams
- Addressing differences in pace, risk appetite and decision-making styles (including US–Europe dynamics)

3. Client engagement across borders

- Shifting from individually-held relationships to more institutional, cross-border client models
- Supporting “one client, one team” approaches on complex international matters
- Helping teams balance speed, local responsiveness and global coordination

4. Culture, talent and unintended consequences

- Identifying where cultural factors matter most and where rigidity is counter-productive
- Supporting firms to “pick their battles” on consistency versus local relevance
- Ensuring global initiatives do not inadvertently erode engagement, inclusion or local pride

PSFI supports internationalisation through board- and partner-level advisory on international strategy and governance, facilitated conversations that surface global–local tensions safely and constructively, and workshops and masterclasses on cross-border working, leadership and client engagement. We also provide practical frameworks and tools that help teams translate decisions into day-to-day international ways of working.

If any of these challenges or opportunities resonate, we would welcome a conversation about how we may be able to help.



Kevin Hogarth
Partner, PSFI
kevin.hogarth@psfi.org



Allyson Stewart Allen
Principal Consultant, PSFI
allyson.stewart-allen@psfi.org