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dentons rodyk

DENTONS RODYK

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I. Client-centred culture of innovation

As of 2019, Dentons Rodyk is on track to complete over 51 client-driven innovation projects in two years, across nearly all its practice and business groups. It has defined its innovation mission as a way to (a) transform the solicitor-client relationship as a full-service law firm, and (b) empower all 400+ employees to build an excellent career in the 21st century. It stands as Singapore’s oldest law firm, with more than 158 years of history, and credits its culture of innovation and change as crucial to its successes. Additionally, the firm recognises that heavy

investments across two decades in cybersecurity, IT infrastructure, and productivity tools have created innovation “readiness”, allowing it to undertake complex transformation efforts.

The firm has developed an innovation methodology which leverages supportive elements of its culture and tailors best practices across various disciplines to the firm’s needs. Significantly, in 2017 the firm obtained extensive input from nearly 100% of its lawyers around existing pain points and opportunities in the solicitor-client relationship – which formed the basis for its ambitious innovation agenda and has bolstered continued stakeholder support. In 2019, Dentons Rodyk will become an innovation hub within Dentons, the world’s largest law firm.



¹ Rocio leads global Dentons efforts to develop solutions with exceptional value for our global clients, and engage the breadth of Dentons talent to build a strong innovation ecosystem. In 2017, she helped launch the Innovation unit at Dentons Rodyk. Rocio also practiced law for over six years in the United States, Central America and South East Asia.

² Kia Meng is a Senior Partner at Dentons Rodyk and has served as the firm’s innovation “Champion” for over two years. His key area of practice is in dispute resolution involving civil and commercial litigation, and arbitration. As Chief Operating Officer he also oversees the firm’s operations and works to drive the firm’s expansion into ASEAN.

³ Gilbert is a Senior Partner at Dentons Rodyk and has led the firm’s IT efforts for 20+ years. He is highly respected in the fields of intellectual property and technology, data privacy/ protection, and telecommunications. He also holds a Certificate in Computer Programming and Information Processing from the City & Guilds of London Institute.

The firm continues to be a major player in the business community due to this culture of client-centric innovation and change – consisting of a focus on ROI, collaboration, and openness. Dentons Rodyk has provided the following self-assessment of its cultural values:



Client-Centred ROI

For over two decades, partners have engaged in disciplined decision-making around complex technology investments, focusing on deepening the trust and faith our clients place in us – even if the payoff is far in the future or the need is not yet urgent.

Culture in Action

15 years before cybersecurity became a major threat, partners invested heavily in solutions with agility and a ready appreciation of future risks.



Collaboration

The willingness to engage with others who are different, while creating something of value, is at the heart of collaboration.

Culture in Action

Rodyk & Davidson’s merger with Helen Yeo & Partners in 2002 brought together tradition and dynamic growth, and became the largest in Singapore’s legal history. Then, in 2016, our combination with Dentons, the fastest-growing law firm in the history of the world, put the firm, our people, and our clients on the global stage.



Openness

We believe that trust, transparency and candid sharing are at the root of any meaningful transformation.

Culture in Action

While developing our 2017 Innovation Agenda, almost all Senior Partners shared pain points during one-hour interviews – and encouraged all lawyers to do the same – resulting in input from nearly 100% of lawyers. Of the thirty-four complex projects scoped – all remain on-track – confirming they are based on real and important needs.

II. Building a strong foundation: Investing in people and technology to drive innovation

Dentons Rodyk supports its clients and employees through long-serving and world-class technology and innovation teams. It has established a robust IT infrastructure since 2001. Subsequently, in 2017, it established a specialised unit to empower practice groups and business units to work on client-driven innovations – while ensuring efforts are scalable, measurable and successful.

Value

Whole-Firm Innovation
2001

Enable high-value firm-wide solutions to be rolled out successfully, efficiently and with centralised management to ensure scalability – while still accounting for variations across certain groups.

Client-Driven Innovation
2017

Enable clients, practice areas, groups, and departments with a compelling business case to develop innovative solutions, with sponsorship, accountability and reporting responsibilities.

