CLEARPOINT
LEGAL CONSULTING

OPERATIONS ASSESSMENT

Prepared for

Seinfeld LLP

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Issued	Illustrative sample

Seinfeld LLP is a fictional firm. This report shows the form, depth and tone of a ClearPoint operations assessment, using patterns commonly seen in Ontario firms of this size. It does not describe any actual client.

This report is in two parts. The first five pages are the assessment and what I would do about it. Everything after that is the detail behind each area, for reference.

THE SHORT VERSION

The firm has doubled. The way it runs has not changed.

Your website introduces four lawyers. Your Clio Grow booking page offers appointments with one of them. The inquiry form on your contact page sends to a shared mailbox rather than into Clio, so those inquiries arrive outside the system entirely. Estates and corporate, two practices with almost nothing in common operationally, share a single intake form.

None of that was a bad decision. It is what a two lawyer firm looks like, and it worked well when the firm was two lawyers. The question this report is really about is what the same firm needs now that seven people are working inside it.

What has changed, and what has not

You told me the firm went from two lawyers to four over about three years, added a law clerk and a second assistant along the way, and that the corporate side has grown faster than you expected. You also said the thing you find hardest is that you still seem to touch every file, and that you had assumed hiring would fix that.

It did not, and it would not have. When the firm was two people, almost everything worked because you knew every matter. That is not a weakness, it is the correct operating model for a two person firm and it is far more efficient than writing procedures nobody needs. The difficulty is that the model does not scale, and it does not fail loudly when it stops working. It just gradually moves more of the firm through one person.

So the pattern underneath most of what follows is the same. Information that used to live in your head is still expected to live in your head, and six other people now need access to it. Each new person added demand on you rather than removing it, because there was no system for them to draw on instead.

> You do not have a growth problem or a people problem. You have a firm still running a two person operating model, and the fix is to move what you know out of your head and into the system everyone already uses.

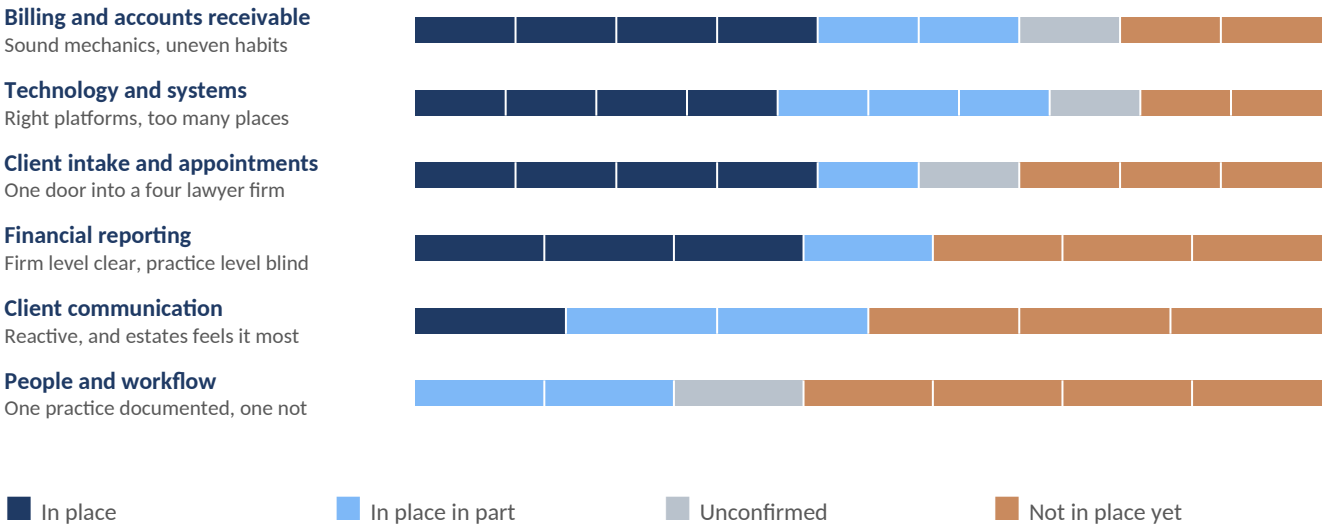
That is also why this is a good moment rather than a late one. Seven people is roughly where the informal model stops working and still small enough that there is not much to unpick. The work gets harder the longer it is left, and it gets much harder past about a dozen.

