

# THE NEW POLYMATHS

AN ENERGISELEGAL  
WHITE PAPER

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THE RISE OF CAREER AGILITY  
IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION  
AND THE WORLD OF WORK

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**THANKS TO ALL THOSE WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THIS WHITE PAPER AND WHO GAVE UP THEIR TIME TO BE INTERVIEWED**

**THE NEW  
POLYMATHS**

# INTRODUCTION

## Forget everything you've read about being a specialist. The world has moved on. Here come the New Polymaths.

As the tectonic plates of the professional workplace have shifted in recent months, so too have our expectations of personal and professional success. Perhaps it's time to question the 'pursuit of excellence' of a specialist career and instead explore a more multifaceted 'pursuit of diversity' career?

### What is a Polymath?

The term 'polymath' has been around since the early 17th century, but it is a concept that has existed since Ancient Greek times. 'Polymathy', deriving from the Greek term polymathia, is defined as 'acquaintance with many branches of learning'; mastering various different subjects and growing multiple 'branches' to form our individual tree of knowledge. But perhaps that's all a little cheesy. Although the original meaning of polymath relates to lifelong studies of historical geniuses (think of Aristotle, Leonardo Da Vinci, or Benjamin Franklin), it now applies to career development across a number of professions. John David McKee, data analyst and consultant, encapsulates its modern definition: 'A polymath is a person whose expertise spans a significant number of subject areas, known to draw on complex bodies of knowledge to solve specific problems' [1]. So, the 'New Polymath', we propose, is busy combining multiple skills and fields of work with on-going learning, at a time of significant change and disruption. This is arguably how the future looks in 2021 and beyond.

### Polymath Role Models

Despite the dominance of male polymaths, from the Greeks through to the modern day, a number of notable women provide equally potent examples.

Marie Curie (pictured) was the first individual & only woman ever to win a Nobel Prize in two distinct branches of science: physics & chemistry. She was also a nurse, an inventor, and a fervent feminist, working through World War I to invent a mobile X-Ray unit. It is both her award-winning intelligence and variation of passions which makes her such a notable polymath.

Maya Angelou (pictured) was a journalist, poet, dancer and civil rights activist. She acquired a vast range of talents suited both to her personal interests and to the political and social demands of the late 20th Century.

*"I think you can be a jack-of-all-trades and a mistress-of-all-trades. If you study it, and you put reasonable intelligence and reasonable energy, reasonable electricity to it, you can do that. You may not become Max Roach on the drums. But you can learn the drums."* Maya Angelou

What a way to sum it up! We don't have to become experts at everything we do but, above all, experimentation is key.

Marie Curie



IS IT TIME TO  
EXPLORE A MORE  
MULTIFACETED,  
MORE DIVERSE,  
CAREER?



Maya Angelou

## A sign of the times....

*"Polymath status is accessible to just about anyone with a modem, a library card, and the desire to learn."*

Kyle Wiens, Harvard Business Review <sup>[2]</sup>

The dawn of the digital age and free online access to data has meant anyone can learn anything from how to speak Mandarin to JavaScript computer programming, should they so wish. On top of this, of course, the global pandemic has catapulted our learning and working onto our screens, catalysing the already fast-moving digitalisation of businesses and institutions. We exist in a time where forward thinking is imperative, and adapting to change is increasingly necessary; these are two skills that the New Polymath must grasp as part of an agile, dynamic mindset.

But how can we apply polymathy to our careers? Can lawyers be polymaths?

### Portfolio Career:

**A career that combines multiple strands, e.g. freelance lawyering, a part-time role, non-exec directorship and pro bono volunteering**

### Research and Interviews

As part of our research, we interviewed over 30 professionals about their career stories, and asked them to share insights into what it takes to pursue an agile and adaptive career.

Many of these have worked, or are currently working, in the legal profession, and some have built what are now recognised as portfolio careers.

*"I relish my portfolio career – it is stimulating, I am never bored and I know that steps I take to evolve it today will lead to new exciting possibilities tomorrow, for me and to continue to make a difference."*

Christina Blacklaws. Award winning legal sector leader: former President of the Law Society, visionary campaigner and advocate for innovation, diversity and inclusion and access to justice. Managing Director at Blacklaws Consulting

### About this white paper

This white paper is split into four main sections:

Firstly we assess **current structural changes** and influences in the world of work, in the context of the last 12 - 18 months, to evaluate how career development has moved on.

Secondly, we explore **Career Agility**, in terms of its importance, and whether or not the legal profession can itself be agile.

Thirdly, we will share a guide to building your own version of the **New Polymath career strategy**, with 6 steps in the path to developing an alternative portfolio approach.

This paper concludes with the **key takeaways** from our research, followed by an afterword by Rachel Brushfield, founder of EnergiseLegal.