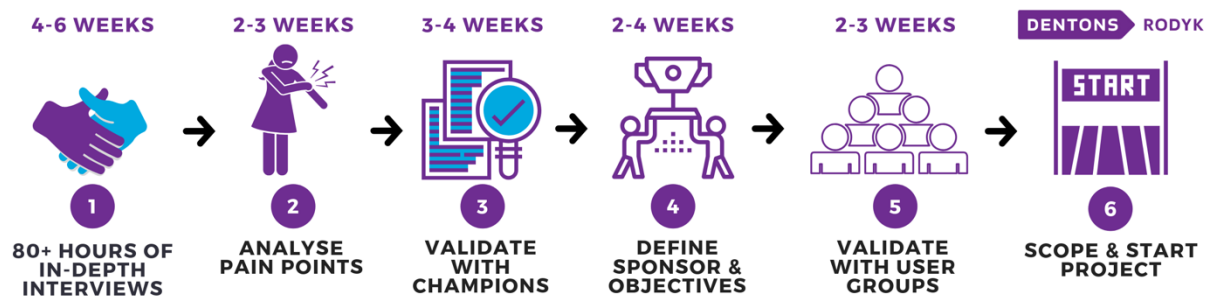
Expertise

- Cybersecurity
- Server maintenance
- System networks & architecture
- Hardware management
- Coding/ database programming
- Innovation management
- Process improvement & re-engineering
- Business analysis
- Product design & development
- Project/change management

III. Deep listening and empathy: Scoping and prioritising high-value opportunities

The firm innovates with a commitment to “digging deeper”, deep listening, and empathy to address increasingly complex challenges faced by clients. In 2017, it conducted hundreds of hours of interviews with almost 100% of its senior partners, lawyers and select targeted industry clients, exploring challenges around collaboration, service delivery and efficiency.

Through this exercise, it scoped more than 34 high-value projects which remain on-track two years later, which the firm believes validates the approach of investing in client listening. As the value delivered through innovation projects became apparent, the firm has also engaged in 17 additional innovation projects.



IV. Case studies

While its innovation unit and IT team are formally responsible for all projects across its 400-person office, firm-wide relationships drive results. The firm’s Chief Operating Officer plays the role of “Innovation Champion”, and an advisory committee represents client and firm interests.

The firm’s IT team helps manage technical roll-out, maintenance and security of solutions. Professionals within Dentons Rodyk also engage regularly with global colleagues, sharing collective learning points and ideas to improve client services. The “heavy lifting” in innovation projects is done by over 37 “team of teams” of full-time lawyers and staff, managed by the firm’s innovation unit, with the consent of their supervisors.

A. *Case Study 1: Prioritising client trust puts the firm 15 years ahead*



Today, the biggest threat to law firms is a data breach. Fifteen years before, most law firms recognised the magnitude of this threat,⁴ Dentons Rodyk had been investing heavily to safeguard its clients' trust and privacy by adopting new technology solutions.

The firm continues working to continue safeguarding its clients' trust in the firm⁵ by investing in high-value security and productivity solutions.

B. *Case Study 2: Making it the firm's mission to build solutions that delight clients*

The firm focuses many of its efforts on helping clients cope with complexity, and in one case of developing three unique client solutions, clients are quoted to have remarked that they were “too good to be true”, and “this will save us so much time, please help us justify to our management why we need to implement this”.

Overall, it took 18 months of interviewing clients, understanding the relationships that were most important to their success, and bringing together a multidisciplinary team to leverage data, online portals and automation tools which help clients deliver easy-to-understand reports to their stakeholders, track progress in real-time, and reduce their workload by hundreds of hours per transaction – not only fostering a closer relationship between Dentons Rodyk and its clients, but also between the different teams and leaders within the clients' own organisations.

READY-TO-USE CLIENT TOOLS:



ONLINE SERVICE PORTALS



PROCESS & DOCUMENT AUTOMATION TOOLS



GLOBAL INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC TOOLS

DENTONS RODYK

⁴ As recently as 2017, many major law firms are reportedly still reticent to implement real cybersecurity systems, since they require significant investment, partners are technophobic, and the cost cannot be passed on to clients (ABA Journal, “Law firms must manage cybersecurity risks” (1 March 2017) <http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/managing_cybersecurity_risk> (accessed 31 July 2019)).

