

Legal Project Management: You Can't Fake It Anymore

By [Susan Raridon Lambreth](#) on October 10, 2017

As we have witnessed over the past five years, the efforts of law firms have evolved in legal project management and, not surprisingly, corporate legal department expectations for their outside counsel to implement LPM has increased exponentially. [Casey Flaherty's](#) most recent [3 Geeks and a Law Blog](#) posts ([On Law Firm Marketing Bullshit](#) and [More Legal Marketing Bullshit](#) and this week's [Law Firm BS – Tier 3](#)), were an apt instigator for me to continue the dialog about this topic of the evolution of LPM, its current standing and law firm and in-house counsel expectations.

A comment from a partner in a AmLaw 100 firm about five years ago reminded me of the correlation with Casey's posts. This partner joked about the language about legal project management they used in their RFP response and how they had won the work, despite not actually having any LPM efforts underway, much less successful implementation at any level. To Casey's point, it was a perfect example of law firm marketing BS that worked, albeit, at that time.

On the other hand, contrast that with how clients are starting to discern between the law firms that are truly implementing LPM in a meaningful way and those that are simply purveyors of marketing BS on the topic. For the past eight years, I have been Chair of the annual Practising Law Institute (PLI) program, [Project Management for Lawyers](#). My co-chair for the 2018 program is [Stéphanie Hamon](#), Head of External Engagement, Legal for Barclays. Barclays has taken an [innovative approach to its use of LPM](#) with their outside counsel, notably their primary panel counsel, and Stephanie's insight will be of great interest for attendees.

The use of LPM was a notable factor in the selection of Barclay's law firm panel and once selected, the firms were invited to meet with Stéphanie and her team in London to discuss their firm's LPM initiative or efforts. The representatives from the panel firms, now known as their LPM Consortium, have been asked to take on projects with their peers/competitors to help Barclays further roll out LPM on its matters and across their outside counsel. This group meets quarterly with the Barclays' legal operations team to report on how they are implementing various aspects of LPM and to share "best practices" with the other panel firms.

As companies like Barclays initiate these programs with law firms, it typically becomes clear which firms are actually implementing LPM in a significant way – and which are hardly doing anything (though we don't know if they used the marketing BS to obtain positions on these companies' panels but Casey's posts certainly suggest that is likely). So, while firms may have been able to "fake it" to obtain a spot on a particular panel, with clients who are savvy about LPM, it becomes obvious if a firm does not actually have credible LPM efforts underway in their firm that will positively impact on the efficiency and value of their client's matters.

Another one of the panelists on the PLI , Project Management for Lawyers is [Bryon Koepke](#), Senior Vice President, Chief Securities Counsel and Asst. Corporate Secretary at Avis Budget Group, Inc. Avis went through a major convergence project winnowing from 700 law firms to seven. Part of the process looked at how the firm used innovative approaches, including LPM to manage their work efficiently and to provide value to the company. These seven firms include some of the national leaders in implementing LPM, such as Bryan Cave and Baker Donelson, and their development of tools to manage matters, their use of data analytics to aid in decision-making on legal strategy and their use of legal project managers were some of the reasons they were selected.

Barclays and Avis are just a few examples of how LPM has permeated legal department expectations for their outside counsel, but many Request for Proposals (RFPs) received by law firms in recent years have also emphasized the importance of LPM (you will note that as Casey suggested, some of these ask for specifics which make it harder to BS):

Company A:

- Indicate the number of dedicated legal project managers that your firm will commit to providing on our matters.
- Describe the key tasks performed by your firm’s legal project managers.
- What were the quantifiable benefits achieved by utilizing legal project managers on these matters?

Company B:

- “Explain how your firm would add value to this transaction in terms of **project management**.”
- “What role do you see **project management** playing in your engagement?”
- Include project management tips / case studies from similar deals – what has worked well, what has not.

Company C:

- Please describe how your firm would handle the project management of XX device and pharmaceutical-related matters, especially in a highly matrixed organization. Include in your description examples of any reports, work summaries, or other tracking mechanisms your firm would use to communicate with us and how the attorneys working on the matter will be coordinated within your firm.

Company D:

- “What will you do for us in terms of using **legal project management** and providing LPM training to our lawyers?”

Company E:

- Detail any initiatives that have been implemented during the current panel term that has resulted in a cost saving / lower fees being incurred, i.e. resulting from a change in how you have provide legal advice / service whether by using lower cost resource, better managing legal matters, technology, decreasing the scope of advice, etc.

Company F:

- Does your firm currently have a formal project management process?
- If so, how does your Firm’s project management process drive efficiency and innovation?

On a recent call with PLI panelists, one of the in-house representatives described law firms that were changing their business model and implementing new approaches as the “Jetsons” and law firms that were not as the “Flintstones.” Law firm leaders don’t want their firm to be viewed as the Flintstones, yet as Casey mentioned, one of the most significant challenges is “sustainably scaling innovation.” Even the law firms who are the US leaders of LPM have only been able to implement it on a small percentage of total firm matters (a very small number have started to reach 40%, while many

others struggle to get 10% of matters or partners on board). What will it take to have a sustainable, scaled LPM program across a firm? That is the \$64,000 question as more and more firms are implementing LPM.

How do we move the LPM efforts in law firms and legal departments forward to meaningful activities and beyond BS? My next blog on this topic will share some examples and we would love to hear examples of how your organization is implementing it (and hopefully starting to scale). We can publicize these at the 2018 PLI program, which has had 400 to 500 attendees each of the last seven years, with about half from corporate legal departments.

Also, for those of you looking for additional help in approaches to begin a LPM initiative or scale yours, consider attending our next public [LPM Training Certification Workshop](#) on Oct. 19 – 20, hosted by Sullivan & Cromwell and our LPM Roundtable meeting which occurs twice a year where firms candidly share their progress in implementing LPM (the next meeting is Nov. 7 at WilmerHale's offices in NY).