



AND THE ART OF LEGAL NETWORKING

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INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON
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Turning Innovative Ideas Into Results: A Practical Guide

BY LINDSAY GRIFFITHS ON JUNE 20, 2017



During the recent CLOC conference, attendees had the opportunity to receive a complimentary copy of Richard Susskind's second edition of "[Tomorrow's Lawyers: An Introduction to Your Future](#)." Susskind also spoke as the lunch keynote on the first day, and shared with us that while his first edition had been written for young and aspiring lawyers in the profession, he had found that everyone interested in the changing legal

ecosystem wanted to hear more about (and sometimes argue with) what he had to say. And so the second edition was updated and published.

Towards the end of the book, with respect to the future of the legal industry, Susskind says:

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Given our economic conditions, the shift towards liberalization, the new providers in the marketplace, and the burgeoning, exponential increase in the power and uptake of technology, I find it unimaginable that our current legal institutions and legal profession will remain substantially unchanged over the next decade. Indeed, it seems to me that the least likely future is that little will change in the world of law. And yet, the strategies of most law firms, law schools, and departments of justice assume just that. In truth, for much of the legal market, the current model is not simply unsustainable; it is already broken.”

Those are strong words, but we’re living in a time when change is fast-paced, faster than it’s ever been. And while most leaders in the industry are willing to accept that change is happening, not many of them are either willing or able to do anything about it.

Rather than opine on the challenges to change (which we can certainly do another time), let’s look at what Susskind emphasizes as a response to what he calls as the “more-for-less challenge” (I encourage you to read his book to understand that in depth) – collaboration. He suggests that in-house lawyers are looking for greater collaboration both among their outside counsel and between themselves and their outside counsel.

One company that is taking this challenge by the horns is Telstra, who presented at the CLOC conference on “Turning Innovative Ideas Into Results: Why Collaboration is Critical to Success.” They shared their case study of partnering with law firm Herbert Smith Freehills on a series of “design thinking workshops and innovation sprints to tackle productivity opportunities.” If that sounds like a bunch of management-speak and fluff, I can tell you that these workshops helped them to save more than 40,000 lawyer hours – in a time when in-house legal departments are being challenged to find ways to cut their legal spend by 30-50%, and most of their outside counsel are only able to offer them a 10% discount, that is something that makes you sit up and pay attention. For outside law firms, the subsequent case study presents a tangible opportunity for collaboration and adding value AND it can also be a template that you can use within your own firms for implementing change.

Presenting the case study were [Mick Sheehy](#), General Counsel of Finance Technology Innovation & Strategy, Telstra, and Ohten APAC’s [Lisa Leong](#) and [Tristan Forrester](#) (both formerly of HSF).

Mick kicked off the presentation by sharing that in order for this project to be successful, they had to have three key ingredients:

1. An innovation culture: they needed a constant focus on the future, with no “sacred cows.” Nothing at the company is beyond the reach of innovation.
2. Legal operations capability and accountability: one person whose job it is to make change happen – the problem with joint responsibility is that there’s no accountability.
3. An innovation agenda: create strategy and planning.

Lisa said that their goal at HSF had been to create “magical client experiences.” To meet this goal, they developed a radical partnership with Telstra. They adopted the idea that “legal is one system,” and said they would stand together to face the disruption in the legal market. Lisa feels strongly that it’s either “disrupt, or be disrupted.” While some of these conversations may be difficult for outside counsel to have with their clients, it’s better to be a part of them, than to get a call saying that their services are no longer needed.

The Telstra Project

This radical partnership involved creating a forum – they took 15-20 in-house lawyers from across the business units at Telstra. They focused on younger lawyers with the idea of giving them a voice, and HSF facilitated the process and workshops. They wanted a process that drove implementation, rather than just discussion.

Using design thinking, they first brought together 15 lawyers around the idea of reducing low value/low risk work that their in-house team does, and asked them to brainstorm what some of this work includes. They landed on four areas, which included things like legal review of communications and internal meetings.

Next, they broke them into small groups to drive action on that. They did an audit on the current time that they estimated was spent on each of these tasks – they did a simple survey asking everyone to estimate how much time they spend on each of these tasks. That gave them a baseline to measure change, and then when it came to asking Telstra to invest in the project, they had the data to back it up.

