

The Emperor's New Clothes: What a Fairy Tale Can Teach Us About LPM

By [Carla Landry](#) on January 18, 2023

Do you remember the tale of the Emperor's New Clothes? Turns out the emperor thought he was wearing a beautiful new robe, but he was actually naked. Believe it or not, this story has relevance to today's law firms.

But first, just in case you've forgotten, here's a brief recap. The emperor was a dapper fellow who loved fancy new duds. He was constantly on the search for the best and brightest tailor. Much like law firms that recruit and hire extremely talented lawyers and legal professionals. One year, the emperor wanted to have the most spectacular look, undoubtedly to post on his Instagram. So he had his people search far and wide to find someone to design his outfit. There wasn't a subject in the kingdom who didn't hear about the emperor's quest for the very best.

Well, there just happened to be two brothers. They lived in the far reaches of the kingdom, but they followed the emperor online. They weren't good tailors and they didn't have much experience, in fact, they sucked at it. But they were great liars. So they stood outside the gates of the castle and proclaimed for all the world to hear that they had the most exquisite cloth and surely the emperor would want to know more about their talented tailoring.

One day, the emperor does, indeed, hear about them and summons them throne side for a meeting. The emperor tells them that he wants the nicest clothes. "What can you do for me?" The eldest brother tells the emperor that they can make him a spectacular garment from the finest fabric. "But," the younger brother warns, "only wise people will be able to see the garment. Foolish people will not be able to see it."

The emperor is intrigued. It would be good to get rid of any foolish people, he reasons. So, the outfit is commissioned and the brothers retreat to pretend to make the clothes. When they return some weeks later with the garment, neither the emperor nor his people can see it because, of course, there is nothing there.

But they can't say anything lest everyone think that they are foolish. Following the king's lead, they remark on how lovely the clothes are. The emperor puts on the invisible garments, turning this way and that to admire himself in the mirror, snapping a few photos for Instagram, and then parades before his kingdom in all his glory. The people are shocked. They don't say anything, however. That is until one impudent young boy from the crowd points and bursts out laughing. Then they all begin to laugh and the emperor runs back to his castle to hide.

We're uncertain of the moral value of this story for children, especially when compared to something like Chicken Little. But it does remind us of LPM.

Making the Invisible Visible

So is there a scandalous charade going on in law firms? Are firms duplicitous like the two brothers? Of course not. But teams of talented lawyers can spend an inordinate amount of time working on something that is nearly invisible to clients, leaving them questioning the value and wondering if there really is anything there.

We would imagine that presenting an unexpectedly large bill to a client or even charging a large number of hours to a

matter must sometimes feel like parading around in the emperor's new clothes. How can law firm managers better help clients understand the value of their services, let alone make sense of the expense? Years ago, clients may have been more like the emperor's kingdom, afraid to appear foolish by questioning out loud what was going on. But fast forward a few years and along came the legal techs, the ALSPs, and the in-house departments who, like the young boy, weren't afraid to point out what was missing. *Where are your clothes?!?*

In our rewritten tale, the emperor's garment is the value that law firms bring to their clients. If your firm's value is invisible, clients won't necessarily laugh, but they will begin to question what you do and how you deliver.

Legal Project Management Signals Value

LPM is the garment the emperor was seeking. It brings material substance to your work and manages how value is perceived. The so-called non-traditional service providers are here to stay. They are pushing law firms toward greater efficiency and judicious use of new technologies. These are all positive things for clients and they are, in the long-run, good for the sustainability of law firms. We just need to get about the business of designing visibility into what we do and how we do it.

Visibility is among the most important characteristics of LPM done well. With a well-designed and executed system, LPM helps legal project teams anticipate and mitigate risks, avoiding unplanned work and rework. Further, it helps them manage priorities and use resources more effectively. LPM helps legal project managers do a better job of leveraging information, evaluating talent, and planning for the future.