

Legal Lean Sigma® and Project Management for Law Departments

By Catherine Alman MacDonagh, JD and Laura Colcord, MBA

There is ever increasing pressure on corporate legal departments to control budgets, reduce spend, improve predictability and efficiencies both internally and with outside counsel, and, on top of all that, deliver more value to their companies. Process improvement (PI) and project management (PM) are excellent responses, since they offer solutions in the form of tried and true methodologies and tools.

What are PI and PM?

Leading law departments (such as Dupont and GE) have long used process improvement to determine the best way to carry out work for better product AND service delivery. Process Improvement helps us determine the best way to carry out a certain kind of work to achieve:

- ▼ Efficiency
- ▼ Excellent quality of work and service
- ▼ High probability of successful outcomes
- ▼ Predictability

Project Management is a role and set of skills that ensures that for a particular engagement, we:

- ▼ Use our “best process” appropriately
- ▼ Actively manage schedules, staff, and deliverables throughout this matter

As such, we always recommend improving the process first, and then employing PM skills, using that process.

Conversations with Law Firms

Today's law firm and law department professionals are faced with new challenges and opportunities to help their firms and departments maximize efficiencies. They must develop and employ strategies and tactics based on the client perspective and reconnect legal costs to the value received. By using PI and PM approaches, legal departments establish common languages, use tools to collaborate on a range of topics from workflow to pricing – in short, a solid foundation in PI allows law departments to engage in a very different conversation with the law firms that provide service to them.

PI work always begins with Voice of the Client. Because it is built into the methodology, a discussion about what the law department finds valuable takes place right at the beginning – not at the end of the matter, where a debrief is important and helpful, but which comes too late to communicate requirements and expectations about work product and service delivery.

Law firms cannot – and should not – be expected to figure out everything on their own. Virtually every client panel sings the same refrain – we want law firms and lawyers that understand our business, speak our language and who will be excellent business partners. Yet too many corporate counsel leave their firms to their own devices, such as developing AFAs/pricing or staffing models, handling data and knowledge management or employing technology for things like discovery, e-billing or ongoing communication without the benefit of communication and true collaboration with their clients.

It goes almost without saying that business units want the same things from their in-house counsel as corporate clients want from their law firms. There is no question that companies have employed process improvement and project management with great success over the years; certain legal departments have developed PI and PM skills because it is either required (GE, for example) or desired by their companies. This would seem especially important to companies involved in manufacturing; however, the potential application of the disciplines is nearly inexhaustible.

It is instructive to read about the recent developments associated with the [Association of Corporate Counsel's](#) (ACC) Value Challenge. In particular, a piece on the 2012 [ACC's Value Champions](#) highlights “Efficiency. Economy. Effectiveness. Predictability. Value. These words are frequently heard in conversations about the practice of law, especially since the economic downturn began in 2008, often as desired characteristics or goals of attorney–client relationships.”

In ACC's [InfoPak on Managing Value-Based Relationships with Outside Counsel](#), it is noted that “in-house counsel wear many different hats, ranging from skilled legal advisors to managers of vital legal services, with varied roles in between. However, a common theme running across all of these roles is the need to deliver greater value back to the client in an ever competitive global economy.”

To “help corporate counsel focus on establishing and maintaining relationships with outside counsel in ways that are aligned with the law department's and corporate client's objectives,” ACC stresses the importance of determine a process is one of the foundational steps a law department must take:

Step 1: Understand the Corporate Strategy and Goals

Step 2: Define the Department's Vision, Mission, and Values

Step 3: Understand the Department's Differentiators

Step 4: Define the Critical Objectives to Accomplish

Step 5: Determine the Process Needed to Support Success

Step 6: Identify Metrics to Measure Progress

About the Legal Lean Sigma Institute

In addition to certification courses, programs, workshops and team leader training, we provide project facilitation, coaching and other support to help you both engage in process improvement as

well as develop novel approaches to working within law departments and with your law firms. To be successful, practitioners should be able to:

- ▼ Identify, evaluate and select process improvement opportunities that are valuable to the firm and its clients
- ▼ Apply appropriate process improvement tools and methods
- ▼ Lead and participate on process improvement teams, and
- ▼ Manage projects to deliver bottom-line results.

