

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

By [Carla Landry](#) on September 4, 2020

This article was originally published through [PinHawk's Legal Administrator Daily](#) on May 6, 2020

What's the Big Deal About Processes

In [Part One](#) of this series, I talked about the evolution of project management in traditional businesses. Project management, in its original iteration, featured quality, cost, and the rigid adherence to a schedule. Professionals are fine with the quality part of the equation. But most lawyers really did not sign on for the latter two.

So, how do you inspire your associates, let alone your partners, by saying, okay, this year we're going to minimize billable hours and strictly follow the plan? Of course, it's not going to happen like that.

But you do need to get people on board, especially right now. Resistance occurs, in part, because LPM changes the way lawyers price the job, how they manage their matters, and, ultimately, how the work gets done. Nobody likes change.

It's clear why clients are increasingly demanding LPM. As work settles into its new post-pandemic normal, they will demand even more. In order to implement it effectively, however, you must think in terms of what LPM means for the firm. When done right, it promotes efficiency and effectiveness, allowing the firm to increase profits. These benefits are an easier sell than the features.

Still, how do you get there?

LPM requires some change. You're going to pull the change management levers of people, technology, and process in order to gain growth, efficiency, and effectiveness. If you recall Change Management 101, you need to invest in all three to get sustainable, systemic change in your firm. You can't simply buy the latest gee-whiz software (technology) and expect (people) to sustain meaningful change. Moreover, LPM is not a series of procedures accompanied by formulaic spreadsheets and templates.

So, let's start with process. But what exactly does that mean for LPM? Here are three principles you should keep in mind:

Avoid Paving Cow Paths

Too often, change is about taking bad processes and making them faster. The cows walk here? That's where the cars should go. That's not always the best solution. Yet it is frequently how change occurs. Take time to question how you've always done things. A candid discussion will foster buy-in among the people who are behind these processes and lead to better decision-making about the solutions.

Do not shortchange the process work by relying on old flowcharts and process diagrams, or, worse, borrow something that works for a similar organization. Your firm has its own unique set of challenges and circumstances, not to mention its own strategies and objectives.

Link Process Objectives to LPM Initiatives

The processes that will impact LPM should be firmly linked to LPM objectives. This isn't merely a theoretical exercise; it should be part of an actual planning meeting. Prior to starting a single process initiative, define the problem you are trying to solve. The improvements made should benefit the organization as a whole, or, at the very least, not harm one department at the expense of another.

What happens if it's not clear to your constituents why process matters...if the steps suddenly seem too complicated? Then you've either failed to make your case or you are moving too quickly, maybe both. Milk the discussion for objections and treat opposing viewpoints with respect. When you reach a consensus, distill the benefits down to a single guiding principle: "We will improve our value-add to clients." "We will reduce our overall cost." The new economy demands a strong benefit.

Make Sure Someone Owns the Processes

A capable somebody within the organization cares deeply about this process and understands its impact on the firm's viability. Assign that person the role of process owner. A process without an owner is like a boat without a rudder. The process owner must be able to identify where their actions intersect with others.

Although the process owner is not likely to be fully trained in process improvement or project management, they should be coachable. They must also have an organizational vantage point and be able to influence other areas outside of their span of control. The process owner provides a single point of contact for the legal project manager and holds the key to successful implementation.

What happens at the three-way intersection of process, technology, and people? Enhanced communications, delighted clients, and fewer collisions among the cows. These steps are geared toward overcoming any natural resistance to change and building a foundation upon which the firm can thrive. Given the right processes, executed in the right way, you'll see real improvement in your ROI.

If there was ever a time to do the things that make a significant difference to your bottom line, that opportunity presents itself now. Watch this space next month for Part 3 in the series focused on technology.