One part of the firm already proves the point

Your estates practice has a working checklist that everyone follows, built up over years. Nobody asks you how to open an estates file. Corporate has no equivalent and is the practice where you said you spend most of your time answering questions. The difference between the two is not the people. It is that one of them has been written down.

The six areas at a glance

Each bar is one area, divided by the components assessed within it. Components are rated separately rather than the area as a whole, because in most of these something is working well and something next to it is still developing.



Unconfirmed means a conversation could not settle it and only looking at the configuration will. Those items would be verified at the start of any engagement and the findings folded into the work.

What is already working

Worth setting out first, because most of a report like this is about opportunities and none of it should suggest the firm is in poor shape. A practice does not double in three years by accident.

- Your estates intake checklist works and everyone uses it. It is the single best piece of operational infrastructure in the firm and it is the model for everything else that needs building.
- Trust funds are taken before work begins on estate administration files, and your trust reconciliations are prepared on time by a bookkeeper who knows legal accounting.
- Conflict searches are run and documented before a file is opened. For a firm adding corporate work at this rate, that discipline matters more every quarter.
- You are already on Clio Manage and Clio Grow, synced, with document automation running on your wills precedents. That is a stronger foundation than most firms this size have, and much of what follows is finishing it rather than starting it.
- You hired ahead of the work rather than behind it, which is why the growth has not broken anything. It has made your own week harder, which is the problem this report is about, but the firm is not in distress.

Suggested sequence

Sequence matters more than volume here. Several of these sit with you or with people already working with you, and the order below is the one I would follow.

	Opportunity	Why it matters
1	Open online booking to all four lawyers	Four lawyers are introduced on your website and one appears on the booking page. Routing by practice area takes the managing partner out of the path of every new inquiry
2	Connect the website inquiry form to Clio Grow	Inquiries currently arrive in a shared mailbox outside the system, so there is no record of how many arrive, how fast they are answered, or how many are never answered at all
3	Build separate intake forms for estates and corporate	The two practices need almost nothing in common at first contact, and one form serving both means the information is gathered twice
4	Review dormant balances in the estate trust ledger	Estate files close slowly and leave small residual balances behind. The volume grows with the practice and this is the area a regulator looks at first
5	Settle on one e-signature tool and one place documents live	Signed documents currently land in two systems and files are saved both to the network drive and to Clio, so no single location is complete
6	Build matter templates, stages and task lists for corporate	Estates has a working checklist and corporate has none. This is the gap that puts the most questions on your desk
7	Put a firm wide billing cycle and a monthly work in progress review in place	Billing currently depends on who is doing it, and unbilled time is invisible until month end
8	Add reporting by practice area	The firm knows what it earned. It cannot yet see which practice earned it, which is the question behind every decision about where to grow

Items one, two and four depend on nothing else and can begin immediately. Items six, seven and eight build on the first three and are better done after them.

Where to start, and why

The first three items above are all intake, and they are first for the same reason.

Intake is the point where information enters the firm. Everything that happens afterwards either draws on what was captured there or recreates it by hand. Get the front end right and a client's details are collected once, cleanly, and then carry through the file: into the matter, into the documents, into the ledger, into whatever gets built later. Leave it unfinished and every stage downstream pays for it in re-entry, and in the small errors that come with typing the same thing twice.

That is why intake comes first rather than simply mattering most. Matter templates, document automation and reporting are all leverage on the front end. Each works by drawing on information that has already been captured, which means each is only as good as what intake hands it. Build them first and you are building against a foundation that is still moving.

