

Using Legal Project Management for Competitive Advantage

By [Susan Raridon Lambreth](#) on October 2, 2012

Using Legal Project Management for Competitive Advantage was the topic of a recent webcast I hosted for West LegalEdcenter. Each of the panelists and I shared examples of how legal project management is helping firms become more competitive and successful. For example:

Monte Malone, Chief of Practice Management at Fulbright & Jaworski, described a situation increasingly familiar to law firm partners where a client interviewed their firm and others seeking greater predictability in the pricing of legal services. Fulbright showcased two of the tools that are part of a suite they call workSMART, one for workload management and another for budgeting and management of the matter to the budget (which uses the Thomson Reuters Engage system). They mentioned one General Counsel who hired them specifically because he anticipated greater fee predictability from a firm that has invested in and committed to LPM tools like these.

David Rueff, a shareholder and Legal Project Management Officer for Baker Donelson, explained his firm's journey in LPM. They started in 2010 with a thorough analysis of write offs and write downs and saw that many of these were a function of insufficient LPM. They boiled down **42 processes** within traditional project management to a smaller number they considered critical for law firms. They then began to focus on helping the lawyers achieve better clarity in their client communication about the scope of a project and the client's expectations. At the time, they did not find the commercially available project management or budgeting tools were tailored enough to the needs of lawyers so they built their own system on Sharepoint, which they call BakerManage. They have won work from clients directly as a result of having process maps or templates for how to do the work efficiently and by showing how they manage their matters using these tools.

Brad Peterson, a partner at Mayer Brown and co-chair of their ***Drive for Efficiency Initiative***, described the challenges of implementing a firm-wide LPM approach across a global firm of over 1600 lawyers. Their initiative has five core elements:

1. Scoping and estimating
2. Alternative fee arrangements
3. Legal project management
4. Lower cost of production
5. Consistency

Firm management became convinced that this was enough of a priority to make it a well-funded global strategic initiative whose goal was to deliver client services at a lower and more predictable cost. Certainly, if accomplished, that will result in increased competitive advantage.

Another global firm is seeking to train many of its lawyers using our LawVision online LPM courses where they will receive a Certificate in Legal Project Management. They believe that by training their lawyers, and actually applying that training to their matters, they will have a competitive edge over other firms. Recent surveys by the leading client research firm Acritas and by The American Lawyer indicate that ***clients are seeking to hire law firms that are applying LPM principles and using project management systems to manage the delivery of legal services.***

Is legal project management just the latest fad or are the growing number of law firms that are developing tools, training their professionals in new approaches, implementing new systems and changing their approach to how they price and manage legal work part of the new model for a successful law practice? You be the judge.