# 1: 'A BIG BAD WORLD'

It's impossible to assess the changes to the world of work throughout the last 12-18 months without addressing the impact of COVID-19. Denied access to office spaces and the major decrease in face-to-face contact, plus a dramatic rise in anxiety and other mental health issues, businesses have been forced to adapt to new ways of working with speed and urgency. If we factor in the disruptive forces of innovation, AI and shifting generational attitudes across professional services, in an already VUCA\* world, it's unsurprising that new career models are being debated.

*"Standing still is being left behind", says Steve Wells, global futurist and Keynote speaker, who sees foresight as paramount in the current climate: "If we take the things that are the most impactful and uncertain, that allows us to think the unthinkable. Humans naturally resist change as a part of biological and neurological response; we need to put something in place that allows humans to explore uncertainties."*

**If the 3 phases of life (education, work, retirement) are no longer relevant, and the ladder of a linear career is being replaced by a 'mosaic' of job roles and learning, how can we navigate our own path rather than being left behind? And who is more likely to need to be more agile?**

*"Standing still is being left behind."*

Steve Wells, futurist

With technology an enabler, the opportunity to build a multifaceted career, visibly and purposefully, is a subject we explored in our research and interviews. What is evident is not only an appetite for change (and, to a degree, risk) amongst professionals, but also the necessity to rethink the boundaries and 'cycles' of work itself. The challenge isn't just change itself or adapting to the realities of demand, but how we negotiate the time invested to produce both professional, economic and personal rewards in the process.

The world that we now live in reflects the speed, change and agility needed to move successfully through it. But what are the key forces that are changing career paths? We see two 'VUCA' elements playing a part here: Job Uncertainty and Digitisation.

## 1: Job Uncertainty

For many industries, the most impactful change has been widespread redundancies and unemployment. The underlying threat that automation could take 50-80% of jobs out of the economy might leave some of us feeling uncomfortable. But the side effects of a VUCA world don't only reach those whose careers are already underway. Unemployment increased the most for the under 25s age group, with apprenticeships stalling and vacancies for graduate jobs falling by 60% (BBC) [4]. With a demand for experience by employers whilst lacking expertise, younger people are becoming stuck in a cycle that prevents them from making a start.

***"Life and working careers will elongate...and those careers will become more multi staged."***

**Andrew Scott, co-author with Lynda Gratton: 'The New Long Life'[3]**

Despite a huge halt in general legal practice, since COVID-19 began, some areas of the law will have seen a surge in activity. Files for divorce in the UK shot up (122%! from July to October 2020, so many divorce lawyers have been busier than ever before. Other companies have reached out to law firms in search for help with unfamiliar schemes such as furlough or social distancing measures, leaving employment lawyers with a boom of new enquiries and a steep curve to climb.

\* VUCA = Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous

# 1: 'A BIG BAD WORLD'(CONTINUED)

## 2: Digitalisation

Though technology and remote working has been advancing for some time, the last 12 - 18 months has acted as the most substantial catalyst for the move to Working From Home (#WFH) for a multitude of sectors. Whether it's Zoom meetings, online retail, or social media platforms that allow us to stay connected, the pandemic has proved that the office is no longer a mandatory working environment. Viv Groskop, author, comedian and podcaster of How To Own the Room, shared her view:

*"If I had to identify the one biggest change of the last 12-18 months, it's the increased use of video and audio, whether this means video-conferencing or using video as a medium on social media or digital platforms or the fact that podcast listenership has doubled in the past year. [...] The rise of audio is easy to understand, as people have had more time to listen to podcasts during the pandemic lockdowns and they offer a kind of intimate connection that has often been missing from our day to day lives."*

As well as YouTube and podcast streaming, public events and talks have begun to take place on social media platforms, such as Instagram & TikTok Live, reaching a wider audience and allowing viewers to watch easily on their mobile phones. Keynote speakers now gravitate further towards 'instant gratification' platforms, providing content for workers-from-home at the kitchen table, rather than the conference hall. Steve Wells, from whom we heard previously, however, worries over the diminished value of online content; *'For certain sectors, there's a perception of a lower value of a digital or virtual event compared to a face-to-face interaction. For example, if I am paid to do a speech to a live audience, then people have no problem understanding the value attached to that. As soon as you put it online, people forget the preparation that goes on behind [online events] is no different at all.'*

**"Podcast listenership has doubled in the past year."**

**Viv Groskop, author 'How to Own The Room'**

Cathryn Barnard, co-founder at future of work consulting firm, Working the Future, shared her view: *'When I think about our business, the most significant change I've noticed is in the way modern organisations make purchasing decisions.'*

*"With so much information freely available online today, modern purchasers are arguably overwhelmed by choice. It's natural for humans to want to feel informed, and we all want to feel as if our decision making is logical and rational. As such, today, far more online 'research' takes place before any kind of contact with a prospective supplier is made. In addition, purchasers typically want to build a sense of trust in a brand, before moving to make contact."*

*"The past year has shown us that we can all work in a way that is flexible and productive without having to burnout or be constrained by commuting. This applies to the legal and voluntary sectors especially and I hope that agile careers will offer the best options for all people with disabilities, caring and parental responsibilities."*