In a firm of your size there is a second reason. Intake is also where work gets allocated, and at the moment it is allocated by arriving at one desk. Until that changes, every other improvement still routes through you, which means the thing you most want to fix is the thing least affected by fixing everything else.

On making it stick

The usual concern with work like this is not whether the tools can do it but whether a new way of working becomes habit, and in a firm of seven that concern is well founded, because it is no longer one person changing a routine. That is a change management question rather than a software one, and it is why training is an integral part of every ClearPoint engagement rather than an optional extra at the end of an invoice. Every engagement closes with training on what was built, and a written playbook the firm keeps and can hand to the next person who joins. Configuring the tools is the straightforward part. Building the habit is the part that needs support, and that support is part of the work.

THE DETAIL BEHIND THIS

The six sections that follow set out what was observed in each area, and the ratings behind the chart on page three. They are there for reference. Everything you need in order to decide where to start is above.

1. Client intake and appointments

One door into a four lawyer firm

This is the area where the gap between the firm you are and the firm your systems assume is widest, and it is also the area where most of it can be closed quickly.

Component	Where it stands	How we know
Clio Grow in use for new inquiries	In place	Observed
Online booking for initial consultations	In place	Observed
Conflict search before a file is opened	In place	You told me
Grow to Manage conversion and matter opening	In place	You told me
Custom fields carrying into Manage	In place in part	You told me
Who owns an inquiry between first contact and file opening	Unconfirmed	To verify
Booking available with all four lawyers	Not in place yet	Observed
Website inquiry form connected to Clio Grow	Not in place yet	Observed
Separate intake paths for estates and corporate	Not in place yet	Observed

WHAT IS VISIBLE FROM OUTSIDE THE FIRM

Your website introduces four lawyers, each with a practice description and a photograph. Your Clio Grow booking page offers one calendar, the managing partner's. A prospective corporate client who reads the page about your corporate lawyer and then clicks to book an appointment is booking with you.

Your contact page carries an inquiry form. It sends to a shared firm mailbox rather than into Clio Grow, which means those inquiries never enter the pipeline, are triaged by whoever opens the mail that morning, and leave no record. You cannot currently tell me how many came in last month, how quickly they were answered, or how many were never answered at all, and neither can anyone else at the firm.

Your website also publishes a fixed fee for a standard incorporation and for a simple will, which is worth noting here because it comes up again under billing. Both of the gaps above are a few hours of configuration, and together they are probably the largest single change available to you in this report.

OPPORTUNITIES

Every new inquiry still arrives at one desk.

The booking page offers your calendar and the shared mailbox is triaged by you or by whoever asks you what to do with it. So the firm has four lawyers and one intake function, and that intake function is also the person with the least time.

Routing by practice area is the fix, and it is a configuration change rather than a policy one. An estates inquiry books with an estates lawyer, a corporate inquiry books with a corporate lawyer, and you see what came in without being in the path of it.

Inquiries that arrive by the website are invisible as a group.

A phone inquiry and a booked consultation both end up in Grow. A web form inquiry ends up in an inbox. That means the one channel you can actually influence, through the website and search, is the one channel you cannot measure.

It also means response time to web inquiries is unknown rather than slow. It may be excellent. Nobody can say, which is its own kind of answer.

Estates and corporate inquiries arrive identical, and they should not.

An estates inquiry needs to establish who has died, whether there is a will, who the executor is and what their relationship to the deceased was. A corporate inquiry needs the entity, the transaction, the other side and who else is advising. One form asks for none of that, so the first substantive conversation is spent collecting what a form could have collected.

Two forms built against the right custom fields also means the information carries into the matter rather than being gathered twice.

ON THE FIELDS BEHIND THE FORMS

Custom fields exist and your wills precedents populate from the intake data, so the path from Grow into Manage is working. Signs point to a good deal of this already being done on the estates side, which is the harder half of the work.

What is not settled is coverage, particularly on corporate, where the practice grew after the forms were built. That sits as Unconfirmed above because only the configuration can answer it, and the next step is identifying where the fields already work well and where they can be extended.

Nobody owns an inquiry between first contact and file opening.

