

LPM is Change for the New Economic Reality: Part Three of a Four-Part Series

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Leveraging Your LPM Technology Spend

Technology is not the only answer. In fact, you don't even need technology as part of your legal project management initiative. But let's just say that carefully selected technology not only saves time, but allows lawyers to focus on... wait for it... the practice of law.

LPM, when it's embedded in the fabric of the firm, changes everything. Unstructured and ad-hoc systems become replicable and transparent. Byzantine and ad-hoc processes are overhauled. Clients, who demand efficiency, are satisfied. But it has to be done right. This means putting in place the people, processes and technology that support your initiative.

In part three of this series, we're going to focus on technology. Not brands and types; today we're technology agnostic. Rather, let's look at five success factors that will help make the most of your firm's technology spend.

1. Showcase the Value-Added

You're crushing your goals. You're exceeding your targets. You have gains from unlikely places. You have a story to tell. Look for LPM technologies that let you define, measure and track data and performance metrics that prove success. This means you'll need robust and flexible reporting capabilities.

Involve project teams and their clients, to the extent possible, in defining meaningful performance indicators and in the design of understandable report formats. All technology must support transparency, helping the project team to align with the clients' business objectives. As you demonstrate value, you'll build the critical buy-in needed to help your technology initiatives succeed.

2. Define Realistic Goals

Since the 1980s, there has been a loud buzz surrounding technology-spurred productivity gains. In actuality, the [U.S. statistic](#) has grown by just 1.2 percent annually since the mid-2000s. Every gee-whiz technology is supposed to increase productivity. Ask how. Demand specifics from your technology vendors. Make sure you're measuring what you care about most. And then build your key performance metrics to capture this data.

Be realistic about what the technology actually delivers. If the solution is allowing attorneys more time to practice law, make sure you answer a key question your partners will have: How does this translate to the bottom line? If it doesn't, you'll need to reevaluate your technology selection.

3. Design a Dashboard for Busy Attorneys

The value of project management must be boldly communicated. One of the best ways to do this is via a well-designed dashboard. However, you should caution your technology vendors against the tendency to ‘geek out.’ This is *not* the place to put all the bells and whistles. Make sure that the LPM technology selected includes a user-friendly, customizable dashboard with plenty of white space. This allows practice group leaders and team managers data-based visibility into performance without having to crunch numbers or chase down busy project members.

Leaders and managers, of course, must take a primary role in defining what they want to see and how often they want to see it. Once they have clear evidence of LPM success, these leaders will become the biggest champions of your initiative.

4. Emphasize Collaboration

The work-from-home (WFH) reality is difficult for those who are unfamiliar with collaboration platforms. In addition to Skype and Zoom, law firm employees will need to collaborate on project management activities. Are you currently supporting internal and external collaboration for geographically-dispersed teams? Ensure that your project management platform makes it easy to share information. Not only will this create greater coordination among team members, the group will feel more cohesive.

During these times of social distancing and WFH, it is particularly important to maintain the firm’s culture and facilitate intergroup learning, so that project management becomes a way of life for the new normal.

5. Train for Operational Excellence

In the past, many practices achieved good success by either following the cow path or blazing a trail for each new matter. Others took a more structured approach with somewhat defined processes and systems. Both, however, missed out on the nuanced elements of optimized project management. That was before clients demanded more. Consider training both lawyers and staff to instill the operational discipline required to help LPM succeed. Your training should achieve the following:

- Everyone is on board and understands the importance of LPM
- Everyone understands their role and its contribution to the success of LPM
- Managers use KPIs and metrics to align their efforts with client objectives
- The firm’s metrics encourage behaviors that deliver value
- There are well-defined resources in place to support transparency

Granted, not everyone is going to be a project manager. They don’t have to be. But proper LPM training underscores the importance of providing value-added service to clients and cultivating operational excellence. The results can take a firm from good to great.

One final point: Want to ensure the adoption of new technology? Make it immediately salient by integrating it into the broader LPM initiative. There is no better way to help employees grasp the big picture.

Of course, technology without smart people and supporting processes simply will not deliver the productivity gains promised. You need all three. In the last section, we covered processes. Next, we’ll focus on people.