Placida Uzoamaka Ojinnaka, Non-practising solicitor and Disability Advocate.  
Member of Lawyers with Disabilities Division (LDD) of the Law Society - Council & LDD Committee Member, the Law Society

# 1: 'A BIG BAD WORLD'(CONTINUED)

## 2: Digitalisation (continued)

It's safe to say that the legal world has seen an enormous shift in its operations too. With most courtrooms being closed since the pandemic started, 85% of the UK's cases have happened virtually (Chambers) [5]. This comes as another disadvantage for younger lawyers, who will therefore lack experience in office or court environments. It's not all bad though:

*"Law students lying in wait to become fully fledged lawyers won't have the battle of trying to grapple with trying to change and adapt old behaviours, systems, traditional ways of working – instead they will likely be part of a new culture that can affect radical and positive change in the profession."* (The University of Law) [6]

Indeed, for a sector perhaps associated with sticking to its time-honoured traditions, the enforced move online has hurled lawyers into a perhaps daunting but refreshingly modern arena. Automation of basic tasks, for instance, has given lawyers more time to focus on more pressing business. Firms such as Penningtons Manches Cooper and Farrer & Co are looking at letting junior lawyers use private offices historically reserved exclusively for Partners, so there is a fair distribution of work space across age groups. This is something that may not have necessarily occurred without COVID-19, with working from home having been a particular struggle for younger workers with more modest living arrangements than most of their seniors. This raises the issue of employee working preferences, and of law firms accommodating for workers' needs and mental wellbeing, even after lockdown has ended.

**In a world that's shifted, and in a workplace environment that's adapted to digital platforms, it's no surprise that many professionals are looking afresh at their careers. Issues of presenteeism, stressful and costly commuting and the role of the physical workplace are all under scrutiny in a new world of work.**

***"[New lawyers] will be part of a new culture that can affect radical change in the profession."***

**The University of Law**

*"What I've always tried to do in life, as well as in my career, is to adapt to change, embrace new technology, and to balance that with judging the best time to step forwards and the best time to step back."*

Sandra Kessell, Freelance editor, writer and content provider



## 2: THE CAREER AGILITY MINDSET

Career agility is a term that has circulated in the world of work years Before COVID-19 (BC... yes, that's a thing now), but it is now that it really comes to the fore as a crucial strategic mindset. Marti Konstant, author of *Activate Your Agile Career: How Responding to Change Will Inspire Your Life's Work*, [7] defines career agility as 'a self-reflective, incremental career path, guided by response to change, evolving job roles, and designed to optimise creativity, growth, and happiness'

We asked people what career agility meant to them, half of whom are either currently working as solicitors or have previously worked in the legal sector. The research conducted shows a pattern of three key discussions: the necessity for a growth mindset in the workplace; the outdated notion of climbing the linear 'career ladder'; and the possibility (or impossibility) of lawyers being agile. Read on for some insightful career stories and inspiring opinions on how career agility has shaped people's success.

**"Career agility must mean flexibility in terms of outlook and expectations, and also attitude."**

**Stefan Stern**

Leading writer on management and the workplace, Stefan Stern, points out that "Career agility must mean flexibility in terms of outlook and expectations, and also attitude. We will all have to be imaginative about what we might end up doing, and open to new ideas/suggestions. It means being a bit more entrepreneurial than might come naturally to some of us."

This is rather different to the expected vision of careers twenty or thirty years ago. "With increased life expectancy, few guarantees about pensions and the cost of higher education/training we are (most of us) going to have to keep working for longer than we might have thought even a few years ago. So career agility must also mean spotting ways of being valuable to others."

### Career agility and the growth mindset

We spoke to Mark Cullen, Chief Marketing Officer at Simon-Kucher & Partners, who started his career in advertising before moving into marketing leadership roles at Aviva and EY. Mark discussed the anxiety that clouded the workplace once the pandemic began: "All of us faced massive uncertainty. I think we have forgotten how scary that first wave was. We had to keep ourselves, clients and teammates safe while trying to keep everything going. Adaptability and collaboration are very human traits and we saw them really tested and guess what? We are, on the whole, good at them!"

The pace at which these changes came is also worth noting; "Carefully laid plans had to change at speed - ripping up the rule book of management. Decision making, that would usually take months or years happened in hours. People had to rely on trust and gut instinct. For me it was a very clear lesson, that when it matters, teams and teaming work."

With the word 'agility' relating to speed of change, Cullen's anecdotes were particularly poignant as we went on to ask his personal definition of career agility. What does it mean to him? "Curiosity. You have to be open to finding and being passionate about new areas and wanting to explore them. Not all will excite you, but go towards those that do. Also, don't assume your initial perceptions are correct - working in advertising was more creatively constraining than working in banking!"

He adds: "Curiosity and passion shine through at interviews and employers rightly value them. I once had a secretary who wanted to try marketing, she was passionate about it, and turned out to be a fantastic marketing manager."