An inquiry can sit in a state where everyone assumes somebody else has it. A pipeline with stages in Grow puts a name against every inquiry from the moment it arrives, which is a reporting benefit and a risk control at the same time.

2. People and workflow

One practice documented, one not

This area carries the clearest contrast in the firm, and it is a useful one, because you have already built the thing that is missing. You just built it once.

Component	Where it stands	How we know
Estates intake and administration checklist	In place in part	You told me
Document automation on wills precedents	In place in part	You told me
Defined handoff between lawyer and clerk	Unconfirmed	To verify
Matter templates	Not in place yet	You told me
Standard task lists for corporate matters	Not in place yet	You told me
Matter stages and pipeline visibility	Not in place yet	You told me
Defined review points on junior work	Not in place yet	You told me

OPPORTUNITIES

Estates has a checklist. Corporate does not, and that is where your week goes.

You told me you spend most of your time answering questions about corporate files, and almost none answering questions about estates. That difference is not about the people or the complexity. It is that one practice has its process written down and the other keeps it in the heads of whoever has done it before.

The estates checklist took years to accumulate. The corporate equivalent does not have to, because the firm now knows what good looks like and the work is to capture it rather than discover it.

Nothing carries a matter forward on its own.

There are no matter templates, so every file is opened by hand and what it contains depends on who opened it. There are no matter stages, so there is no view of where anything sits without asking. And there is no standard task list on corporate work, so what needs doing on an incorporation or a share transfer is reconstructed each time.

At two lawyers this cost very little, because the overhead of writing it down exceeded the overhead of just knowing it. At four lawyers and three staff that has reversed, and it keeps reversing further as the firm grows.

Work moves between people by conversation.

A matter passes from lawyer to clerk and back by email, a note or a word in the corridor. Nothing is wrong with that in itself, and it is quick. What it does not do is leave a record of who holds the file right now, which is the question that gets asked when a client calls and the person who knows is out.

Stages answer it almost incidentally: a file sitting in the drafting stage with a named owner needs nobody to remember.

Review of junior work happens by arrival rather than by design.

Work reaches you when it is finished or when someone is unsure, rather than at points the firm has chosen. That means some work gets reviewed more than it needs and some reaches a client with less attention than you would have wanted, and neither is visible until something goes wrong.

Task lists that carry a review step at the right stage turn supervision from a memory problem into a workflow one, which is also what a regulator expects to see in a firm with junior lawyers.

3. Billing and accounts receivable

Sound mechanics, uneven habits

The mechanics here are in better shape than the habits. Nothing is broken, and the variation between people is the thing worth attention.

Component	Where it stands	How we know
Funds in trust before estate administration work begins	In place	You told me
Trust reconciliations prepared on time	In place	You told me
Fixed fees on incorporations and simple wills	In place	Observed
Accounts receivable followed up	In place in part	You told me
Firm wide billing cycle	In place in part	You told me
Retainers on corporate matters	In place in part	You told me
Docketing consistency across the four lawyers	Unconfirmed	To verify
Work in progress visible between month ends	Not in place yet	You told me
Dormant balances in the estate trust ledger reviewed	Not in place yet	You told me

OPPORTUNITIES

Billing depends on who is doing it.

You described some lawyers billing monthly without prompting and others billing when reminded. With four lawyers that produces a revenue line that moves for reasons nobody can explain afterwards, and it makes a slow month impossible to distinguish from a slow biller.

A firm wide cycle with a fixed date is a small change, and the one that makes everything else in this section measurable.

Unbilled time is invisible until month end, which is too late to do anything about it.

By the time a file with four months of unbilled work surfaces, the conversation with the client is a difficult one and some of that time will be written off. A work in progress view checked weekly turns that into a conversation at four weeks instead, when it is routine.

Dormant balances in the estate trust ledger will keep accumulating, and that is the nature of the work rather than a failure.

Estate files close slowly. Clearance certificates take time, a residual beneficiary cannot be found, a small balance is left after a final distribution. Every estates practice accumulates these and yours accumulates them faster each year because the practice is growing.

