

Legal Project Management 2022

Where are we now?

A decade after Legal Project Management started here's a quick recap on where we've been and a look forward to where we are going...

What is Legal Project Management?

Even a decade after it was created, Legal Project Management is still an emerging discipline in the legal sector that uses project management techniques and adapts them to apply to the management of legal matters. Practitioners of legal project management employ it in the process of providing legal services rather than in the substantive legal work itself. It is becoming increasingly common, especially when modern legal practices deal with alternative fee arrangements or where improving efficiency and client service is a goal...

In-house counsel and outside legal teams apply legal practice management principles, and it is fast becoming a non-negotiable skill set. To stay competitive, all lawyers need to understand the basic principles and be able to apply them to create legal project management procedures for the operation of their practice. At the same time, we need professional legal project management specialists who can work with legal teams to support the delivery of more complex systems.

Using legal project management, you can deliver on time and on budget and effectively manage variations. It is a game-changer, and it is here to stay, so it's time to get on board or be left behind!

Where did it all begin?

The changes that we see in the legal profession started with the Global Financial Crisis of 2008-2009, and it's taken over 10 years for its impact to be felt in the form of changes in the way we expect lawyers to deliver services.

For the first time, the legal profession experienced a major disruption and massive changes in client expectations. Firms needed to work differently if they wanted to stay in business, and there was significant pressure to increase the size of in-house legal teams and reduce legal budgets.

This triggered a willingness to explore disciplines and practices from other professions for the first time across the entire legal sector. Law firms explored concepts of legal outsourcing and legal offshoring. It was during this time that Legal Project Management and Legal Process Improvement were born. I was a senior program delivery professional working across many sectors when I found myself heading up the business project management office for Herbert



Smith Freehills. I was also lecturing in the Master of Project Management Program at Sydney University.

After I got the business project delivery side of things sorted out, I turned my attention to the legal side of the business. I couldn't understand why lawyers, who were obviously so intellectually capable, weren't using project management techniques to manage their legal matters. It was so obvious to me that legal processes were simply a different form of project and would greatly benefit from the application of project management tools and techniques.

I did some research and found that basic project management skills had been included in Senior Associate training for an entire day a few years ago. I asked what had happened and why the content was no longer being delivered. I learned it had only been a trial and that the attendees had not found the content useful. No wonder, whilst the training content was good, it was not tailored to the legal context, and the examples were not related to legal matters. Those who attended the training may have recognized the material's value in other applications, but they were unlikely to see how to meaningfully apply the techniques to their delivery of legal services.

Legal Project Management was Born

I started researching current trends and directed the library to perform daily searches for publications and articles in the field of Legal Project Management. I discovered there were a few other firms and legal thought leaders who were also starting to think along the same lines. I knew there was something in this; and with the right academic rigor and hands-on experience, it would be possible to tailor traditional project management techniques for application to legal matters.

I was given the go-ahead to develop a pilot training course in Legal Project Management and ran this very successfully for a few forward-thinking partners and their teams. I was so gratified when I was asked to deliver a one-hour Legal Project Management continuing education session for our clients. More than 200 people turned up to the Sydney presentation, and just under that number attended the session in Melbourne. The reviews from clients were raving, and I still remember one of them,

"Thank you, that was the best CPD training I have ever attended".

At the same time, we saw the emerging field of Legal Process Improvement getting started. In 2010, I was invited by the Head of Information Logistics (eDiscovery and Litigation Support) to work with the team to understand their processes and implement process improvement concepts. It came on the back of interesting work being done by Seyfarth and Shaw to implement Lean Six Sigma through the firm as part of their recovery from the Global Financial Crisis. We spent 18 months gradually modeling processes to remove waste and increase efficiency.

In 2012, I left Herbert Smith Freehills because I wanted to concentrate on Legal Project Management and that opportunity wasn't open to me in that firm. I immediately got busy writing one of the first books to be published in the field - *Legal Project Management*, (LexisNexis 2014), and I started lecturing for the College of Law, Australia, in the field of Multidisciplinary Project Management as part of their Master of Legal Practice curriculum.

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.

Legal Project Management is a pared-back model that enables faster adoption by all legal professionals. It supports new ways of working to ensure on-time and on-budget delivery.

What are the benefits of Legal Project Management?