**"Curiosity and passion shine through at interviews and employers rightly value them."**

**Mark Cullen, Simon-Kucher & Partners**

## 2: THE CAREER AGILITY MINDSET (CONTINUED)

*"As changemakers, it's vital that we role-model curiosity."*

*Cathryn Barnard, future of work specialist*

Cathryn Barnard agrees with Mark Cullen, above. *"At its most simple, for me career agility is all about continuous learning. We're in a period of profound change now, and the challenges we face economically, societally and environmentally require us to continuously adapt. Continuous learning for me, however, is all about trying new things, and while it's awkward to try something new for the first time, the sense of accomplishment that comes from trying new things can't be overstated. As changemakers ourselves, it's vital that we role-model curiosity, learning agility and flexibility."* However, this isn't without its challenges. *"Experimentation mode requires letting go of previously held assumptions, to explore new ideas and possibilities. This takes courage – it involves relinquishing both control and the idea of oneself as expert (or 'knower') to continuously try new things."*

So, if curiosity is a 'hunger' for a broader scope of knowledge, how can we differentiate this from the influential term growth mindset? For one thing, curiosity is a behaviour, as opposed to a state of mind. Matthew Syed, author and broadcaster, describes growth mindset as 'the belief that skills and talents can be developed through hard work, purposeful practice and feedback'. [8] Not only do we take on a growth mindset by adopting determination and openness to bettering our own skills, but we willingly listen to feedback from others and learn from previous failures. Syed says *"The ability to learn from failure is crucial to success. However, we have become conditioned to fear mistakes and to try and avoid failure at all costs."*

Growth mindset is all about keeping an eye on our personal progress whilst learning from experiences and knockbacks, spurred on by the desire to become wiser instead of 'beating ourselves up'. Although any negative pointers may sting at first, by listening to others, whether senior or at peer level, and actively asking for feedback, we can avoid a so-called 'Fixed Mindset' that may limit our ability to develop and improve.

Sarah Hudson, Project Manager at the University of Oxford, with previous experience in the manufacturing industry, echoed the importance of digesting what other people say:

*"Keep learning. Keep listening. Keep active. Make yourself valuable by learning as much as you can. When you really listen, you can almost see between the lines of what's being said....., because sometimes what you think you hear/see is not always how it seems. By listening properly, it gives you the advantage of A) keeping one step ahead of others, B) [it] gives you time to get prepared should you need to and C) helps you see what's really happening in the wider environment. So keep active, keep engaging in conversation with colleagues and keep networking".*

***"Keep learning. Keep listening. Keep active..and keep networking."***

**Sarah Hudson  
University of Oxford**

## 2: THE CAREER AGILITY MINDSET (CONTINUED)

### Fading of the Linear Path

We're all too familiar with the metaphorical 'career ladder', which many of us expect to hop on and clamber up pretty early on. As Sarah Ellis, co-author of 'The Squiggly Career'[9] rightly underlines, a linear, one-lane road that is largely predictable and straightforward, is no longer the predominant route to success:

*"Careers today are characterised by change, uncertainty and ambiguity and feel altogether 'squigglier' than those of previous generations. The idea of a career ladder is no longer relevant or motivating as a guide for individual career ambitions, or indeed realistic as organisations become flatter and can no longer offer promotions, as the default way to demonstrate progression".*  
Sarah Ellis

Career coach and job search specialist, Peter Wilford, has significant experience in helping people to look at their careers from alternative angles. *"There was a time when careers moved in a linear direction, with a few, or even just one employer throughout your working life and a focus in only one career area. This situation no longer applies, which means that career and job decision making has never been more crucial and has become more complex than it has been for previous generations. We must be mindful of the impact of every career decision we make (or fail to make) and how it might affect any future decisions as work and in our lives."*

*"A portfolio career ensures that you never stop learning. I relish new challenges. A portfolio career means that I can make more of a difference, with the different strands of what I do. Boards also provide excellent Quasi judicial skills and competencies."*  
Sally Penni MBE, Barrister at Law Kenworthy's Chambers and one of Cranfield Management School's '100 women to watch'.

Maggi Evans is an author, conference speaker, consultant and psychologist who defines career agility as 'the proactive investment in continuous learning'. *"I think it's important to have a lifelong attitude that says 'I'm not just in one career, I need to continue to learn and invest in myself, to look at where the opportunities are, and to take full responsibility for my next steps, engaging others to help me'".*

Nancy Rowe, current Head of Inclusion & Diversity for Publicis Sapient International, worked for almost 20 years in digital marketing in a variety of roles, gaining an interest in diversity equity and inclusion.