Legal Lean Sigma® certifications and programs were developed in collaboration by a former corporate counsel and a process improvement expert with global experience. In addition to a deep knowledge of the content, perhaps more importantly, the Legal Lean Sigma Institute is the only organization that is focused exclusively on the legal profession while possessing an abundance of experience working with other fields. With a perspective that comes from having served as a corporate counsel and from working with and inside legal departments and law firms, we are uniquely qualified.

Comparison of Legal Lean Sigma® Certifications & Skill Levels

White Belt	Yellow Belt	Green Belt	Black Belt
Understand processes, process mapping and measurement	Knowledgeable about processes, process mapping and measurement	Experienced in process mapping and measurement	Skilled in process mapping and measurement and can teach others
Familiar with basic language and concepts of key PI methodologies	Knowledgeable in basic language and concepts of key PI methodologies	Experienced in using one or more key PI methodologies	Skilled using one or more key PI methodologies and can teach others
Familiar with DMAIC phases in executing process improvement projects	Familiar with DMAIC phases, steps and tools for each phase	Experienced in using DMAIC to execute a project, have used most common tools for each phase	Have used DMAIC to execute several projects, skilled with the most common tools
Know that there are many useful process improvement tools	Know the most common process improvement tools and how they are used	Have used the most common process improvement tools and know which others are available	Skilled with a range of process improvement tools and can teach others
Understand key components of systematic process improvement	Knowledgeable about key components of systematic process improvement	Experienced in delivering the key components of systematic process improvement	Able to create the key components of systematic process improvement in a novice organization

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About the Co-Founders of the Legal Lean Sigma® Institute

Laura Colcord is a Legal Lean Sigma



Master Black Belt. She is an internationally-known Process Improvement expert who has pioneered the use of Lean and Six Sigma in many non-traditional applications,

including financial services, higher education, health care, support functions, and new product development.

Laura began her process improvement career at Exxon Chemical, continued at Booz-Allen and Dove Consulting before becoming an independent consultant. She has worked in more than 20 different countries for over 30 years and brings a unique depth of expertise to her work as a result.

Laura's consulting practice encompasses the Process Improvement spectrum, including developing internal PI resources, assessing improvement potential for an organization, leading process improvement projects, and helping leaders design systematic PI programs for their organizations.

Laura has a B.S. in Chemical Engineering and a MBA from NYU's Stern School of Business. She was a Fulbright Scholar in Germany.

Laura is the Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer of the Legal Lean Sigma Institute.

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Legal Lean Sigma® courses and programs have been delivered to professionals from more than 100 law firms, legal departments and organizations associated with the legal profession. Laura Colcord and Catherine Alman MacDonagh of the Legal Lean Sigma Institute are faculty members of ACC's Value Challenge Master Class, George Washington University's Masters of Law Firm Management program, and presenters at firm retreats, the Association of Legal Administrators Large Law Firm Retreat, the Legal Marketing Association Annual Conference, and LSSO's RainDance Conference.

Catherine Alman MacDonagh, JD is a



Legal Lean Sigma Black Belt and a certified Six Sigma Green Belt. She is passionate about teaching those in the legal profession about process improvement and the benefits it delivers.

Catherine is a former corporate counsel who brings the client perspective to all of her work. She is known for her successes as a law firm executive and for implementing innovative strategies as well as business development training and coaching programs for professional services firms for more than 20 years.

She is a Co-Founder of the Legal Sales and Service Organization (LSSO) and the Co-Developer and Chief Enthusiasm Officer of the Legal Mock tail™, an experiential networking training program for lawyers.

Catherine is the co-author of two books: *The Woman Lawyer's Rainmaking Game* with Silvia Coulter and *The Law Firm Associate's Guide to Personal Marketing and Selling Skills* with Beth Cuzzone. She is a trained facilitator and frequent speaker and enjoys teaching a graduate professional services marketing class at Emerson College.

Catherine is the Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the Legal Lean Sigma Institute.

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