

Achieving world-class basics for law firms:

How bimodal programme delivery can fast-track
IT success

Driving practice efficiencies for IT and Operations leaders in larger law firms is nothing new. However, the pressure is huge for IT team resources, capacity and capabilities to deliver 'world class basics' – IT that just works – all while seamlessly integrating legacy systems, and being seen to deliver technological innovations.

The market is crowded and merger and acquisition activity continues at pace. Law firms face stiff competition and are fighting to remain relevant to clients. Unsurprisingly, firms are acutely focused on how to sell smarter, reduce delivery cost, and improve quality of service to ensure their ongoing ability to win new business in a dynamic market^[1].

In addition, just under half of IT leaders say that growth is hampered by the firm's legacy IT infrastructure, and just over a third say their existing systems are neither agile or scalable enough to support future expansion^[2].

"IT and Operations leaders are under pressure to innovate and quickly adapt to these new market realities whilst cranking the handle on legacy system upgrades," explains Tiggy Robinson, Partner at Nine Feet Tall.

IT leaders find themselves on a constant round of upgrades to replace end of life products and new implementations to replace a complex array of technologies acquired over a long period.

But getting the basics right is no longer a case of having your practice management, document management, and case management systems working seamlessly. These platforms should be mobile enabled, link to complex workflows and should sit alongside a range of other tools such as OCR, digital asset management, e-Billing and CRM, that underpin efficient operations. The demand for insightful analytics and Business Intelligence mined from all of these databases is also rising rapidly and creating new challenges.

"IT and Operations leaders face two really tough fundamental challenges. The first is to balance their portfolio, investments and priorities between legacy infrastructure improvements and making leaps in innovation," explains Tiggy. "The second is to ensure the firm has access to the right expertise and resources at the right time to get these projects delivered quickly, so that their value can be realised – and they can move on."

Little wonder then, with so much on the agenda that many upgrade programmes stall or over-run due to the sheer pressure on resources and lack of prioritisation. The result? Timelines expand, costs mount, and confidence plummets.

Bimodal programme delivery – getting the balance right to fire up project success

At Nine Feet Tall we encourage our clients to consider a bimodal programme delivery model, where the requirement to pioneer new capability is balanced with the need to deliver world-class basics – and, crucially, each benefits from the right amount of dedicated resource at the right time.

1

Review your portfolio

2

Consider a more flexible IT project delivery model

3

Map flexible resources to phasing



Matter management

A UK based Top 100 law firm had begun the implementation of a new matter management platform, but the project had stalled and firm-wide buy-in was low.

The Nine Feet Tall team partnered to inject pace and rigour into the change programme, reducing delivery time by 4 months.



Practice management

A top European Intellectual Property firm needed additional expertise during the implementation of their practice management system.

The Nine Feet Tall team was engaged to project manage the Test and Go Live phases, resulting in an accelerated delivery time, reduced supplier consultancy costs, and faster time to deliver benefits.

1

Review your portfolio

Begin by reviewing your change portfolio and allocate projects to either the world-class basics or innovation buckets. The world-class basics category should contain those projects which are critical and necessary to run efficient operations. The innovation category will have those projects which may be pioneering or 'test and learn' in nature and include those projects which are client-led; often their impact is not firm wide.

While considering which category each project fits into, that is also the perfect time to ensure that these projects still align with your overall business strategy. Here, ruthless prioritisation is key. You cannot deliver everything with limited resources, so if something is added to the list due to client or partner needs or demands, a less critical project should be removed. This transparency about capacity to deliver is a hard conversation to have, but critical to the successful delivery of your overall portfolio. Having a bimodal analysis and prioritisation in place can help immensely with those conversations.

2

Consider a more flexible IT project delivery model

The skills and expertise required for these two different types of projects can differ. Many firms now have specific innovation hubs, that may sit outside of IT, but use the IT team's skills to deliver smaller, faster projects, often adopting an agile methodology or more agile ways of working. In addition, large scale PMS implementations, which can take years to complete, may also not sit exclusively with IT, but will require a considerable amount of resources. Many firms look to bring in additional interim resources to manage these projects and programmes and to support during design and implementation phases, as these projects tie up resources for a considerable amount of time.

Take a hard look at your internal resources: their capabilities, strengths, development needs and career aspirations and be realistic about where you have any capability or capacity gaps. In-house resources often add the most significant value on innovation projects that have the potential to create a step-change for the firm, instead of grinding through a cycle of constant upgrades. In addition, internal teams may see delivering the new, ground-breaking technology projects as those which will enhance their careers.

3

Map flexible resources to phasing

Breaking your projects into distinct phases will help you to deliver key benefits as early as possible. Map the capabilities and resources you'll require for each phase. Having a strong project leader is critical to success. Many firms have gaps in experienced project and programme management capabilities.

During the design phase, make sure you have a sufficient number of skilled Business Analysts dedicated to the project who can liaise effectively with the business and also be credible with technical teams.

Business readiness is often overlooked until the later stages of the project, sometimes too late, and without careful consideration about how changes will land with your teams on the ground. Having experienced Change Leads is critical to the successful implementation and adoption of these tools.

Consider a flexible resourcing model by looking at options to pull in specialist external capability to run some of your projects and/or in combination with expertise drafted in for short bursts of activity. An experienced, multi-disciplined external project team, trusted time and time again to get projects delivered, will churn through your world-class basics programme. This will enable you to reap the benefits faster and boost firm-wide confidence; while freeing up your own staff to focus on initiatives that truly add value to the firm.

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Tiggy Robinson, Partner, Nine Feet Tall



Case Management System and process design

A national legal services provider had grown rapidly and disparate supporting systems were no longer fit for purpose. The Nine Feet Tall team partnered to design common ways of working and led a case management system implementation, which reduced errors by 80% and accelerated growth plans.

Legacy systems are failing ^[2]

50%

of IT leaders say growth is hampered by legacy IT infrastructure.

30%

of existing systems are not agile or scaleable enough to support future expansion.

Nine Feet Tall – your trusted project delivery partner

At Nine Feet Tall, we manage and deliver complex IT system implementations. Our team is experienced at bringing rigour, pace and quality to the change programmes of many of the UK's top 100 law firms. We accelerate project delivery, enabling IT and Operations leaders to realise business benefits faster and boost firm-wide confidence, while focussing their in-house resources on initiatives that add the greatest value.

With a track-record of successful delivery of more than 200 implementations across multiple systems, our team lives and breathes complex IT project and programme delivery. We work as a partner to your teams and engage your business users to embed lasting change.

Our project success speaks for itself. If that's not enough, we:

- Guarantee we can find a minimum of 10% process efficiencies
- Are happy to link our fees to the delivery of the project outcomes
- Can commit to scale within 2 weeks



Tiggy leads a Nine Feet Tall team of legal sector specialists. Skilled in project delivery, an expert culture and change manager, she has led technology, efficiency and post-acquisition programmes for some of the UK's leading law firms.

Tiggy Robinson, Partner

Get in touch

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