*"I am definitely an advocate of having lots of side hustles whilst working in your main role, because, once you've gained those new skills and knowledge, one of those side hustles may end up being your full-time role."*

Adi Gaskell writes for [Forbes](#) on the benefits of being Polymathic in the world of work, one benefit being 'Tapping into your passions'. *"When we're children we have this inherent curiosity for life that tends to get beaten out of us as we progress through the schooling system, such that we often end up in jobs we hate. This is a criminal waste".* [10]

***"A portfolio career means that I can make more of a difference with the different strands of what I do."***

**Sally Penni MBE**

**Could this be what being The New Polymath is all about?** Acquiring 'side hustles' and constantly learning new skills, not only in pursuit of a successful and well-rounded career, but also fulfilling interests and happiness?

However, does this theory apply to all sectors and all types of people? What about those who do not wish to deviate from their area of expertise, or those who genuinely enjoy climbing the ladder? This brings us on to the next part of our research....

## 2: THE CAREER AGILITY MINDSET (CONTINUED)

*"The portfolio career lawyer or nomadic lawyer phenomena is not a 'flash in the pan' – it has gained critical mass and will continue to grow and evolve over the course of your life."*

Mitch Kowalski, General Counsel/Head of Legal, Board experience, ICD.D.

### Can Lawyers be Agile?

As a profession with firm foundations of precedence, texts, and principles of right and wrong, areas of law already face greater obstacles to modernisation and progressiveness. We have already mentioned how online court hearings have gone ahead during the pandemic, and how some firms have been considering redistributing office space in fairer ways. We spoke to a trainee in the Magic Circle, who argues that the changes struggling to take place within the legal sector were somewhat reliant on COVID-19 to materialise fast enough:

*"Lawyers struggle to work from home using personal laptops as the confidentiality of the information means that unreliable online document storage platforms have to be accessed, rather than files being edited and saved locally to personal computers. Prior to COVID-19, associates as senior as 2/3 years' post qualified experience (PQE) may not have been issued with work laptops. During the pandemic, this became a budget priority and laptops were issued to all fee earners in most firms. What's more, the legal industry has often been resistant to new tech (firms often roll out legal tech only to have certain partners refuse to implement it in their teams). COVID-19 has meant that lawyers had to learn to use programmes that allowed flexible working, such as virtual hearing software."*

Moving forward into the so-called 'Fourth Industrial Revolution', arguably we are no longer expected to become an expert in one discipline, using the same skills for the same things, until the day we retire. Adi Gaskell refers to this concept as a 'T shaped knowledge base' and argues that our range of expertise should form more of an 'M' shape (much like 'Squiggly' careers). Nicola Raj, General Counsel at Ebiquity PLC, and Coral Hill, Editor-in-Chief of Legal Women Magazine, both feel that a wider scope of legal knowledge is required nowadays:

*"In the in-house world, the business usually recognises the importance of legal input. However, lawyers are expected to be versatile and able to provide support in a variety of business areas, especially where the team is relatively small. It is not possible to stay in your lane as much as in private practice, and it is important to have a can-do attitude. The business wants answers and 'that's not my area of expertise' doesn't cut it. You need to be able to think 'out of the box', be strategic, commercial, and find solutions to problems."* Nicola Raj

***"It should be normal to dip into different divisions instead of perfecting everything you do."***

**Coral Hill, Editor-in-Chief  
Legal Women Magazine**

*"My generation is used to being in control and knowing everything, so when I first started using technology as part of my legal practice, I felt this rising sense of panic..."*

*"We need to realise that we can't be experts in everything because it updates so quickly; it's almost impossible to learn everything in enough time. Typically lawyers are perfectionists. It should be normal and accepted now to dip into different divisions instead of perfecting everything you do."* Coral Hill

## 2: THE CAREER AGILITY MINDSET (CONTINUED)

### Agility and Diversity

Despite these elements of progression within the legal sector, there is undeniably some deep-seated outdatedness that is yet to be shaken off.

Morgan Wolfe, Commercial Litigation Solicitor at Astra Group and member of the Law Society's Women Lawyers Division steering committee, voiced her concern about the lack of female representation at senior levels of the profession. Morgan noted that women account for half of all solicitors, but only a third of Partners. They are conspicuously absent from top tier rankings and leadership panels. In Morgan's view, *"Allyship is critical to this equation: more middle-aged white men need to stand up and speak out on this issue. We can't do it alone."*

*"There is still a long way to go....what is most important is how we prolong these steady improvements as the pandemic draws to a close."*

**I. Stephanie Boyce,  
President, The Law Society**

Clearly, in some areas, there is still a way to go when talking about gender inclusion. We spoke to Tom Chakraborti, Senior Legal Consultant for Binham LTD and previously GSK, who recalled his battle with the legal recruitment system:

*"Whilst there has been a laudable aim of redressing previous gender imbalances in law firms and legal departments, at the moment the danger is that male candidates and all candidates over a certain age are not prioritised for legal roles, despite their experience and aptitude. I have felt this myself and am seeing this happen to female friends of mine who are of BAME background."*