Following this, it was time to implement these in what they called 8-10 week “sprints.” These sprints were essentially test runs of solutions developed by the small groups, who mapped them out and decided who would do what. No one was asked how the projects would end up, just how they should get started (this kept them from being too mired down in challenges). There was also built-in accountability half way through the sprints and at the end. They had another workshop at the end to find out what they planned to do next – simple, but powerful.

In between “sprints,” they had implementation lessons, which were comprised of identifying what they’d learned, the challenges and failures, and how to implement change in *this* particular organization. That helped them learn lessons about Telstra, some small and some big. These sprints are now institutionalized,

and they rotate lawyers through them regularly as they work to implement the changes throughout the entire legal department. In fact, it's more than just about rotating the lawyers through – Mick, Lisa, and Tristan have lawyers from within Telstra approaching them regularly to find out when it's their turn to participate in the program because they're so excited to be a part of it.

Results

From the first round, four areas emerged:

- 1. Internal meetings:** They went through a number of sprints, which were focused on internal legal meetings. When they surveyed the group, the results showed that they spent one day per fortnight in legal meetings, which fell into two categories – information sharing and decision making. The groups decided to work to categorize their meetings, articulate what decisions had to be made, and only invite the necessary people. For information-sharing meetings, attendees could opt in, but were only allowed to attend 2 1/2 hours per week.
The results: They found a 55% reduction in the time spent in meetings, with 92% saying they weren't less productive and 80% saying they were *more* productive. This was over 8 weeks of testing.
- 2. Reporting:** Telstra put together a report on their top matters, which went to the manager, and on up the chain. 75 hours per week were being spent on this, and although there was a lot of push-back initially, it turned out that the two most important people weren't even reading it, and it was too long to be usable. They decided to continue to produce it, but made it much shorter, and therefore more usable.
- 3. Legal review of communications:** Through their sprints, they were able to reduce this by 29%
- 4. NDAs:** Automating these resulted in an 82% reduction in time. They had 2-3 lawyers doing this full time previously, who are now doing other work.

Throughout all of these, Mick emphasized that communication, both with the lawyers involved, and the business units, is key.

Key Lessons Learned

Telstra is now tackling bigger and harder projects, and Mick shared that they're able to do this because of some key lessons that they learned:

- Take on smaller projects first to get some wins on the board.
- Eliminate material amounts of work.
- It's important to have data to back up what you're saying to the company/firm.
- You have to be able to move fast. If you're waiting for more than 70% of the information to be available to you on a project, you've waited too long.

- It's less expensive to be wrong than you think.
- Communication in change management is hugely important.
- It's nice for a company to see the legal department being innovative – I'd venture to say that it's really nice for clients to see their *law firms* being innovative too.

So if you want to change by design, you need to be action-oriented, said the speakers. What are the key components to that?

- ***Having an experimental mindset:*** don't be afraid to fail (as Mick said, it's less expensive than you think).
- ***Make it user-centered:*** the things you're changing should be of value to someone.
- ***Have an action bias:*** there tends to be too much talk and not enough action – Mick calls this being an “intellectual piranha.” We need to roll up our sleeves and try something. There will be some discomfort and we might fail, but we *will* learn.

Importantly, *leading* change is better than change *management* – leading change implies you have a choice, while managing it implies it's something that's been forced on you that you have to handle. For those of you who are change leaders and want to start a movement (like those of us who were at CLOC), the speakers had some advice:

- Have a shared purpose: what's the “why?” Think about what would the world look like.
- Be open about some of the risks: Mick asked what we thought the biggest challenge was from his staff, and we agreed that it was the fear that peoples' jobs were at risk. Don't be afraid to address that in the open.
- Success stories: share and celebrate all of them, even if you only tried something.
- Group rituals: these can create a sense of team. Creating a sense of team helps invest people, so pay attention to these.

We've talked here before on Zen about how creating pilot programs within your firm can be the way to test the waters with big changes, and it seems that Telstra has supercharged that idea. Not only that, but HSF took the idea of collaboration with their clients and ran with it, providing HUGE value in a way that other firms could certainly replicate with existing clients. While this isn't exactly the type of collaboration Susskind is talking about in his book, it gets us started down the path of working together more for the overall success of the legal community.