

The Growing Role of Legal Project Management: Why LPM Professionals are Key to Law Firm Success

By [Susan Raridon Lambreth](#) on October 29, 2024

As the legal industry continues to evolve, so do the roles within it. One of the most dynamic roles gaining traction in recent years is that of **Legal Project Management (LPM) professionals**. Once a largely behind-the-scenes operational function, legal project management has transformed into a central pillar of law firm strategy with their clients. Today, LPM professionals are not only managing the logistics of legal matters but also helping law firms deliver greater value to their clients. The recent survey conducted by LawVision and True Value Partnering Institute with Savvy Surveys for Lawyers shows the evolution of these roles and their impact on their firms.

So, what exactly do legal project managers do, and why are they so critical to modern law firms?

The Strategic Evolution of Legal Project Management

Traditionally, the legal profession has been structured around individual attorneys managing their own caseloads and client matters. However, as client demands for efficiency, reporting and much more have increased and legal work has become more complex, law firms have had to adapt. Enter legal project management. LPM professionals apply project management principles to legal matters, ensuring that matters are handled efficiently, within budget, and according to strict timelines.

While LPM roles may have initially been focused on keeping track of tasks and deadlines, their responsibilities have expanded significantly. Today's LPM professionals are strategic partners who collaborate with both attorneys and clients to improve processes, enhance client communication, and enhance the overall delivery of legal services.

Why Law Firms are Embracing LPM Professionals

The rise of LPM roles isn't just a trend – it's a response to a number of challenges that law firms face in today's competitive landscape. Here are some key reasons why legal project managers are becoming indispensable to law firms:

1. **Cost Management and Efficiency:** Legal work is notoriously expensive, and clients are increasingly focused on controlling costs. LPM professionals help firms provide more predictable, transparent billing by developing budgets, tracking tasks and deliverables, and ensuring that projects stay within financial parameters. They help manage resources efficiently, reducing stress on the matter team and avoiding cost overruns that can erode profitability and client trust.
2. **Improved Client Communication:** Clients want regular updates on the status of their legal matters and expect their legal teams to be responsive to their concerns. Legal project managers play a critical role in enhancing communication between firms and their clients. The soon-to-be published report on LPM compensation and roles indicates that many LPMs are client facing and interact regularly with the firm's clients. In particular, they help ensure the client contacts are getting the reporting or other information they need promptly and without a big bill for a lawyer's time pulling this together. By overseeing the project lifecycle and providing clear, consistent updates, LPM professionals help improve client experience, manage client expectations and overall foster better

relationships.

3. **Process Optimization:** One of the key strengths of LPM professionals is their ability to analyze workflows and improve processes. From developing standardized procedures to streamlining and improving communication between legal teams, LPM professionals bring a level of organization and oversight that ensures legal matters run smoothly. This not only saves time but also reduces the risk of errors or missed deadlines.
4. **Risk Mitigation:** Managing legal projects involves anticipating potential risks and developing strategies to address them. LPM professionals are skilled at identifying risks early on and putting contingency plans in place. Whether it's budgetary constraints, unexpected requests from opposing counsel or a regulator, changing legal requirements, or unexpected client demands, legal project managers help firms stay ahead of the curve.
5. **Supporting Alternative Fee Arrangements (AFAs):** With clients increasingly requesting alternative fee arrangements (AFAs) such as fixed fees or contingency billing, LPM professionals are critical in ensuring that firms can deliver services profitably under these models. In addition to tracking tasks and monitoring risks, they ensure that the scope of work is clearly defined so that the firm meets its financial goals while still providing excellent service that meets client expectations.

The Value LPM Professionals Bring to Clients

It's not just law firms that benefit from the work of legal project managers – clients also see significant value in these roles. In fact, many clients are beginning to insist that their law firms have a strong LPM function in place before engaging them. We regularly hear from law firms that the vast majority of the RFPs from clients ask for dedicated LPM professionals or LPM support in some way. Here's why:

1. **Transparency and Accountability:** LPM professionals provide clients with greater transparency throughout the course of a legal matter. Many clients want to know what's being done, how long it will take, and how much it will cost. This level of transparency builds trust and ensures that clients feel more in control of their legal spend.
2. **Predictability and Cost Certainty:** For many clients, the biggest frustration with legal services is the unpredictability of the costs. Legal project managers help develop clear budgets and cost estimates that give clients a more accurate understanding of what their legal matters will entail financially. This level of predictability is especially important in large, complex matters where unexpected costs can spiral out of control. Once budgets are developed, they help the matter teams stay on track with the budget. And, if there is an unavoidable budget overrun, the LPMs help the lawyers communicate promptly about changes to minimize surprises to clients.
3. **Timely Delivery of Legal Services:** Deadlines in legal matters can have significant implications, whether it's a court date, a regulatory filing, or a contract negotiation. LPM professionals are responsible for ensuring that these deadlines are met. They keep the legal team on track and ensure that nothing falls through the cracks, which ultimately leads to better outcomes for clients.
4. **Tailored Legal Solutions:** Every client's legal needs are different, and LPM professionals are adept at customizing their approach to meet these needs. By working closely with clients to understand their priorities, LPM teams can offer solutions that are tailored to the specific goals of the client, whether it's minimizing legal costs, speeding up a transaction, implementing a specific technology to enhance efficiency on the matter or managing risk.
5. **Enhanced Client Satisfaction:** All of these factors – transparency, cost management, process optimization – contribute to one overarching outcome: improved client satisfaction. Legal project managers ensure that clients receive value for their investment, which leads to stronger, longer-lasting relationships between law firms and their clients.

The Future of Legal Project Management

As law firms continue to navigate an increasingly competitive marketplace, the role of legal project managers is only expected to grow. According to recent surveys, firms with well-established LPM functions are seeing significant benefits, not just in terms of internal efficiency but in the quality of service they can provide to clients. Moreover, as clients become more sophisticated and demand greater accountability from their legal providers, law firms that invest in LPM professionals will be better positioned to meet these expectations and secure long-term client relationships.

Legal project management is no longer a “nice-to-have” – it’s a critical function that adds tangible value to both law firms and their clients. For firms looking to differentiate themselves in the legal market, building a strong LPM function could be the key to success.

Next week we will be publishing with Thomson Reuters and True Value Partnering Institute (TVPI) the results of the recent survey about LPM Professional compensation and roles. **Please email eva.booth@lawvision.com if you would like more information or would like to purchase the report.** All firms who participated receive a free executive summary. Also, if you are a legal professional seeking to enhance your credentials in LPM, [click here](#) for information about earning your accredited Legal Project Manager (ALPM) designation.

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