

Is Legal Project Management Really Different than Project Management?

By Pamela Woldow

In recent weeks, several bloggers have waged a spirited debate about whether Legal Project Management (LPM) is really just plain, old Project Management in a law firm setting. As you might expect, there are advocates on every side plus plenty of folks asking, who cares? Here's my take, as posted at [3 Geeks and a Law Blog](#):



As a lawyer who has used LPM in her own legal practice, and in the last four years has taught it to thousands of lawyers in law firms and corporate legal departments, LPM is a significant and independent variant of standard PM due to the legal environment in which lawyers operate. Equating the two would be like saying that since a horse has four legs and a dog has four legs, a dog is a horse.

One of the primary goals of PM is to reduce variation. That's perfect for turning out car fenders on an assembly line. PM is also aimed at collaborative efforts to achieve goals set forth in a Project Charter. So, it is excellent for planning linear processes, like software or systems development, where a team is working toward a singular goal.

For those of us who have practiced law, those PM goals don't work in real-world legal trenches. Law is inherently different from manufacturing and IT. In litigation, for example, you have an opposing counsel whose efforts, intellect and time are spent trying to frustrate, defeat, and unseat all your efforts. There is no single team all working to create a fender or a software installation. Instead, you have clashing, opposing forces that are paid (handsomely!) to think of and effect ways to undo the gains of the other side. In a software installation, for example, this would be like having someone erase programming code and toss the computers out the window every night after a day's work.

And, transactional work has the same tensions. In mergers and acquisition deals, there are fleets of brainy folks trying to move the price point in favor of their client. All the

while, business folks, shareholders, the press and others are bringing unique pressures to bear on the chess pieces that the lawyers are moving on the board.

Moreover, the players – the lawyers – have very specific personality traits that have been tested and written about many times. They tend to be extraordinarily autonomous and non-collaborative – markedly more so than the general population and other professionals.

Lawyers work very independently. In fact, we're trained to do so from law school onward, and the compensation structures in law firms intensify and reinforce that tendency. So, in law firms you have a boatload of autonomous, intelligent folks engaged in ritual warfare on behalf of clients who pay them to achieve certain goals. This is not an environment where standard PM is going to play well.

That said, there are processes that can be improved and made more efficient. There are patterns in matters or parts of matters that can be flow-charted and for which some parts of traditional PM approaches make sense. The push towards sharing information and collaborating that LPM supports absolutely enhances the efficacy of strategizing, staffing and managing legal matters. But, a dog is NOT a horse.

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