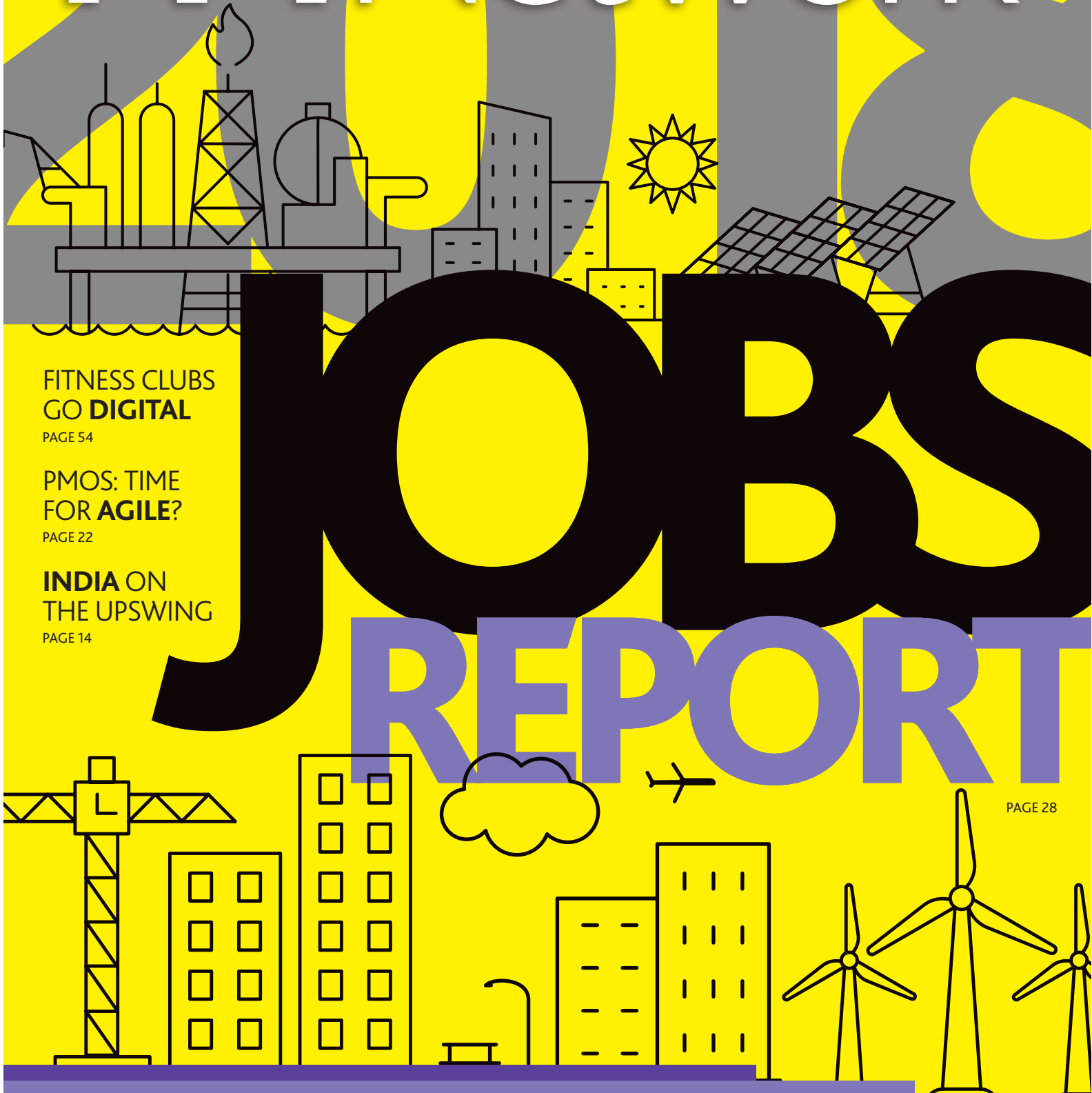


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Legal Aid

Big law firms are facing big challenges these days. With the rise of artificial intelligence and data analytics, new low-cost outsourcers are automating routine, high-volume legal work—and raiding established firms’ client lists. The upshot? Big organizations are feeling major downward price pressures and ramping up their pursuit of new efficiencies. Two-thirds of U.S. law firms say increasing efficiency is the primary effort they’re making to be more competitive, according to an August 2017 Exterro Inc. survey. About half of firms said they’re now “much more focused” on project management principles and technology than they were five years ago.

