

Project partnering for law firms:

Building the balanced project team

Read any of the industry analyst predictions on the focus of IT spend in legal services over the next five years and you're left in no doubt about the billions of pounds being invested in digital transformation – software, infrastructure and programmes to drive efficiencies, improve customer experience and transform the legal services model.

The move away from pen and paper began many years ago. However, it is only relatively recently that firms began to understand the impact and benefits of providing services which allow their teams to work in an agile way and truly collaborate with their peers and clients.

As a result, IT and Operations leaders have significant investments in change, comprising hundreds of projects and programmes. Many are focussed on keeping up with the pace of change which is critical to the future relevancy of their firm, and they are implementing features and products and using technology that was not invented 18 months ago. No longer can IT leaders afford to run too many large monolithic programmes that go on for two to three years. Instead, they are focusing on very rapid delivery cycles using agile methodologies, asking 'how do I mobilise a project very quickly? how do I use the right delivery techniques to deploy projects and get technology in use faster and more effectively?'

Alongside legal skillsets, having the expertise to manage complex IT programmes successfully is the critical capability that enables law firms to operate successfully and differentiate. Their challenge is the scarcity of highly experienced talent, capable of empowering their leadership to act with greater agility and achieve better outcomes, combined with a myriad of suppliers vying for their business.

In-house project management is often the first-choice route for a variety of reasons. Employees are on-site and available for queries at every step of the way. The ability to generate solutions often follows from understanding how the problem was created in the first place. When using in-house resource, it's important to map out the volume of work so that an assessment can be made on the capacity needed and look at the capabilities required for each phase of the project.

Consider whether in-house resource has experience of delivering that specific project or whether they are learning as they deliver, in which case there will be a learning curve cost to delivery. In addition, assessing whether in-house resources can deliver the optimum result from a technical, business-readiness, and business engagement perspective is also critical, as is linking performance and remuneration to delivering project outcomes, as you would do with any externally provided support.

Most firms, however, are at capacity with their current team of IT Project and Change Managers, or the cost of having them on a learning curve to deliver is considerable, and they look for external support to ensure critical projects are delivered successfully.

But this support comes in all shapes and sizes, so what's helpful to know when selecting the right type of supplier who can deliver beyond your expectations and become a truly trusted partner?

The choices



External contractor

Think about:

Scalability

Risk and reward



Software provider

Think about:

IT-led vs. business-led solution

Business readiness



Global consultancy

Think about:

Flexibility

Fixed vs. tailored solutions



Niche consultancy

Think about:

Depth of law firm experience

Flexible resource model

Evidence of value and impact

Key considerations for selecting the right project delivery partner

1 External contractor

Often the go-to option when additional resource is needed quickly, contractors provide a relatively low-cost way to inject specific expertise into your team. When considering external contractors, take into account the level of scalability you require and the speed with which you need resource to scale.

Ensure you take up sufficient references and speak to previous clients where possible. Check whether the contractor is willing to be flexible on the effort required to match the ebbs and flows of the project. Also, have a plan for back-up resource when your contractors are not available for periods at critical points in the programme.

2 Software provider

Your software vendor will usually offer project management resource, a crucial asset for bringing deep product knowledge and ensuring the technical development and delivery of the project. However, you cannot rely on a project manager supplied by your solution provider to plan and manage the delivery of all the elements of the project which sit on the business and non-technical side of the project. The business readiness workstream, for example, is crucial for determining how IT processes marry up with current working practices and what impact any changes will have on ways of working, as well as understanding, engaging with and speaking the same language as business users.

3 Global consultancy

The originators of many of the project methodologies and frameworks, the big four and other global consulting firms have a huge resource pool and a wide skill set that underpins their credibility and reputation to act on a large-scale, global basis for just about any type of business. When considering a global consultancy option, ensure you get to meet the team who will actually carry out the work to ensure a good fit. Think about what type of resources you need, for how long, and where your budget will be best spent. In addition, consider what methodology they recommend you adopt and whether it is right for your firm.

4 Niche consultancy

Niche consultancies can be nimble with expertise that spans different aspects of programme and project delivery. One single resource is likely to have multiple skills and experience, which means they are capable of handling a variety of aspects on the project, adding significant value and representing a good return on your investment. Consider which sectors your niche consultancy partner specialises in, their depth of experience with similar law firms, plus their expertise in dealing with the systems and projects that sit in your portfolio. Discuss your resource requirements over the lifecycle of the project and ask for a flexible resource model. In addition, explore whether they will adopt a risk and reward pricing model to link fees to the successful delivery of project outcomes.

How to choose the right delivery partner – think...

1. Flexible

Being flexible and nimble with the ability to do small and fast, just as well as large and lengthy projects is a key asset of any project delivery partner. As is the ability to flex resources to adapt to the peaks in workload and the requirement for specialist expertise.

2. Tailored

Rather than using a fixed project methodology, look for an approach that uses best practice but which tailors the output and deliverables to your firm's unique dynamics.

3. Pragmatic

Decrease the complexities in your programme by working with a partner who is highly pragmatic and uses just the right amount of governance to champion the needs of the firm and the achievements of your outcomes.

4. Value-driven

Establish clear business impact and ensure your project benefits are achieved by linking fees to project outcomes.

5. Cultural fit

Ensure swift acceptance of your project partner's team within your firm by assessing their cultural fit – What are their values? Do they align with your firm's? Listen to the language they use and their outlook. How do these values inform their working practices? Question how they will establish an understanding of your firm's culture and adapt to it.

6. Impactful

A partner should have a very clear view on how they can swiftly deliver real impact on your programme. Within two weeks you should expect to see a step change in the programme with the team operating in new ways. Think too about a partner who can help you to deliver lasting change. One that will work with your project teams to equip them with the right skills, processes and techniques, and empower them to use these when delivering future projects and programmes.

Nine Feet Tall: your trusted delivery partner

Nine Feet Tall manages and delivers complex IT transformation projects. Our team is experienced at bringing rigour, pace and quality to the change programmes of the UK's top 100 law firms, enabling them to accelerate delivery, realise benefits faster and boost firm-wide confidence.

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 with our client teams and engage their 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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