This is the area a regulator looks at first, and the test is rarely whether the money is there. It is whether every balance can be tied to a matter and whether anything has been sitting untouched without explanation. Reviewing the ledger, documenting what each remaining balance is and dealing with what can be dealt with is a defined piece of work with a defined end.

Your fixed fees were set for a smaller firm.

You said the incorporation and simple will fees have not been revisited since they were set. The firm has roughly doubled since then and the cost of delivering those matters has changed with it, in both directions, because some of that work is now done by a clerk rather than a lawyer.

Whether those prices are right is answerable from your own time records, provided time is recorded against matters consistently enough to rely on. That is the Unconfirmed item above and it is the first thing I would look at, because it also answers the practice area profitability question further on.

> **On the trust ledger review**
>
> ClearPoint does a good deal of trust remediation and Law Society of Ontario spot audit preparation, so this section is written from working through the ledger rather than from reading By-Law 9. The practical point is that dormant balances are far easier to deal with when you choose the timing.

4. Technology and systems

Right platforms, too many places

You have the right core systems. The difficulty is that a second copy of several things has grown up alongside them, which happens almost inevitably when a firm adds people faster than it adds conventions.

Component	Where it stands	How we know
Clio Manage	In place	You told me
Clio Grow	In place	Observed
Microsoft 365 and Outlook	In place	You told me
Trust and general accounting in Clio	In place	You told me
Document automation on precedents	In place in part	You told me
Documents stored in Clio	In place in part	You told me
Electronic signature	In place in part	You told me
Accounting and practice management reconciled	Unconfirmed	To verify
Corporate records and minute books on the matter	Not in place yet	You told me
Email filed against the matter	Not in place yet	You told me

OPPORTUNITIES

Two electronic signature tools are in use, so signed documents land in two places.

One lawyer signs through Clio and another uses a separate service. The executed document from one route is on the matter and the executed document from the other is in an inbox until someone saves it. For wills and corporate resolutions, where the signed version is the only version that matters, that is worth closing.

Documents are saved to the network drive by habit and to Clio by intention.

The result is that neither location is complete, so finding a document means checking both and trusting neither. That is a few seconds each time and a genuine problem the day somebody needs a file and the person who saved it is away.

Clio Drive sits on the desktop and behaves like the network drive while syncing into Clio underneath, which closes this without asking anyone to change how they work. It is usually the easiest habit change available in a firm this size.

Your corporate records live outside the matter.

Minute books, registers and the entity record sit in their own system, so a corporate file in Clio is only part of the picture and anyone answering a question about an entity has to be in two places to do it. As the corporate practice grows this gets more expensive rather than less.

This one is worth assessing rather than assuming. There are connected options that did not exist or were not credible a few years ago, and the right answer depends on volume and on how much of the register work you intend to keep in house.

Email about a matter is in Outlook, not on the matter.

Whoever is on the thread can see it and nobody else can, so the clerk who picks up a file has no view of what the client was told and reconstructs it by asking.

Clio files email against the matter from inside Outlook, so this is a button rather than a new system to learn.

> **Clio Certified Partner and CosmoLex Certified Consultant**
>
> Most of what is in this section comes from configuring these platforms for small firms rather than from reading the documentation, which is also why the limitations are stated alongside the capabilities.

5. Client communication

Reactive, and estates feels it most

Nothing here is going badly. The opportunity is that the work you do has long quiet stretches by nature, and quiet is experienced by clients as neglect even when the file is progressing exactly as it should.

Component	Where it stands	How we know
Matters actioned when a client makes contact	In place	You told me
Clio tasks used for follow up by some of the team	In place in part	You told me
Communications recorded against the matter	In place in part	You told me
Stated response time standard	Not in place yet	You told me
Scheduled milestone updates on estate administration	Not in place yet	You told me
Secure document sharing with clients	Not in place yet	Observed

OPPORTUNITIES

An estate file can be progressing perfectly and feel abandoned.

