

Embracing Change: 5 Facts About Law Firm Innovation

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Think Good Ideas Don't Always Come from the Top



When the economy suffers, so does the legal industry. Law firms across the country have become entrenched in the daily doldrums of rallying the troops and drumming up business.

Desperate times call for innovative measures!

Change is not only key for successful growth, but also for sustaining in tumultuous times. Unfortunately, though, having an idea and seeing it come to fruition is easier said than done - especially in law firms.

Rees W. Morrison, author of the article [Ten Truths About Innovation in Law Departments](#), offers even more insight into the promise of innovation. Here, Morrison has broken down five true statements about change in legal departments - and the common myths associated with them.

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1. New ideas are plentiful, but are rarely implemented.

Ask anyone in a law department about what could be improved, and they will list at length. It's a myth that good ideas come only from the top or are rare. And, if internal sources of new ideas are not enough, these days -- unlike the times when a general counsel had relatively few ways to learn about new methods -- multiple channels pour out novelty. Conferences abound, groups for general counsel proliferate, trade journals headline trends, consultants pollinate among departments, books fill shelves, and online networks extol and transmit new practices instantaneously.

Ideas may be many, but without implementation they account for nothing. A creative idea for a law department practice has no value unless the department translates that new idea into actions.

2. Every law department (and firm) can innovate.

Innovation does not mean that no one else has done it before or that it is major; it means that a particular law department lawyer does something beyond the status quo in that department's context. **All law departments can push their envelopes.**

3. Law departments have limits on absorption of new practices.

There's no way around it: People resist change. It's a constant uphill battle.

That said, law firms should strive to dole out only small doses of change at a time. Too much of a good thing (ie change) requires too much energy over a long period of time and may burn people out.

4. Metrics foster innovation.

As law department managers gradually accumulate more measurements regarding what legal services cost and what works well, those metrics spur innovation. It's largely myth that benchmark numbers tell us what to do differently, but they certainly stimulate sharper thinking on what we can do better.

The confusion of the day-to-day workload lifts a bit when numbers tell a story -- especially one that supports improvement. Better benchmark surveys, with large numbers of participating departments, can give insights into what practices of staffing and spending correlate with best outcomes. Metrics also help persuade people that change will bring about improvement, and they help gauge progress.

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5. Modules of change make more sense than whole practices.

Some people view innovation as the adoption of a "best practice." Reality is more complex than that myth: Any change has multiple components so law departments that move in a new direction actually combine some subset of the available components and introduce their own variations. In a nutshell: Mix and max your own ideas to create innovation.

The legal industry, itself, has its own way to embracing change. Head over to [Law.com and read more of Morrison's article](#), which also offers an interesting perspective on innovation's wider applicability.

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