*"Career agility to me means working hard to make the absolute best impression that I can with everyone, satisfying as many demands upon me as I can satisfy, giving the best quality commercial legal advice that I can give and being as flexible as I can with all demands. Agility means a willingness to work for clients according to their demands, taking on work not necessarily in your sector or comfort zone and taking each day/ week as it comes. In my opinion a lot of BAME candidates and also more experienced lawyers demonstrate these qualities, so it would be positive to see such lawyers given more of the opportunities that are being denied to them."*

I. Stephanie Boyce, the first person of colour to become President of the Law Society, describes herself as "living proof" that personal resilience achieves results. Boyce spoke at an online event for Energise in December 2020, on the topic of 'Career Agility in Law'. [11] She believes that, in terms of progress, *"There is still a way to go. Diversity in the profession has improved in recent years, and statistics on the current cohort of law students show potentially even greater diversity in the future. However, there are still barriers that make it harder for some to get in and get on. Working from home has benefited disabled people, giving them more opportunity and removing certain barriers, which is brilliant. But what is most important is how we prolong these steady improvements as the pandemic draws to a close."*

**Agility, then, is needed as a mindset to overcome an outdated lack of diversity across some law firms, as well as being essential to keep up with the demands of a post-pandemic future.**

*"Allyship is critical.... more middle-aged white men need to stand up and speak out on this issue. We can't do it alone."*

Morgan Wolfe

## 2: THE CAREER AGILITY MINDSET (CONTINUED)

*"For women, the regrettably self-evident conscious and subconscious bias shown towards them in the workplace can increase the challenges of balancing family and professional commitments. A portfolio career can then have many attractions."*

Professor Stephen Mayson, UCL

### Can Lawyers Be Polymaths?

When it comes to having an agile career, many of the lawyers (or ex-lawyers) we interviewed were in fact portfolio careerists, and had already used agility to navigate their way through considerable career changes.

Jayne Nicol, a trained solicitor, studied and practiced healthcare law in the UK and then worked in healthcare development in Africa, where she also co-founded a new law school. Jayne is also a registered nurse and a trustee and director of a rare diseases charity. What does career agility mean to Jayne? *"It means adaptability to me. I've had to be adaptable with nearly everything I do since my career began. It means choice; I've not had a linear path in my career, so the ability to have choice is very important to me. And it means things that fit in around my life; particularly my daughter. Many of my decisions have been based around her."*

Jayne exemplifies that lawyers can indeed be career agile and polymathic, merging two separate sectors - with the common interest of helping people, and ditching the restrictive one-way career ladder.

***"[Practical] resilience  
...is the art of sailing  
through torrents."***

**Olivia Streater**

Olivia Streater is someone who physically embodies the meaning of agility in her work, shifting from qualified solicitor to Dance and Movement Psychotherapist. *"Practical resilience"* is something she maintained in pursuit of her adaptable career:

*"Resilience ('the art of sailing through torrents') is economic, somatic, intellectual and emotional. Repeatedly starting again - in a new job, career, home, country, language or system of professional accreditation - can be challenging, even overwhelming, and thus paralyzing. Somatic work is a tool to help us nurture all forms of resilience.... it can help us to function better within environments or systems that we cannot control. Accessing the wisdom of the body beyond the thinking mind helps transform the 'unmanageable' so that we can take consistent, constructive action."*

Evelyn Davies-Jones told us about how continuous agility helped shape her career:

*"My own career path, to date, has encompassed teaching science at primary, secondary and sixth form levels, working in the commercial sector for prominent pharmaceutical companies undertaking sales, marketing and brand management roles, working as a qualified solicitor, advising and acting for clients in both the private and public sector, and more recently in non-exec roles, as a member of a board's audit and remuneration committees, and also assisting pupils at a local primary school with their reading comprehension."*

How does Evelyn define career agility?

*"Taking action, when necessary or appropriate, to craft one's own future direction, being self aware, willing to take calculated risks and not being limited by career choices made previously; taking a positive stance and constructing a future forward path when faced with unforeseen challenges and circumstances."*

**Evidently, risk-taking and multiple restarts are crucial when taking steps into becoming one of the New Polymaths. We need not shy away from being a 'newbie' in something, as refreshing and reframing your career is exactly what is needed to avoid a fixed mindset, and to ultimately regain control.**



## 3: YOUR NEW POLYMATH PLAN

**Having digested so many career stories and words of advice, it's important to think about an action plan: What can we do to become New Polymaths ourselves? What are the new rules of the game? And what are the key strategies we need to implement to achieve career agility?**

Rachel Brushfield suggests **6 steps** to adapting your career plan, below.

### 1. **Review and reframe** - identify yourself as a polymath

Your career identity is an important part of who you are, because work makes up such a large proportion of how we spend our time. Make time to be clear about the different roles that you want to have and new ones to develop in future. Knowing the job titles for these can help you get clear about the different aspects of your career and broaden your horizons.

