

Understanding Legal Project Management - critical changes to the way that lawyers work!

Stand out from the crowd by delivering on time, on budget and delighting clients

Critical skills that ALL lawyers need today and tomorrow...

Legal teams and firms of all shapes and sizes need to understand how Legal Project Management (LPM) and related disciplines will fundamentally change the way that lawyers work. These changes are critical to the sustainability and transformation of the legal profession.

There are many challenges faced by law firms when developing change programs that are designed to embed legal project management into the firm. This article goes back to basics and provides the awareness and understanding of LPM that is required for individual lawyers to start the change journey.

What is Legal Project Management?

Legal Project Management is an emerging discipline in the legal sector that utilises project management techniques and adapts these for application to the management of legal matters. Practitioners of legal project management apply it to the process of providing legal services rather than to the substantive legal work itself and it is becoming increasingly common, especially when faced with alternative fee arrangements or where there is a commitment to improving efficiency and client service.

Legal Project Management first appeared a decade ago after the Global Financial Crisis, as law firms and in-house teams were under significant pressure to change their approach and the fundamental cost models of legal services. Firms were going out of business; in-house teams were expanding, clients were demanding alternative costing models and better service; and the entire legal sector was being demystified. Firms started looking for better ways to engage clients and new ways to perform their work. They needed to be more effective and more efficient and reduce costs - so Legal Project Management was born.

Legal Project Management is a major innovation that applies project management disciplines to legal matters. The framework that I developed and published in *Legal Project Management*, Linton, 2014, Lexis Nexis draws on my work with lawyers and my experience as a project delivery professional and academic to provide a project management framework that is specifically tailored to the needs of lawyers and their clients. LPM is a pared back model that enables faster adoption by all legal professionals.

What are the benefits of Legal Project Management?

Legal Project Management (LPM) provides the framework, tools and techniques that enables lawyers to –

1. Deliver on time;
2. Deliver on budget
3. Delight clients

The benefits of LPM for individual lawyers...

Through the coaching work that I do with lawyers and legal teams, I have also seen almost miraculous changes and amazing benefits for individual lawyers, including –

1. Improved focus and prioritisation
2. Reductions in stress and overwhelm
3. Increased satisfaction
4. Improved efficiency
5. Ability to cope with increased volumes
6. Clarity of client outcomes

One of my clients, a Managing Partner of a boutique firm, was amazed when the firm had a tripling of volume unexpectedly and the lawyers who had embraced LPM tools and techniques were able to cope with the increased demands whilst those that hadn't adjusted their ways of working really struggled. They ended up working longer hours and being more stressed than their colleagues who were using LPM.

The benefits of LPM for law firms...

LPM also provides significant benefits for law firms by –

1. Reducing write offs
2. Supports alternative billing
3. Improving profitability
4. Improving efficiency
5. Improving quality and effectiveness
6. Retaining clients
7. Retaining legal staff

Legal Project Management Lifecycle

All legal matters are projects, they are simply a special type of project. They all start and end, have a defined set of objectives and deliverables, and follow a consistent set of phases – even though the detail of the deliverables and activities in each phase are specific to the type of matter – e.g litigation if different to a property transaction, but each has common elements.

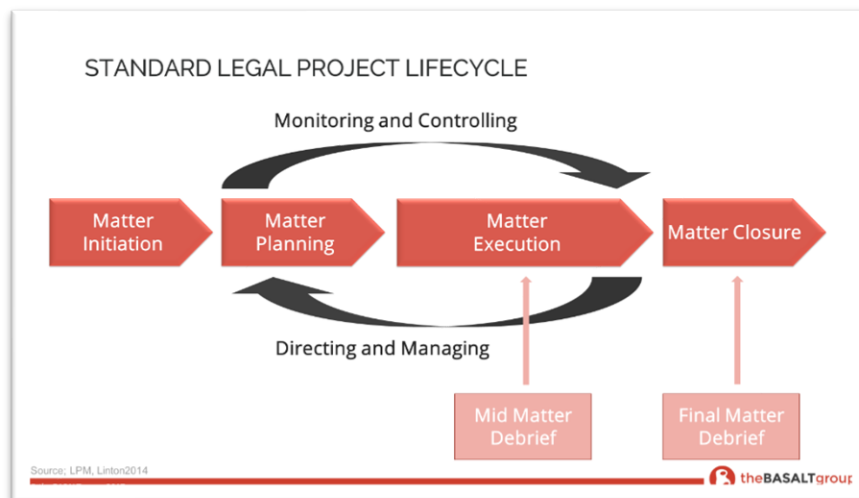
At the basic level all legal matters have the same standard phases –

