

The role of Legal Project Management in public sector projects

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As a result, public sector bodies often look for their legal partners to demonstrate not just LPM experience, but a dedicated LPM function to support complex matters.

What does LPM look like in practice?

LPM provides a set of tools and techniques to enable a legal team (whether in-house or external legal partners) to effectively and efficiently project manage operational aspects of the service delivery, keeping the project on track in terms of scope, time, and costs.

Depending on the size, complexity and/or duration of the matter, LPM can be as simple as coaching lawyers to embed these techniques within their day-to-day work. For the larger projects, it might involve appointment of a dedicated legal project manager (PM) to work alongside the lawyers and whose role is solely to manage the operational aspects of the matter, allowing lawyers to focus on delivery of legal advice. LPM can also involve PMs working with wider teams on a consultative basis, to instil best practice to enable them to run matters more efficiently and effectively.

What are the benefits of LPM?

At its core LPM helps to bridge any gaps between the lawyers and their clients (whether internal or external). Even where a dedicated PM isn't appointed, embedding LPM principles in the legal team can significantly enhance delivery.

Taking a more controlled, risk-based approach is a key facet of LPM. It provides a platform for proactive stakeholder management, client reporting, costs control and the management of risks and issues as they arise. It also provides the client with a go-to contact for service delivery (in tandem with the client partner in many cases), and a more agile response.

That results in fewer surprises for the client, better communications and more matters being delivered on time and within budget. For the legal delivery teams, it also enhances client relationships by working with them more productively, it can reduce write-offs and removes certain stresses from the legal team throughout the delivery of the project.

How do we embed LPM?

LPM requires a PM, and/or LPM techniques, to be embedded from inception of the matter. To add the greatest value, the PM should be involved with scoping and pricing discussions upfront, co-ordinating the kick-off meeting (a key aspect of any legal project but sometimes overlooked), right through to project closure. It is part of the role of the PM to establish well-defined goals early on and make sure the project stays focussed on these as part of tracking and managing the project. As the matter progresses, the PM can co-ordinate regular

project board/steering group meetings to keep relevant stakeholders abreast of progress and to manage any issues/risks etc that arise and consequential changes which may be required to the scope as required.

There are generally four key phases to LPM:

- **Define** — at this stage the PM and lawyers work to understand client expectations, objectives, and success factors, understanding what is in and out of scope and any assumptions that need to be factored into the project. At this stage key milestones, should also be set, stakeholders identified and a budget set.
- **Plan** — this is where the detailed project plan is produced breaking down the project into phases and tasks) and scheduling those workstreams against milestones. Often it will also include a communications plan, resourcing plan, risk analysis and change plans.
- **Deliver** — throughout this stage the task is to manage the matter within the prescribed project plan (above). Risk and issues management is key.
- **Close** — the final stage involves the client signing-off the project. At this stage it's also important to take time to evaluate how the project went and discuss any lessons learnt.

LPM tools

As part of the LPM, a PM will be armed with a toolkit to steer the project through these phases. Legal-tech solutions play a key part in that toolkit.

Perhaps the most fundamental tool at a PM's disposal is the project plan. This 'map' of the project lifecycle is developed by the PM in conjunction with the legal team and is a vital tool in tracking the project and should be updated and amended as the project inevitably evolves. The project plan can also incorporate a Gantt Chart and/or PERT (Programme Evaluation and Review Technique) analysis. These tools allow the PM to diagrammatically represent the project schedule and assist with critical path analysis against certain fixed key project milestones.

The PM will also have at their disposal a suite of other tools and templates which can be adapted for each matter, but which may include, amongst many others:

- A project charter (forming part of stage one, 'Define' — as mentioned above). This is a high-level document setting out fundamental objectives and key aspects of the project and is often a very helpful reference point during any part of the lifecycle of the project.
- A risk management log (sometimes taking the form of RAID logs (Risks, Assumptions/Actions, Issues, Decisions). This allows the LPM to record and manage risks and issues as they arise.
- A communications plan.
- A roles and responsibilities matrix for each of the project team.
- A change management plan, including escalation protocol etc.
- Client reporting dashboards — these can be tailored to the requirements of the client and the project and provide an excellent (often online) platform for clients to be able to access progress reports on the status of a project for access at any time.

Project management, whether delivered externally or by a client's own team, is likely to become an increasingly vital element of the way in which legal services are delivered and for that reason Browne Jacobson LLP has recently established (and actively applies) a dedicated LPM function.

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