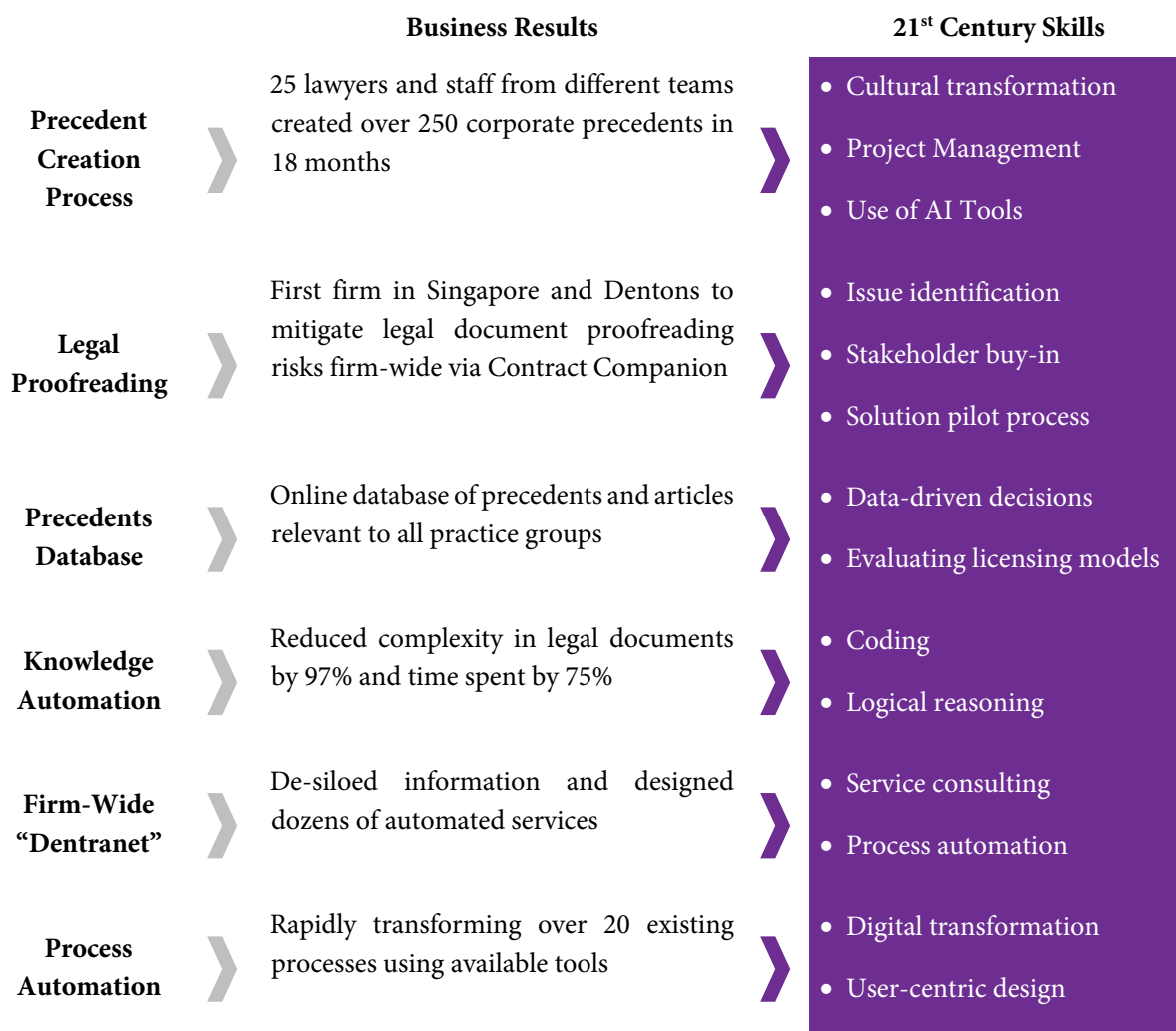
⁵ Dentons Rodyk was the only winner in Asia of the Visionary Award by Symantec Corp for implementing Symantec Enterprise Vault in 2008. It was also one of the first law firms to adopt a document management system (DMS), and Blackberry Push Mail Access.

Only four months after launching the solution, all the clients the firm has met with have taken the next steps towards implementation, and continue to work closely to re-define how they collaborate on key transactions.

However, not all client-facing solutions require 18 months of design and development work. While the type of tool will vary depending on the industry and practice, the firm has implemented ready-to-use client solutions in hundreds of instances to add value and make collaboration easier. Ultimately, the firm wants its solutions to be a testament of its dedication to clients – and for users to come away with the conviction that their needs matter to the firm.

C. Case Study 3: Building 21st century careers through business transformations

Apart from significant business results from the firm’s more than 51 projects, over 220 clients, lawyers, and professionals of all ages and backgrounds have gained 21st century skills through experiential learning, which will help them continue building an excellent career in changing times.



The firm believes in the need to leverage the experience of its clients, lawyers, and professionals to re-design the way these three stakeholders work together. At the heart of the firm’s client-



driven approach is a consultative model that recognises the value in the stakeholders' collective experiences to reach decisions that work for all.

By placing clients and users at the centre of the development process, the firm seeks to move away from the "top-down" approach traditionally embraced by many law firms, in an effort to ensure the success and continuity of its innovation projects and the continued growth of the organisation.