1. Matter Initiation
2. Matter Planning
3. Matter Execution or Matter Delivery
4. Matter Closure

The unique elements for each type of matter occur within Matter Execution where all the deliverables and activities unique to that matter are undertaken to meet the client's objectives.

Once a plan has been put in place for legal matter, you can't just 'set and forget' and assume that the matter will run to the plan. This is where the art of legal project management comes in – with the critical 'directing and management' and 'monitoring and controlling' activities that ensure the matter stays on track by –

- Predicting and resolving risks to successful delivery before they occur
- Responding to issues that have occurred so they don't push you off course
- Directing the people assigned to the matter
- Managing client expectations
- Identifying and obtaining approval for variations to cost and time



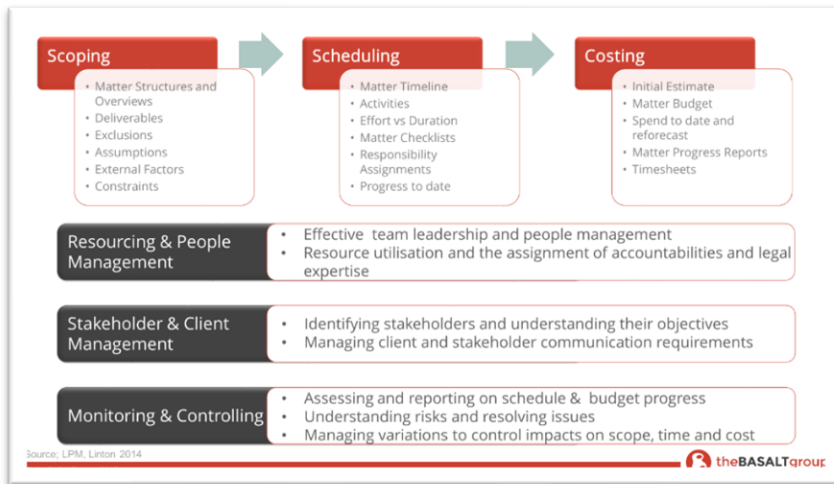
Legal Project Management Framework

I have selected and tailored good practices from the field of Legal Project Management to create a Legal Project Management Framework that is applicable to ALL legal matters. It contains the critical building blocks for running a successful matter and comprises –

1. Matter Scoping
2. Matter Scheduling
3. Matter Costing

These core competencies or building blocks are supported by specific disciplines –

- Resourcing and People Management
- Stakeholder and Client Management
- Monitoring and Controlling



It takes some time to understand and embed these disciplines and knowledge areas into legal practices, I've observed that the most successful and happy lawyers are the ones that have a degree of 'natural' talent in the area of project management. I encourage you to take the next step and equip yourself with the tools and techniques to deliver on time, on budget and delight your clients.

About the author...



This article was written by Therese Linton, Founder and Principal Consultant of The BASALT Group® encompassing The Positive Lawyer® and the Academy of Legal Leadership®. She is a global leader in the field of Legal Project Management and literally wrote the book. She also has unique expertise in Legal Process Improvement, Legal Portfolio Management, Legal Transformation and Legal Operations.

As a leading global expert in Legal Project Management, she has worked with thousands of lawyers to develop their capabilities and skills. As part of this work, she developed a ground breaking Legal Project Management Competency Framework and you can access it here

<https://products.basaltgroup.global/lpmcf1> or checkout the training programs and tools offered at www.basaltgroup.global

My aim is to inspire you to achieve great things and I look forward to joining you on your journey! Cheers....T

