

Guiding global employment law in a changing world: A look inside the Primerus Labor and Employment Practice Group

By Jo Mathis

The attorneys on the Primerus Labor and Employment (L&E) Practice Group Executive Committee are leading efforts to transform how international law firms handle employment issues. Michael Szeto, Francisco Peña-Valdés, and Reinier W. L. Russell are three of the committee members working in a rapidly changing legal environment where employment practices cross both national boundaries and industry sectors.

About the Practice Group

The Primerus L&E Practice Group is made up of labor and employment lawyers from all over the world who address the increasingly complex world of workplace law. For these attorneys, the opportunity to collaborate across jurisdictions represents the most exciting aspect of their committee work.

“It was my fellow Executive Committee members that made me want to join in the first place,” says Szeto. “We have a strong panel. There is no better forum to ‘geek out’ on employment law internationally than with this group.”

Peña-Valdés sees the committee as “an opportunity to contribute to the strategic direction of the Practice Group and to promote cross-border collaboration in a time of unprecedented change.”

And Russell says his goal is not to share the ins and outs of – in his case, Dutch – labor law, but rather to share regional and global trends and ask: “How can we best tackle the needs of our clients together?”

Facing complex global challenges

Employment law today is driven by technological advances, shifting work arrangements, and geopolitical forces, and the committee members are focused on staying ahead of these changes.

“In Hong Kong, there have been calls for the government, judiciary, and legal industry to address modern labor law issues, particularly the increasingly common use of flexible work arrangements and artificial intelligence (AI),” says Szeto.

The Executive Committee is dedicated to ensuring that the Practice Group delivers value to the Primerus member firms, HR professionals, executives, employers, and employees internationally, particularly in the face of the increasingly complex legal landscape and cross-border elements in this global economy, he said, adding that the committee can also assist the Practice Group in staying ahead of emerging issues and sharing the legal trends, available tools, and opportunities.

Peña-Valdés highlights how employment compliance has become multinational.

“As companies decentralize their workforce, employment law compliance is no longer confined to a single jurisdiction,” he says. “Employers must now reconcile local wage and hour laws, tax obligations, and social security contributions across state and national borders.”

Creating value through knowledge sharing

The L&E Practice Group tackles everything from traditional labor relations and regulatory compliance to emerging issues, such as remote work regulations, AI in the workplace, and cross-border employment practices.

The attorneys emphasize that the committee’s core mission is developing frameworks that benefit member firms and clients alike.



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Szeto envisions success through “building a more collaborative culture by enhancing participation in knowledge sharing initiatives and expanding membership in various regions.”

He suggests virtual sessions where members and clients can share jurisdictional insights and spotlight sessions on legislative developments across regions.

Peña-Valdés says the L&E Practice Group can play a pivotal role by developing a jurisdictional response framework – one that provides clients with seamless legal support across borders.

He suggests creating an international compliance matrix tailored to industries affected by trade policy changes.

“One of the most significant emerging trends is the legal complexity surrounding remote and hybrid work arrangements, particularly in multi-jurisdictional contexts,” Peña-Valdés says. “As companies decentralize their workforce, employment law compliance is no longer confined to a single jurisdiction. Employers must now reconcile local wage and hour laws, tax obligations, and social security contributions across state and national borders.

“Additionally, the intersection between labor regulations and new geopolitical shifts – such as the reconfiguration of global trade under what we now call “Globalization 2.0” – requires member firms to align labor strategies with evolving supply chains and nearshoring initiatives.”

The human element in legal practice

Despite technological advances, the attorneys say that personal connections remain central to effective legal counsel.

“People and relationships are our greatest assets,” Szeto says. “I have always found joy in interacting with others, and I believe that knowledge sharing and collaboration benefit society collectively and strengthen our work.”

When asked about AI replacing employment lawyers, Szeto is resolute, noting: “AI cannot replace your friendly neighborhood employment lawyer.”

He explains that the crucial element of employment law practice comes from face-to-face meetings with clients, where attorneys can “sieve out the problems and issues” beyond what appears in documents.

Looking forward

The committee members see their role as increasingly important in navigating the intersection of employment law with other domains.

“Labor law is no longer an isolated field – it is increasingly tied to international trade policy, technological transformation, and political risk,” says Peña-Valdés. “Through the L&E Practice Group, we have the opportunity to lead those conversations and provide clients with holistic, forward-looking counsel.”

Szeto says he looks forward to collaborating with other members to address cutting-edge issues, such as the gig economy, the use of AI in the workplace, remote work culture, and related compliance issues.

Russell believes that all labor and employment lawyers from every Primerus firm – not just office representatives – should attend the regular meetings. He believes members need to become familiar with each other’s practice areas and present their work to fellow Primerus attorneys, in-house counsel of the ACC, and eventually to clients through collaborative efforts, such as cross-border publications and webinars.

“Together,” Russell says, “we stand strong.”



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