Waiting on a clearance certificate, a probate application or a bank is not inactivity, but from the executor's side it is indistinguishable from it. You said most of the complaints you hear are about not hearing anything, rather than about the work.

A scheduled update at known points, even one that says nothing has changed and here is why, costs a few minutes and removes most of those calls. It is also the single cheapest thing in this report to put in place, because the milestones are the same on every file.

There is no stated response standard, so each person has their own.

Seven people each operating a reasonable personal standard produces an inconsistent experience that nobody inside the firm can see, because everyone is comparing against their own. A stated standard is less about speed than about everyone meaning the same thing by it.

Documents go to clients as email attachments.

For wills, estate accounts and corporate records that is a security question as much as a convenience one, and it is one of the few places where a firm of your size is noticeably behind firms of similar size that have adopted a portal.

Clio includes secure sharing, so this is configuration rather than a purchase.

6. Financial reporting

Firm level clear, practice level blind

Component	Where it stands	How we know
Bookkeeper experienced in legal accounting	In place	You told me
Trust reconciliations prepared on time	In place	You told me
Firm level profit and loss reviewed regularly	In place	You told me
Time recorded against matters consistently	In place in part	You told me
Profitability by practice area	Not in place yet	You told me
Realization and write offs tracked	Not in place yet	You told me
Reporting used in decisions about where to grow	Not in place yet	You told me

OPPORTUNITIES

You know what the firm earned. You cannot yet see which practice earned it.

Estates and corporate have very different shapes. Estates is longer, slower to bill and heavier on clerk time. Corporate is faster, more transactional and more likely to be fixed fee. Reported together they average into a number that describes neither.

This matters now rather than in general, because you told me the corporate side has grown faster than expected and you are weighing whether to hire into it. That is a decision the firm is currently making on impression rather than on figures, and the figures are already in Clio waiting to be grouped.

Write offs are not counted anywhere.

Each lawyer reduces their own time at billing, which is normal and often right. What does not happen is anyone adding it up, so the firm cannot see what proportion of recorded time becomes revenue, by person or by matter type.

That number is usually the most uncomfortable one in a firm this size and the most useful. It is also the number that tells you whether the fixed fees in the previous section are set correctly.

Next steps

Worth saying

Seeing a list of opportunities set out like this can feel daunting. It should not. What this report describes is the position a great many small firms reach when they grow, where the systems that suited the early years stop keeping pace with the firm around them.

Every item here is solvable, with targeted, right sized improvements rather than a rebuild. Helping firms work through exactly this is at the core of what ClearPoint does.

The suggested sequence earlier in this report is the practical version of this. Items one, two and four can be started straight away and are worth doing regardless of what you decide here. The rest form a natural first engagement, beginning with intake.

A first piece of work would normally run four to six weeks and finish with the firm able to route an inquiry to the right lawyer, see every inquiry that arrives, and open a corporate file the same way twice. Scope and the fixed fee for that work are set out separately, and if the existing build turns out to be in better shape than this report assumes, that time moves forward into the next stage rather than being lost.

The items marked Unconfirmed would be verified in the opening stage of any engagement, and what they turn up gets folded into the work rather than reopening the scope.

Happy to talk it through

If you would like to go through any of this before deciding, or if something here does not match what you see inside your own system, a short call is the fastest way to settle it. There is no obligation attached to this report and nothing in it expires.

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About this assessment

A ClearPoint operations assessment is a single conversation of about thirty minutes, together with a review of what is visible on the firm's public website and booking page. It is not based on a review of the firm's practice management configuration, its files or its financial records, and nothing in it is verified inside those systems. Where a conclusion is drawn from a symptom described on the call, that is said. The items marked Unconfirmed are the ones a conversation cannot settle, and they would be verified at the start of any engagement with the findings incorporated into the work.

Seinfeld LLP is a fictional firm, created to show the form, depth and tone of a ClearPoint assessment report. Its circumstances are composites of patterns commonly seen in Ontario firms of this size and practice mix. No part of this report describes an actual client, and no client information appears in it.