

Legal Project Management: The Second Generation

By [Susan Raridon Lambreth](#) on August 30, 2021

LPM is going places, according to the speakers at the recent LPM Global Summit. If you missed the Summit, replays are available [here](#) for another few weeks.

Keeping with the theme of the last few blogs, we asked our Summit panel: How do you see LPM evolving in the firm or in the legal market?

We got inspiring answers from everyone. Here's what they said.

Getting Real with LPM

Clients know how LPM should look. We've written in the past about law firms that claim they use LPM in their approach to matter management. But once the firm wins the bid, their clients complain that they don't see it.

Anthony Widdop, Global Director of Legal Project Management at Shearman & Sterling, believes that firms in the future must be able to demonstrate a real mastery of LPM. "If you're looking at this from a competitive standpoint, you've got to say that LPM is not just table stakes," Widdop says. "If clients don't see that you're actually applying LPM, your firm is at a distinct competitive disadvantage."

Widdop says that LPM skills are not just for the legal environment. "These are core skills that are required for the future, and I really advise people to actually look at that and to take that as a key part of their development."

Do-it-Yourself LPM

Kerryn Underwood, Head of Legal Project Management at King & Wood Mallesons, believes that LPM practices will be more empowering to other members of the matter team. She says, "I think we will develop and become a ...much slicker [LPM] operation. But we'll also focus on how we can equip our people with self-service tools and information so that they can actually do [more] themselves without actually having to have a dedicated project manager."

Underwood notes, however, that even as much of the responsibility for LPM practices shift from project management teams to lawyers, LPM will continue to be relevant. "I don't think the need for LPM is going to subside," Underwood says.

Big Data is Here

"LPM is now broadening the scope of what they're responsible for, where it used to be just helping a particular client or matter to run more smoothly and stay on budget." Bethany Knoblauch, Director of Matter Planning at K&L Gates, sees a larger, even more, strategic role for LPM in the future.

Knoblauch says, "Now we see LPM getting involved in things around data analytics on alternative staffing, pricing, really all things about legal operations." And big data is getting really big in legal operations. This isn't about computers and artificial intelligence doing the jobs of lawyers. Rather, it's about supplementing and informing legal judgment and decision-making processes. Many clients are there already with AI, predictive analytics, and machine learning. They'll naturally expect law firms to follow.

"LPM is now part of [legal operations] and they're expected to...drive those initiatives within the firm and within the legal industry," says Knoblauch.

Core Service Delivery Blending with LPM

Tracy Lau, Senior Project Manager at Clifford & Chance, is seeing an important trend. Increasingly, clients are requesting LPM as part of their overall service delivery. Who better to sell the firm's capabilities than project management leaders?

"We are part of the core team in the pitch. And we participate in beauty pageants. I think that this is a trend that we're just starting to see...that will evolve and increase in the next few years," says Lau.

The Co-Mingling of Legal Tech and LPM: Is There an App for That?

"LPM is going to highlight the need for technology improvements as we work through some of the issues that we experience in managing," says Angela Floessel, Director of Pricing and Legal Project Management at Morrison & Foerster.

"How can we have better tools for managing tasks? As an example, how do you look at overall utilization? How do you [know] what you're working on across all matters for a specific resource?" I think that will be the direction that we move toward in the future."

In addition, Floessel says there's a keen awareness that some of the more repetitive and manually intensive tasks don't have to be that way. "Younger attorneys are asking more and more to not have to do things manually." As mentioned, there is a whole new world of technology out there, including exciting developments in artificial intelligence. And it's not just the young lawyers who are asking, according to Floessel.

Lau can see the need, too, for smarter processes. She believes that legal tech and LPM will align more closely. She says, "I work with my legal technology advisor on a daily basis to improve and streamline the way we do dashboards and the way that we automate certain functions."

From Checking Off Lists to Checking Out Technology

Aaran Scott, Director Legal Project Management at Clifford Chance, says that his law firm is investing in an LPM technology platform. Like many other project management teams, they started out small with minimal technical support. Scott says, "We are now investing in a professional project management platform that will actually help us streamline the way we project manage, and also help us to enhance and implement best practices across the different work types."

LPM is not technology-dependent. You don't have to use a suite of IT tools. Plenty of firms, especially smaller and mid-sized firms, can accomplish LPM with checklists and flowcharts. Of course, using tools intended for the job can certainly make life easier. As firms mature in their use of LPM, there are plenty of user-friendly tools to investigate. We expect more firms to phase in supporting technologies and more comprehensive platforms in the coming years.

LPM: More Important Than Ever

LPM is essential for law firms today. It will be even more critical in the future. As Scott says, we will be dealing with the post-Covid economy for quite some time. "What impact is Covid going to have long term on the economies, and what pressure is that going to put on professional services firms and legal services firms? Are we going to see even more pressure on efficiency?" Undoubtedly.

In addition to LPM, there are new technologies coming down the pipeline. For law firms that expect to remain competitive, LPM, as Widdop mentioned, is table stakes. In order to take advantage of new technologies, firms need to have a disciplined approach to project management.

When law firms manage dozens to hundreds or thousands of complex matters, LPM is essential. It's not just a fancy time management tool. It helps law firms scale what they do, brings management discipline to the work, ensures transparency for the client, and reduces write-offs and write-downs.

One thing is certain as we slide into 2022 and beyond: LPM is not just for large projects. The full benefit is realized when LPM is utilized across all matters. The more matters firms apply LPM to, the more they can truly recognize the benefits, streamline their work processes, improve the bottom line, and free up lawyers to do what they do best.

For the rest of the articles in this series, click [here](#).