

# Legal Project Management Isn't a Silver Bullet, But it May Be a Superpower

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There are many tools and templates in traditional project management to help companies plan, scope, budget, and report work with great precision. Businesses swear by it. So, when you apply these tools to LPM, you get magic, right? Not exactly.

LPM is a wonderful tool. It can help you manage a project competently while meeting your clients' demands for greater accountability. It lifts the shroud of secrecy so that clients can be confident that the work is being done in the most efficient manner possible. It ends the sticker shock that can often occur once the work is completed.

But it's a lot messier than the traditional project management found in world-class companies. I know that won't stop you, though. Who enters the legal profession because it's easy?

## No Silver Bullet

When it comes to technology projects, project management might be the silver bullet. It certainly seemed to be when I was working on a massive forensic investigation with programmers in Switzerland. Their process was as rigid as I've ever seen. The tasks were discrete, granular and methodical, or, at least, they seemed that way to me. They followed the plan faithfully, documenting everything scientifically. That works for forensics and programmers because they are, after all, sciences.

But the law, as lawyers constantly tell us, is different. There is no silver bullet. Consequently, for lawyers, LPM is not a magic wand. There are aspects of the law firm culture and the very nature of the work that makes project management unique.

Legal project managers aren't gods. And technology can't really fix bad processes. Moreover, law firms are not as structured as other types of businesses. There are many aspects of a matter that are unpredictable.

Even still, LPM is a process that firms are using successfully. And while legal project managers aren't gods, many of them have a superpower: They can make order out of chaos. That's the beauty of LPM.

## Order From Chaos

In some firms, even a few years after LPM rolls out, there is still a bit of confusion. This happens for several reasons. First, LPM may not be widely adopted in a firm. Usually, this is by design. Many firms roll out LPM in some areas and not in others. This happens for different reasons – e.g., need, client demand, interest, etc.

Second, lawyers are notorious for jumping in the deep end. With a high degree of urgency, they prefer to get started immediately, working hard to get the job done. Being busy is not necessarily synonymous with efficiency. Planning is a large part of project management. It underscores a successful outcome.

Technology can also be an issue. It's tempting to deploy the latest technology solutions without fully defining requirements or understanding how to optimize the workflow.

But the great thing about LPM is that it can make order out of chaos and manage the madness at whatever stage of the game you're in. You just have to trust the process. Lawyers can still do their lawyerly thing, only now it's organized and efficient. A well-designed LPM process requires minimal change in the way lawyers apply their legal acumen. But it makes a measurable difference in keeping clients happy and boosting the firm's profitability.

### **Make Change Less Hard**

As much as you might like to have the LPM process flow smoothly every time, real and lasting change in any firm takes time and patience. It is an iterative process. Some matter teams may use LPM flawlessly from start to finish. Others may pull in the project manager in the middle of the process. It works either way.

But it is about change. So, here are some tips from the change management playbook to help ensure that LPM goes smoothly.

- Evaluate your processes and workflows to ensure that they work. If you are deploying new technology, make sure that it meets your requirements. You have good processes when surprises and redundancies are minimized and communication and visibility are optimized. The legal project manager should know where resources are allocated and the status of the work at all times.
- Plan your projects. Include a legal project manager during the planning process. This will save time and help avoid midstream corrections to resources, scoping, budgets and more. Change is easier when the train is still on the track. But if you haven't done the upfront planning, better to do it mid-project than to fly by the seat of your pants.
- Do the activities that promote change. Ensure that LPM supports the way lawyers get the most critical work done. Solve the major pain points and publish your success stories. Give regular and loud kudos to the people who are making LPM work.
- Be methodical and patient. Change takes time. Demonstrate a dogged determination to keep at it. If you follow the methodology, the benefits will come. Of course, this doesn't mean that you can't customize your approach and alter templates and tools to better fit your practice group and the challenges ahead.

### **In It to the Limit**

Now that you're actually doing the thing, now what? It can't hurt to cross your fingers and pray. But, realize that although LPM can be messy, it's worth it in the end. As mentioned, you'll have a better outcome if you put in the upfront planning and engage a legal project manager early on. But even if you don't, you'll discover the transformative power of LPM when deployed mid-matter. It's all about using the techniques that are effective for your practice group and the waters you're navigating.