Treating operations as the economic engine

What I've built for firms where the strategy is sensible, the AI tools are licensed, and the margin still has not moved

General briefing · Alt-V Law

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In short. Operations is the leverage spine of the firm; without it, strategy stalls and AI buys licences instead of margin. I've built a reading of law firm operations across five dimensions (the LOMM), a sideways view across the ten business-services functions (the BOM), a catalogue of the eleven improvement levers that move the needle, a per-function intervention menu, a Process Discovery and Evaluation Engine for the one or two processes a firm needs to see at depth, and a four-phase engagement shape that runs the whole thing in twelve weeks.

The three lenses

The LOMM. Five stages (Owner-Operator → Functional → Structured → Managed → Adaptive) across five dimensions: ops function shape, matter economics visibility, standard processes, data posture, AI posture. Overall stage is the *minimum* of the five, not the average. The full ninety-minute diagnostic unpacks ten operating dimensions underneath - matter intake, rate setting, resource allocation, WIP and billing, realisation cadence, panel and client management, practice-group planning, technology stewardship, data and reporting, people and careers. A separate four-level Boutique Operating Maturity model carries sub-fifty-fee-earner firms.

The BOM. The sideways cut. Ten business-services functions (finance, HR, IT, marketing and BD, risk and compliance, facilities, secretarial, knowledge, procurement, COO/PMO) with cost-to-serve against sector benchmarks. Mid-market sector median total business-services ratio is 8.5–9.5% of fees. Where a firm sits meaningfully above it, the excess is usually spread across the function mix.

The eleven levers. Organisation design · AI-driven automation · shared services · outsourcing · offshoring · process improvement · technology consolidation · spend and procurement · demand management · benchmarking · pricing-profitability-LPM. Ten work the cost base; the eleventh works the margin side. Per-function the intervention menu is specific: time-entry AI and matter profitability in finance; AI governance and application rationalisation in IT; pitch automation and CRM data in BD; AML/KYC document AI and conflicts automation in risk; EA pool migration and secretarial workforce evolution in HR.

The Process Discovery and Evaluation Engine. For the one or two processes a firm needs at depth - matter opening + AML, billing to cash, file closure - Alt-V runs a consultant-driven engine: structured process model, deterministic metrics (cycle efficiency, handoff density, rework loops, control coverage), a six-dimension process profile, and (where PMS logs are available) a described-vs-actual reconciliation that surfaces phantom steps and dark activities. It is reserved for the one or two processes that matter most.

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How a full engagement runs

The reference Operational Review is twelve weeks, four phases, three facilitated workshops. **Set-up** (weeks 1–2). **Diagnose** (weeks 3–5) - Diagnostic, Benchmark, ten function-specific interview guides, maturity assessment. **Options and future-state design** (weeks 5–9) - service-delivery decision framework, lever-selection prioritisation, target operating model. **Business case, board decision, handover** (weeks 9–12) - board pack, implementation methodology, PIR calendar. Lighter shapes: a three-to-four-week Snapshot Diagnostic against three to five functions; a sixteen-to-twenty-week Comprehensive OR + Org Design when the firm wants the review and the redesign in one scoped piece of work.

The sample pack

Three artefacts across two invented scenarios. **Ashcombe Verity LLP** (280 fee-earners, six offices, £62m fees, independent, COO 18 months in, MP asking why the AI tools are not in the P&L) runs through the Benchmark and the Diagnostic. **Calder Rowan LLP** carries the worked Readiness Report - a different firm because the Readiness Report is a different shape of artefact (a scoped paid deliverable, not a self-run tool).

Where this tends to be useful

1. **Before an AI investment case.** Replaces the “which vendor” conversation with the “do we have the operating base this spend needs” one.
2. **After a lateral programme.** Growth through laterals reshapes the BOM quietly; the Benchmark run against the new footprint gives the honest answer.
3. **Before a strategy day.** The ops counterpart to the Strategy Diagnostic. Firms running strategy days without an operating-model assessment usually produce a strategy their current operating maturity cannot execute.

How much of your current business-services spend do you actually believe is buying leverage that compounds - and how much is just paying for the lights to stay on?

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