

A Growing LPM Community – Part 1 of a Series

By [Susan Raridon Lambreth](#) on July 26, 2021

Like many good ideas, it started with a few early adopters. But now legal project management is more than just the flavor of the day. Around the globe, there are a growing number of professionals dedicating their time and their energy to LPM.

The proof was at the recent Global LPM Summit. The attendees ran the gamut. There were law firms large and small, legal departments, and the Big 4. There were full-time business professionals leading LPM initiatives. There were legal project managers, both experienced and neophyte. And there were the lawyers, those who increasingly recognize the need for a more disciplined approach to managing the work that they do.

We had a great time. And we also departed more enlightened than when we arrived. And keep reading. Whether you attended the Summit or not, you'll find this series of articles useful. In it, we will cover some of the themes from the sessions and offer tips for those just beginning to implement LPM and for those who want to take their LPM to the next level.

We asked many of our speakers to share their advice for firms or individual lawyers just getting started in LPM. Here's what some of the Summit speakers told us.

"Build momentum through your successes."

According to Ranjit Oliver, Executive Director, Allen & Overy LLP, you're going to need some success stories, "Focus first on the coalition of the willing. And then use those partners who embrace legal project management to sell the benefits to other partners."

Anthony Widdop of Shearman & Sterling agrees. Everyone isn't going to want to play. He suggests that there are two groups of people: those who want LPM and those who need LPM. "Start with a core set of stakeholders. Naturally, it's easiest with the ones who actually provide an open door." From there, you start to build successes, promoting to others who "need" LPM. It is important to demonstrate success to keep the momentum going.

"Address the pain points."

You can use a toolkit or even try the proverbial hammer. But there are many other approaches, as well. That's the flexibility you need when you build LPM services. As Kerry Underwood, Head of Legal Project Management at King & Wood Mallesons, says, "Really listen to your clients and your lawyers to understand their pain points and frustrations."

When you understand the pain points, you can build your LPM services to remediate these issues. It's impossible to deploy a single LPM process for every client or matter. Instead, you need to be flexible and know what parts of the LPM toolkit are most useful for the situation.

Underwood knows that there are no boilerplate solutions. "I don't think it will ever work to set up a function that you want everybody to go through. That would be ideal and it would be lovely... but it's not going to happen." It's more realistic to determine actual requirements and deliver on that, she says.

"Take your time."

Many of the speakers cautioned LPM leaders to be patient. Few firms mandate the use of LPM. For this reason, it may take longer than expected to get lawyers to consider different ways of working, even when it will make their lives easier.

Kevin O'Sullivan, Director of Legal Project Management at Baker McKenzie, also cautioned LPM practitioners to be patient. "Even if you work in a law firm where you're able to mandate...from the top, the journey is going to take time."

As Oliver reminds us, "It's a marathon, not a sprint." A marathon requires training, dedication and consistency.

"Create a program that fits your culture."

Mimi Eingorn, Director of Client Operations Services & LPM, Ropes & Gray, advises that firms and law departments pay attention to culture. In the absence of cultural alignment, lawyers will continue to do what they've always done. "Make sure you have management support for LPM and create a program that aligns with your firm culture."

But wait. Doesn't LPM change your culture? Done correctly, it most certainly will. But, in order to get there, you must ensure that the LPM initiative moves forward. Think about how projects are currently managed. You don't need to change everything all at once, remember, it's a marathon. If there was little focus on efficiency in the past, that's not going to change overnight. Keep what makes sense to keep. Make changes where there is limited resistance. Chances are that every partner has a little low-hanging fruit they can pick. Bring them into LPM with these triumphs.

"Define the scope of your program."

LPM includes many different aspects of legal work. It's easy to take on too much which can dilute the impact of the work. Decide whether you're going to focus, for example, on a large matter, a specific practice group, or client relationship support. Then you can expand over time as you gain experience.

Blandine Davies, Director of Practice Services & Head of Legal Project Management for Norton Rose Fulbright LLP, asserts, "You need to be able to clearly articulate your focus and what your value propositions of your LPM program are – and on the flip side, to articulate what LPM is not." While scope creep may help you build relationships in the beginning, in the long run this lack of discipline will get in the way of scaling and building broader buy-in.

Widdop concurs that you must get people "singing from the same hymnal. "If everyone is not aligned around a common message, your LPM initiative is going to take a long time to take off," he says.

"Don't over engineer your solutions."

Eingorn offers advice for firms just getting started. "Overly complicated tools or reports are not likely to resonate, especially with busy lawyers and for lawyers just getting started." She recommends a measured start. "Try a couple of new things at a time. That way, the changes won't seem disruptive or time-consuming."

Time to Get Started

Now is the perfect time to get the LPM ball rolling. Start with a little LPM done right. Build your wins and find your champions. Take the time to find the right approach for your organization. When you address lawyer pain points and reduce the time spent on non-billable matters, that's a win. When you give clients a more efficient approach or provide

assurance that you are helping them manage the risks of their matter, that's the gold standard.

If you missed the Summit, you can click [here](#) for more information.