As Jordan Furlong puts it, *"a 'career' is actually many different decisions taken at different times about how you can best add value to those around you, and thereby bring value to your own life. We need recognition of the fact that a single life will contain several different stages or 'mini-lives', none of which is more valid than the other, but each of which must be identified, respected, and given a response."*

There are many different phrases similar to Polymath: portfolio career, slasher, multivariate, to name but three – this is confusing! Choose a phrase that works for you and with which you identify, when you introduce yourself to others. You need to connect with the phrase: Kaleidoscope career, multi-faceted career, prism career.

There are plenty of current polymaths in the media; we've all heard of Kim Kardashian, the supermodel and socialite, but she has now diversified her career by training to be a lawyer, particularly focussing on criminal law and giving the incarcerated a second chance.

### **Action planning**

- Define your own vision for your polymath career
- Create an infographic that visually expresses the different strands of your career
- Select metaphors that bring the concept of a polymathic career to life for you

*"A single life will contain several different stages or 'mini-lives'."*

Jordan Furlong, legal sector analyst and forecaster

### 1: Review and Reframe

# 3: YOUR NEW POLYMATH PLAN (CONTINUED)

## 2. Build your brand

A personal brand is the territory that you occupy in the minds and hearts of your target audience. A distinctive personal brand creates a strong foundation and fertile soil which enables career agility.

In the digital age, with so much content being shared and attention spans getting shorter, creating a personal brand makes sense. Make it a priority. Stand out for good reasons.

### Action planning

- Ask your network for their perceptions about you
- Choose 5 words that best sum up how you want to be perceived
- Craft a short phrase for your personal brand that is emotive, or get someone else to do this

## 3. Tap into your areas of learning

Continual personal and professional development (CPD) is at the heart of career agility. Developing your areas of knowledge and creating strong specialisms and acquiring and mastering in-demand emerging skills will enable you to move in new directions. If you put all your career 'eggs in one basket', you have no safety net. The massive impact that COVID-19 has had on various sectors nailed this point home very firmly indeed. The bar has certainly been raised with more competition and so investing in higher levels of qualification and acquiring accreditations is wise. Continual learning needs to be at the heart of your career, especially with the pace of change accelerating. Skills now have a 'shorter shelf life' than they once did.

Many people who enjoy a portfolio career chose it because they relish variety, love learning and embrace new challenges. We attract clients who feel the same. Some of them were interviewed for this white paper, (Jayne Nicol, Evelyn Davies-Jones and Olivia Streater for example). Their love of learning and curiosity throughout their career shines through.

### Action planning

- Set CPD goals each quarter and block out time in your diary each week to focus on CPD
- Create a specific savings account with regular deposits to fund your future CPD
- Utilise a virtual PA to look at emerging trends and plan an away day to analyse them and their immediate and future implications on your career and CPD focus

*"Career agility means giving yourself more than one career option - a career plan 'A', 'B' and 'C'. In uncertain times especially, this helps your peace of mind. Your career/work has a massive impact on many things- money, confidence and relationships."*

Elizabeth Rimmer, CEO, LawCare

**2: Build your brand**

**3: Tap into your  
areas of learning**



## 3: YOUR NEW POLYMATH PLAN (CONTINUED)

### 4. Overcome personal barriers

Barriers can be actual or perceived. Lack of self-belief is a common barrier to career agility, as are barriers about marketing yourself and networking. Robust self-belief and competence in marketing yourself are prerequisites of career agility and success. Everyone has barriers, doubts and fears, it is part of life. It is part of being human. The important thing is to know what they are and do something about them. Creating shifts about things that used to hold you back is empowering and energises you. I. Stephanie Boyce's example shows a determination and resilience against personal barriers, coming from a single parent family, being a first generation British national, and striving to be President of the Law Society four times! This goes to show that some barriers are only as big as you perceive them to be.

#### Action planning

- Identify and transform your limiting beliefs with an experienced coach
- Consider career profiling tools which can provide useful insights and inform your CPD
- Ask people in your network who you know well and trust for their constructive observations about what holds you back

### 5. Get organised

Being agile needs you to be organised, to work expediently, and to not waste time. It is also about developing good systems, habits, utilising technology.

Outsourcing tasks to people gifted in finance or appointment setting makes sense. It frees you up to play to your strengths and do what you are good at and enjoy.

Everyone is different. Not everyone is naturally organised, but you can learn to be. I am lucky that I am naturally organised – it is in my genes. I have also used experts including an office organiser and had a virtual PA for most of the years I have run Energise. Creating a bespoke timeless physical filing system including laminating dividers which I will never have to re-do, and writing notes using a marker pen and big letters so I don't need my glasses on to read them works for me!

#### Action planning

- Keep timesheets to gain insights about areas to improve your productivity
- Write a list of tasks you could outsource
- Get a coach

*"There is now more of a focus on personal authenticity of lawyers, moving away from their rigidly professional image towards a willingness to share and be more authentic, merging the personal and professional."*

Lucy Morrison, Business Leader. Professional Education. Qualifications & Accreditations. Digital Transformation. Lawyer

**4: Overcome personal barriers**

**5: Get organised**

## 3: YOUR NEW POLYMATH PLAN (CONTINUED)

### 6. Create a plan

"If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail" said Benjamin Franklin. What gets measured gets done. So true. As a career coach, seeing my clients achieve their career goal is immensely satisfying. Helping them to break down big change into bite sized actions that don't overwhelm is essential.

