

LPM – On the Cusp of Explosion?

By [Susan Raridon Lambreth](#) on May 10, 2021

On the way to the upcoming [Global LPM Summit](#), some interesting themes are emerging. There will be over 75 speakers sharing their best tips and strategies. After interviewing 39 of them myself, my mind is spinning with the tremendous insights they shared. Legal project management is becoming a wholly accepted discipline at almost every medium to large-sized firm and many legal departments. Here is a sneak preview of some of the themes these speakers will tackle:

Changing Views of What LPM Is

Several global leaders describe LPM as a function that helps law firms provide excellent client service. Another favorite description from the law firm perspective is that LPM plays a critical role in reducing “the operational burden for partners.” That’s gratifying to hear. LPM goes far beyond “projectification,” i.e., managing the flow of work activities. Instead, we describe LPM as a critical process for client relationship management, upping the game in creating client value. Legal project managers or other trained legal professionals on the matter team can accomplish this, something many busy partners welcome.

Evolving Roles of Legal Project Managers

Some legal project managers are responsible for one large matter. Others consult on or monitor a dozen or more smaller matters. Regardless of the differences in scope, all project managers assume a variety of challenging roles and responsibilities. These include problem-solver, coach, team manager, and communication facilitator. LPM is called upon to manage expectations, mitigate risks, and reduce friction in an increasingly complex legal environment. The LPM function continues to evolve, supporting world-class service delivery with systematic structure, discipline, and proven methodology.

What LPM Should and Should Not Do

Need a marketing deck? A follow-up email to a recalcitrant team member? A billing revision? It’s easy for legal project managers to become gofers for whatever a busy partner or matter team may need. This is why many LPM heads educate legal professionals on the role they actually should provide. A characteristic of the best legal project managers is their personal use of a disciplined approach to all task assignments – their own and the team’s. However, legal project managers, as natural problem solvers, may need to resist getting caught in the weeds themselves. It can require discernment and excellent influence skills to ensure they can help the matter leaders direct the right work to the right people.

Consider that, in many instances, one of the highest and best uses of legal project managers is client-facing, working closely with the client’s legal operations professionals who speak the same language. Of course, ultimately, there are no hard and fast rules. Firms should seek to right source based on their culture, strategy, and talent base. If the LPM head can add value or perform a task more efficiently than, for example, a lawyer, it may make sense for them to do so.

LPM Is Not Just for Large Firms Anymore

Firms from small to large can benefit from bringing simple disciplines to their matters and to their matter lifecycle. The LPM wave is sweeping the globe. For example, there are the usual suspects, a well-known Wall Street elite firm with more than 55 percent of its partners successfully using LPM services and tools. Compare that to a small Ecuadorian law firm that moved from its traditional model of measuring billing hours to a value creation model. This innovative firm has tossed out billable hours while maintaining profitability and enhancing client relationships. How do they do it? Their Managing Partner will share how they strive to come in under budget on every matter, using a business model enabled by LPM.

Adoption is Growing Dramatically

The proof of LPM adoption is in the numbers. More firms are using LPM and measuring the return on investment for their LPM initiatives. These metrics may include any combination of the following and more:

- Number of matters positively impacted,
- Reduction in write-downs and write-offs,
- Creation of new or innovative client business solutions,
- Number of lawyers trained or using LPM approaches,
- Number of client RFPs won

Some firms have specific monthly or quarterly quantitative KPIs. In contrast, others view it more qualitatively – tracking how many partners they have won over, how many use LPM occasionally, and how many have consistently integrated LPM into how they run their matters.

LPM Promised Should Be LPM Delivered

According to some clients, when it comes to the day-to-day delivery of services, they never receive the LPM approach promised during the pitch. Clients are confused. Does the firm actually have LPM capability? Are there enough LPM professionals to service the clients' needs? Are our matters important enough to the firm to justify the use of legal project managers (even though it was promised)? Does our relationship partner understand and facilitate LPM? Any of these issues are problematic to the client relationship.

When a client requests legal project management, the LPM team should ensure that the client needs are met. There can be no bait and switch. Sometimes, however, the most well-intentioned LPM team can't get around the relationship partner to speak directly to the legal operations professional to understand their expectations.

These are just a few of the exciting topics and conversations that will occur June 15 – 18 during the [Global LPM Summit](#), with speakers literally from all around the globe. We look forward to having you join the sessions and the live networking just one month away.