

system to a group-mandated software solution. Although many schedules were available within the new transactional system, they sacrificed granularity as a result. Now, the team can't get hold of the detail without spending much more time on a task – it has become a very convoluted process.

This was a large oversight at the requirements gathering stage. It would have come to light had the finance manager been properly involved in the project, right down to its scope and requirements.

Here's another example: a telecoms company needed to change its revenue recognition reporting due to the IFRS 15 accounting rule. This had a very large impact on how its ERP recognised revenue. A significant proportion of the project management leadership team were

**“The finance manager is on the project team, whether they want to be or not.”**

qualified accountants, who helped the programme management lead to understand and implement the changes needed within the ERP to become IFRS 15 compliant while maintaining the current systems and processes.

Finance managers understand statutory reporting requirements – it's a key part of their role. As the number of these projects around organisations grow, their need to understand and appreciate the project management life cycle will only grow. They are becoming more technologically savvy, the workplace becomes more digitised and skill sets are changing and developing – many transformation projects are still on the horizon. ■

# Are partners too protected?

As people increasingly ask questions of the behaviour of senior leaders, concerns are being raised about the power of partners

The #MeToo movement has brought sexual harassment and workplace bullying into the public eye. As a result, senior leaders are under scrutiny, and accountancy is no exception.

According to figures from accountancy wellbeing charity CABA, 50% of chartered accountants view their workplace as 'toxic' – for those under 34, it's more like 80%. Firms are facing pressure to do more to disclose the extent of misconduct and improper behaviour, and how they will remedy those issues. All of this has thrown up questions about the protected nature of partner status.

“Partners are protected in all kinds of ways,” says Prem Sikka, professor of accounting at the University of Sheffield and emeritus professor at the University of Essex. “Partners own the firm, so it's almost a given that the firm will side with senior staff and attach lower weight to complaints by non-partners.”

As Fiona Hotson-Moore, forensic accounting partner at Ensors Chartered Accountants points out, there's also fear of recrimination: employees or other partners may be reluctant to speak up about bad behaviour due to concern for their own position. “Partner status has always been opaque and too protected,” she insists. “They can abuse their position.”

Matthew Cole, partner and head of data protection at employment law specialists Prettys, agrees. He's

known some partners who have used their position to “exercise control”: year-end bonuses, pay increases and career advances have been withheld on the whim of a partner. There are therefore many opportunities for bullying to manifest itself, with some partners either withholding work or overworking an individual.

Sikka has heard similar stories. He's spoken to hundreds of people in accountancy as part of an independent report, Reforming the Auditing Industry. They revealed they were often forced to work evenings and weekends with little or no pay. “Staff are often given 800 hours to do 1,000 hours' worth of work to meet budgeted targets. Everyone knows it can't be done, so trainees often have to work outside office hours. It's a form of bullying and a recurring feature.”

But is this culture starting to change? Hotson-Moore and Cole think so. The #MeToo initiative has already created a move towards calling out workplace bullying, says Cole, while Hotson-Moore believes increased scrutiny from prospective employees will result in tangible changes to firms' practices and policies.

Sikka, however, is more cynical. “While accountancy firms may be reflecting on their broader culture in light of high profile cases, it's still a predominantly male sector with an obvious class system. We can't believe firms who insist improper behaviours are just 'isolated cases'.” ■