Defining a S.M.A.R.T. career goal (Specific, Motivated, Achievable, Relevant, Trackable) and creating a plan to achieve it, with bite size steps, is wise.

In a fast-changing uncertain world, it is also essential to have a career plan 'A', 'B' and 'C'. This is a bit like having 'career insurance' and reduces any risks that you face in your career. Utilising career scenario planning techniques can also be a useful approach where you think ahead about different potential work scenarios, the potential factors that influence them, and what you would do in each case. This technique is used in the Forces and by some corporates.

Most people don't have a career strategy or plan, and the massive impact of COVID-19 on many people's careers has been a reminder not to leave this to chance. Otherwise, you are vulnerable to the buffeting winds of nature, financial markets, bias and more.

#### Action planning

- Create a short, medium and long term career plan, starting with the outcome and diarise the actions
- Explore career scenario planning as an especially robust form of planning for uncertain times
- Diarise monthly and quarterly planning and re-prioritising away days

*"What people are looking for now are durable, transferable skill sets, especially those human capabilities to relate well to others which are applicable across jobs."*

Nigel Spencer, Professor in Education  
Innovation & Professional Practice, School of  
Law at Queen Mary University of London

### 6: Create a plan

## 7 KEY INSIGHTS

# SUMMARY

## THE 5 'C'S OF CAREER AGILITY

- **CONTROL** - being proactive, decisive & taking responsibility for your career
- **CURIOSITY** - broadening your horizons by seeking options, possibilities and knowledge
- **COMMITMENT** - passionately pursuing & taking action to move to the career horizon of your choosing
- **CONFIDENCE** - belief in yourself & that you can achieve your goals
- **CONCERN** - having a positive & philosophical attitude to mistakes or rejection

Source: UKCES (UK Commission for Employment and Skills) August 2011 "The role of career adaptability in skills supply".  
[https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/publications/2011/bimrose\\_ca\\_main.pdf](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/publications/2011/bimrose_ca_main.pdf) [12]

## THE NEW POLYMATHS

**2**  
Having a 'growth mindset' is vital to manage change and adapt to shifts in the post COVID-19 business environment

**4**  
Listen to others, get feedback and take on constructive criticism; It will help you realise your strengths

**6**  
COVID-19 has increased flexibility of working for the legal sector, with remote working and smarter tech

**1**  
As the workplace changes, it is important to stay curious, actively seek new skills and keep learning

**3**  
Resist being a perfectionist; gain new opportunities instead from different areas of expertise

**5**  
Careers don't happen in straight lines, but may leap back and forth from different sectors, speed up and slow down

**7**  
Lawyers **can** be agile, but the profession needs to be more diverse and adaptive from the top down

*"In order to have a portfolio career, and develop career agility, you need to risk personal change."*

Rachel Brushfield, EnergiseLegal

## AFTERWORD

*“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change.”*

Charles Darwin

**Polymath is not a title per se. It really is a mindset: something you pursue and resulting in an ultimately well-rounded lifestyle.**

In summary, it is about choice, taking action, when necessary or appropriate, to craft one’s own future direction, being self-aware, willing to and not being limited by career choices made previously.

Taking a positive stance and constructing a future forward path when faced with unforeseen challenges and circumstances ensures peace of mind - and future-proofs your career in an uncertain world.

Being a New Polymath is about developing a successful and well-rounded career and also fulfilling interests and happiness.

Here's to the future!

*Rachel*

**Rachel Brushfield**  
**Founder - EnergiseLegal**

***“When the winds of change  
blow, some people build  
windmills, others walls.”***

**Chinese proverb**

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



### RACHEL BRUSHFIELD

Rachel Brushfield is founder of EnergiseLegal and a self-confessed polymath who doesn't fit into one 'neat box'. She creates innovative thinking in her approach via insights and practical solutions across career, talent, learning, marketing & branding, and is a published author in multiple topics.

Rachel is motivated and inspired by enabling the uplifting breakthroughs of her clients at major career and business crossroads.



### TILLY MUMMERY

As an intern at EnergiseLegal, Tilly has been responsible for conducting all research and one-to-one interviews, in addition to managing the content of this white paper.

As a recent English graduate from the University of Birmingham, Tilly is pursuing interests in writing, editing and social media strategy, as well as being a trained lifeguard.



### LOUISE BARFIELD

Louise is an Associate of EnergiseLegal and provided editorial and design support for this paper. As an experienced marketing and communications specialist, she is currently Head of Marketing at London-based property advisory firm hgh Consulting and is a board member of Tech London Advocates' Future of Work Group.

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