

Case Study at the Cutting Edge: Legal Project Management in Australia

By Pamela Woldow, Esq.
Partner, Edge International



The legal profession, sad to say, rewards its denizens with relatively few breakout moments, a dearth of challenges that allow its movers and shakers to break new ground. All the talk about law's "New Normal" notwithstanding, the legal landscape is a pretty conventional place, populated by more "first followers" than "first movers."

That's why it was both a privilege and a career highlight to work with King & Wood Mallesons to roll out Australia's first comprehensive Legal Project Management (LPM) initiative. Even those familiar with international law firms may not recognize the name, because until the firm's other recent astonishing bit of innovation – combining with China's King & Wood to create King & Wood Mallesons, a 1,800-lawyer super firm -- it was known as Mallesons Stephen Jaques. Clearly the combination with an Asian firm, rather than, say, a UK Magic Circle firm, reflects the firm's determination to bust outside the box.

Selective Perspective

King & Wood Mallesons spent the better part of a year assessing options for their full-immersion LPM initiative before selecting Edge to support LPM design, rollout, introduction and training. "We traversed the entirety of the providers in that professional services space," says their Managing Partner for Clients & Markets, Beau Deleuil, "and we thought they would give us the edge."

My colleague, Doug Richardson, and I soon found ourselves juggling a myriad of moving parts in collaboration with the firm's newly-minted internal project management department, headed by can-do-guru and Director of Legal Logistics, Michelle Mahoney.

Building in a Client Focus

Part of our brief was to design a series of bespoke LPM training client-orientated workshops. "In part [the LPM training] was driven by us and a desire to be more competitive, but in large part it's also because clients themselves are asking for it," says Deleuil. "The key benefits are that clients will see a new way of delivering services that gives them confidence, and we think that will be pretty revolutionary in the evolution of the market." King & Wood Mallesons' Australia Managing Partner, Tony O'Malley concurs: "Our aim is to make efficiency our business challenge, not our clients."

These initial client- focused workshops broke a lot of new ground and required constant revision and updating of content -- a process the firm has actively continued and augmented. Except for a common basic model of LPM stages and skills, nothing about these workshops came off the shelf. Each agenda was keyed to the kinds of work the firm performs for each client and the issues involved in their client relationships. Each program had to introduce LPM precepts while also providing a forum for candid exchange of ideas, clarification of client priorities and, yes, diagnosis of friction points.

As facilitators of these training workshops, we were called upon for some fancy footwork: keeping dialogue candid and focused...making sure all voices and viewpoints were heard and respected...keying content to LPM efficiencies and action steps...making sure the firm's lawyers made the most of this unprecedented client relations opportunity...and debriefing the training to assure that post-training workshop momentum was maintained on both the law firm and the client side. Exhilarating stuff, with feedback that showed the effort had been well worth it.

Spreading the Knowledge

King & Wood Mallesons' goal, however, was not just one-and-done training for a couple of selected practice groups. The firm wanted to take their LPM learnings from these workshops and design their own King & Wood Mallesons LPM training, facilitated in-house by their own people and tailored to meet the needs of their lawyers and clients across all practice groups. To support this goal, part of our role involved helping to bring a pool of carefully-vetted senior lawyers bringing them up to speed with instruction and LPM specific materials.

By the end of 2012, King & Wood Mallesons will have delivered LPM training to their 480 lawyers with more than three years of experience, across all of their Australian centres.

Looking Ahead

Although initial LPM rollout and training has focused on the firm's Australian lawyers, Deleuil says he already is receiving inquiries from the firm's overseas offices in Beijing, Hong Kong, Shanghai and London. "In Asia and China it's one step at a time. We want to get it right here first, and we will have to adapt it to those markets."

Deleuil expresses particular satisfaction with this initial phase of LPM activity and believes it eventually "will become something everyone [at KWM] chooses to do. Why wouldn't you do this?" he asks. "My strong view is that the early adopters of this, the lawyers who volunteer for training, run at it, and implement it, will lead the pack internally and externally. They will be speaking a language that clients get. They will gain confidence in what they are doing, and I think this will become the new normal."

We could not agree more.

Additional Resources

Chaffey, Claire, “Just Being a Lawyer No Longer Enough,” *Lawyers Weekly*, March 30, 2012 <<http://www.lawyersweekly.com.au/news/just-being-a-lawyer-no-longer-enough>>

Manglani, Manju, “King & Wood Mallesons to Train Nearly 500 Lawyers in Project Management,” *Managing Partner*, March 30, 2012 <<http://www.mpmagazine.com/node/5802>>

Collings, Olivia, “KWM Launches Project Management Skills with Edge,” *Australian Legal Business*, March 29, 2012 <<http://au.legalbusinessonline.com/news/breaking-news/kwm-launches-project-management-skills-with-edge/108118>>

Woldow, Pamela, and Richardson, Douglas, “Legal Project Management Enters Adolescence,” *Practice Innovations*, January 2012, Volume 13, Number 1 <<http://store.westlaw.com/signup/newsletters/practice-innovations/2012-jan/article2.aspx>>