“There is a growing role for project managers at law firms,” says Nadine Miles, PMP. She was hired in July as a legal project manager at the multinational firm Hogan Lovells LLP in Washington, D.C., USA.

The firm has used project managers for decades in operations and information technology, but hired project managers focused on legal matters three years ago to train its global workforce of lawyers on project management techniques for the first time. After seeing the program’s success, in 2016 the firm began hiring project management specialists like Ms. Miles to work directly within its practice groups around the world.

“It shifts case management to project management practitioners so that lawyers can spend their time assessing substantive legal questions,” Ms. Miles says.

Scaling Up

While this practice is increasingly common at bigger law firms, it’s far from widespread, according to Susan Lambreth, chair and founder of the Legal Project Management (LPM) Institute and a principal at LawVision Group. The U.S. firms leading in the realm of LPM have only been able to implement it on a small percentage of total firm matters, with a very small group of them reaching 40 percent of activities, she wrote in an article on the



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“There is a growing role for project managers at law firms.”

—Nadine Miles, PMP,
Hogan Lovells LLP,
Washington, D.C., USA

legal content site JD Supra in October. “What will it take to have a sustainable, scaled LPM program across a firm? That is the big question as more and more firms are implementing LPM.”

Only 29 percent of U.S.-based firms have structured project practices in place, with 15 percent of organizations saying their project management maturity level is high, according to the Exterro survey. Adoption appears to be even slower in other parts of the world; a 2017 study by the Australasian Legal Practice Management Association found 19 percent of firms in Australasia (which is mainly made up of Australia and New Zealand) use project management software.

But the rise of project management in the legal world is likely to continue—and not only because firms know they need to control costs. Clients sometimes demand that project managers be placed on their cases, Ms. Miles says.

Plus, project professionals add value in a variety of ways, she says. They can work with lawyers to ensure they employ efficient processes on cases and use the most appropriate staff for tasks. They can also help with project initiation and planning, budget estimates and tracking, process improvements, after-action reviews and assessments of software and other technologies.

Project management is a good fit in the legal environment, Ms. Miles says—but ultimately implementing project management principles is an exercise in change management. As with any industry, change inevitably presents challenges.

“Implementing new systems, no matter how much more efficient they may be, comes at the cost of losing familiarity. Like any industry, changing organizational habits can be challenging.” —*Ambreen Ali*



The Gov. Mario M. Cuomo Bridge during construction

Design, Build, Debate

When the Gov. Mario M. Cuomo Bridge opened late last year in New York, USA, the US\$3.9 billion state-government-sponsored project was at the center of a political debate. Budget overruns and schedule delays weren't at issue—the project had neither. Skepticism was over the team's project delivery style. It used a design-build approach, under which design and construction work is folded into one contract to speed up execution and lower costs.

The method has gained popularity in U.S. state departments of transportation in recent years. As of 2016, more than 1,300 design-build projects had been sponsored by these agencies, compared with 140 as of 2002, according to industry group Design-Build Institute of America. Yet New York remains one of the few states where design-build can only be used in limited scenarios in the public sector. Both the state governor and the city of New York's mayor have pushed the state legislature in the past year to authorize a much broader use of the design-build approach. But some labor leaders have complained that such expanded use could lessen government oversight of project execution and displace union members.

As additional major infrastructure projects are proposed, debate continues. The city of New York's transportation department estimated that using a design-build approach for the proposed Brooklyn-Queens Expressway project would save US\$113.4 million in taxpayer dollars and shorten the project schedule by two years. “I'm dumbfounded that we are not able to have this option when we can see—it has been demonstrated in all 50 states—that it works,” Feniosky Pena-Mora, then-commissioner of the city's Department of Design and Construction, told *The New York Times*. —*Kate Rockwood*

U.S. state
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projects as of
2016.

Source: Design-Build Institute of America