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Is Dechert Ahead of the Curve?

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We can imagine an experienced law firm partner rolling her eyes: Why should I have to sit through a six-hour presentation on project management when I've been managing cases for years?

Eye rolling aside, every lawyer at Dechert will have to attend such presentations in what is believed to be the first instance of an Am Law 200 firm teaching its lawyers project management techniques to expedite the legal process, according to the Legal Intelligencer, an Am Law Daily sibling publication.

Pamela Woldow, a consultant at Altman Weil who works with in-house law departments, is doing the training. That's not a coincidence, of course. In-house lawyers want to save money, and they want their outside law firms to find ways to handle cases faster and cheaper.

One way to do that is project management, a catch-all term for standardizing processes, planning matters more carefully at the outset and providing better cost certainty for clients. Firms should be able to ballpark the cost to produce, say, a motion for summary judgment in a particular sort of litigation, experts told the Intelligencer.

That's actually a pretty relevant example. At a panel of in-house lawyers we attended last month, representatives from CPA Global, a leading legal outsourcer, said a motion for summary judgment is the perfect example of something that can be broken into distinct parts--with some of those parts completed (perhaps in India) through an outsourcing firm.

The message at that event was clear: Firms will lose business unless they find a way to make routine legal work affordable for their clients. So perhaps Dechert is ahead of the curve. Woldow faced skepticism early in the process, particularly from finance lawyers. But she appears to have won some of them over.

"Lawyers like to believe that everything they do is unique and complex," she told the Intelligencer. "The truth is there are some parts of representation that are complex, but there is an awful lot that is rather easily mapped."