V. Driving the firm's continued success: Singapore, global, and technology partners

The firm believes that the Singapore Government's leadership and programmatic support for legal innovation cannot be understated. Of note are the leadership of the Singapore Judiciary, the Singapore Academy of Law's ("SAL") development of Asia's innovation ecosystem, and the efforts around data strategy, staff re-training and future-planning spearheaded by the Infocomm Media Development Authority, Economic Development Board, Law Society of Singapore, and others.

As a founding member of the Future Law Innovation Programme ("FLIP")⁶ since January 2018, the firm's pioneer cohort of 12 lawyers can attest to the impact of the programme as well as relationships with future technology partners.

In 2019, Dentons Rodyk will become a global innovation hub within Dentons, working to support a robust innovation ecosystem, further deepening relationships with global Dentons partners and technology collaborators. It will also continue deepening its partnerships with key technology companies and leaders. Notable collaborations include:

- (a) **Litera Microsystems** – Dentons Rodyk was the first firm in Singapore to adopt Contract Companion firm-wide to reduce legal proofreading risks (July 2018).⁷
- (b) **Create (Big Hand)** – The Big Hand team provided seamless support and expertise to support a complex roll-out of a firm-wide solution (July 2019).



⁶ The enthusiasm and drive of Paul Neo, founder of FLIP, Noemie Alintissar-Mooney, Assistant Director of FLIP, and Melissa Goh, Deputy Executive Director of SAL Ventures, has also inspired jurisdictions seeking to promote innovation.

⁷ Dentons Rodyk, "Dentons Rodyk enhances document review with Litera Microsystem's Artificial Document Intelligence (ADI)" (19 July 2018) <<https://dentons.rodyk.com/en/about-dentons-rodyk/news/2018/july/dentons-rodyk-enhances-document-review-with-litera-microsystem-artificial-document-intelligence>> (accessed 31 July 2019).

- (c) **XION.AI** – Dentons Rodyk partnered with a leading provider of AI-based solutions to design an AI tool to handle backend processes (October 2018).⁸
- (d) **LegalFab** – Dentons Rodyk experts shared insights and advice during the development of a blockchain-based notarisation system (September 2018).

VI. Lessons learned

Finding innovative ways to overcome innovation challenges is often a juggling act. The following are possible approaches the firm has identified to help keep projects moving forward.

	Rapid Market Changes	Resource Constraints	Innovation vs Risk	Slow Progress or Resistance
Challenge	While working on a very interesting solution involving cutting-edge technology, the market quickly changes and ROI drastically decreases.	As projects mature, it is challenging to sustain the same level of delivery – which may decrease stakeholder buy-in and introduce new risks.	Some solutions developed may be very valuable, but may present challenges around security or data protection.	Very interesting and useful technology is introduced, but there is no adoption and in some cases, outright resistance.
Lesson Learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take a phased approach to solution development. • Ensure value is tested before full investment. • Consider ways to reduce risk if circumstances change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design projects to be scalable and repeatable. • Ensure there is consistent messaging around value of project. • Enable team members to learn “on the job”. • Consider win-win partnerships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continually assess whether there is the correct balance. • Seek support from expert IP & Technology lawyers • Design all solutions with security and data protection in mind. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure sponsor support before starting project. • Design solutions around user needs. • Follow Change Management steps. • Be patient – allow people time to adapt. • If the above doesn’t work – question if there is actually a need for the proposed technology

⁸ Dentons Rodyk, “Dentons Rodyk announces partnership with XION.AI to build custom AI tool” (26 October 2018) <<https://dentons.rodyk.com/en/about-dentons-rodyk/news/2018/october/dentons-rodyk-announces-partnership-with-xion-ai-to-build-custom-ai-tool>> (accessed 31 July 2019).

VII. Conclusion

The firm's key innovation drive is to earn and keep its clients' trust, deepen these relationships in quickly-changing times, as well as ensure that Dentons Rodyk empowers its people to build excellent careers in the 21st century. As it expands its client-driven Innovation Unit and becomes a key innovation hub within Dentons in 2019, it is encouraged by the advice of Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon:

“We have always been the masters of our own destiny and, in this moment, we have a golden opportunity to chart a new course for the entire profession...”⁹

⁹ Menon CJ, ‘Deep Thinking: The Future of the Legal Profession in an Age of Technology’ (Gala Dinner Address at the 29th Inter-Pacific Bar Association Annual Meeting and Conference) (25 April 2019) <[https://www.supremecourt.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/deep-thinking---the-future-of-the-legal-profession-in-an-age-of-technology-\(250419---final\).pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/deep-thinking---the-future-of-the-legal-profession-in-an-age-of-technology-(250419---final).pdf)> (accessed 31 July 2019).