Legal Project Management (LPM) provides the framework, tools, and techniques that enable lawyers to deliver on time; deliver on budget; and 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 near-miraculous changes and amazing benefits for individual lawyers, including –

1. Improved focus and prioritization
2. Reductions in stress and feelings of being overwhelmed
3. Increased job 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, expressed amazement when the firm tripled its volume unexpectedly and those lawyers who embraced LPM tools and techniques coped well 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. Supporting alternative billing methods
3. Improving profitability
4. Improving efficiency
5. Improving the quality of services
6. Retaining clients



7. Retaining legal staff

If you would like more information about the Legal Project Management framework and more specific tools and techniques, here's a link to some previous articles, [Understanding Legal Project Management](#), [Understanding Legal Portfolio Management](#), and [Understanding Legal Process Improvement](#).

Where are we now?

For a time, many law firms would use smoke and mirrors to respond to requests for proposals (RFPs) that required innovative approaches such as legal project management and legal process improvement. They would simply hire someone familiar with LPM to write content in those sections of the tenders even though they had not implemented the concepts within their own operations. Thankfully this practice seems to have ceased.

Where are we now -

- Most major law firms now have dedicated Legal Project Management or Legal Operations Teams that supply legal project management, process improvement, and pricing support.
- Mid-tier firms have also started to consider implementing modern process improvement techniques, and some of them now have dedicated internal Legal Project Management practices.
- We've also seen major consulting firms create Legal Operations practices to support legal teams with legal project management and legal process improvement.
- Progressive law schools in major universities are now offering the first units of study in Legal Project Management and Legal Operations.
- In-house teams are taking up the challenge slightly differently by starting to implement Legal Operations disciplines, including some level of Legal Project Management and Legal Portfolio Management.

Future of Law and Innovation

The concept of Future of Law and Innovation (FLIP) is attracting a lot of interest, and most developed nations now have dedicated FLIP societies or specific chapters within their existing legal societies and associations.

The Law Society of NSW conducted an inquiry into Flip in 2017. Its Flip report came up with 12 key findings and 19 recommendations. I've highlighted the ones that are aligned with Legal Project Management. Even though it is disappointing to note that it is not actually mentioned by name—it appears we still have a way to go!

1. Pressure from legal clients is increasing competition and the **need for value and transparency**
2. **New ways of working are proliferating**

3. In-house corporate lawyers are driving change – client-focussed service; legal technology, **legal process improvement; and cost monitoring**
4. Changing cultures and increased use of technology
- 5. New areas of work and new roles**
6. Artificial intelligence raises ethical and regulatory considerations
7. Funding is urgently required to assist access to justice
- 8. Law graduates of the future require new skills**
9. Change management techniques can enhance the well-being of lawyers when properly supported
10. Flexible working arrangements are on the rise and are increasingly expected by legal talent
11. Globalisation raises new opportunities and new threats for domestic firms
12. Innovation and changing client behaviors require practical guidance for lawyers

The type of comprehensive behavior change that is required will not be achieved until Legal Project Management competencies are included in the basic tertiary education that lawyers receive at the university level and then further enhanced through mandatory post-graduate practical experience.

So, the challenge is to convince universities and law schools to include Legal Project Management, Legal Process Improvement, and Legal Operations courses as mandatory units within law degree and postgraduate programs. This type of practical training will enable lawyers to satisfy the expectations of their clients and key stakeholders. It is a shame that so many universities still focus on black letter law, whilst overlooking the practical training and competency development that will equip lawyers to find satisfaction and success in their careers.

What's next?

Firstly, law schools and post-graduate practicing certificate programs MUST include units on Legal Process Improvement and Legal Project Management.

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

Law firms and in-house legal teams face many challenges when developing change programs designed to embed Legal Project Management and other innovative practices into their methods of working. The best way to integrate new ways of working, including Legal Project Management, is to undertake internal training and coaching programs led by a true expert.

As a project management expert, lecturer, author, and trainer, I have worked with thousands of lawyers. I know exactly how to shortcut the competency-building process and tailor the Legal Project Management principles and tools that best fit your practice area and preferred ways of working. The major components of a successful change program are as follows –

1. Create the burning platform – change or die!
2. Ensure sponsorship and adoption from the top
3. Provide change leadership training and support
4. Encourage a Growth Mindset and use Motivational Interviewing techniques
5. Spend wisely on genuine experts
6. Provide comprehensive training, supported by on-the-job coaching
7. Reinforce and reward the new behaviors
8. Make the new way to work mandatory!

If you would like more information about how to implement a Legal Project Management framework and other innovative ways of working, here's a link to a previous article [Embedding Legal Project Management](#)

About the author...



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

As a leading global expert, she has worked with thousands of lawyers to develop their capabilities and skills. Find out more and [register your interest in The POSITIVE Lawyer®](#) or sign up for one of the [new world-class CPD Units](#) in Legal Project Management, Legal Process Improvement, or Legal People Management.

Therese is also happy to chat, and you can [book a call](#) at a time that works for you.

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



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