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Legal 2030: 8 Shifts in Legal's Operating Model to Build Legal Intelligence



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Unprecedented macro forces — from extreme regulatory volatility and rapid AI deployment to severe budget constraints — are fundamentally reshaping the legal department, making traditional long-term planning nearly impossible. To navigate this disruption, General Counsels (GCs) must urgently redefine their department's value proposition and operating model, turning mounting pressures into strategic opportunities.

This report identifies the eight key legal operating model shifts that GCs need to make to effectively support their business between now and 2030. Our insights enable you to improve the following:

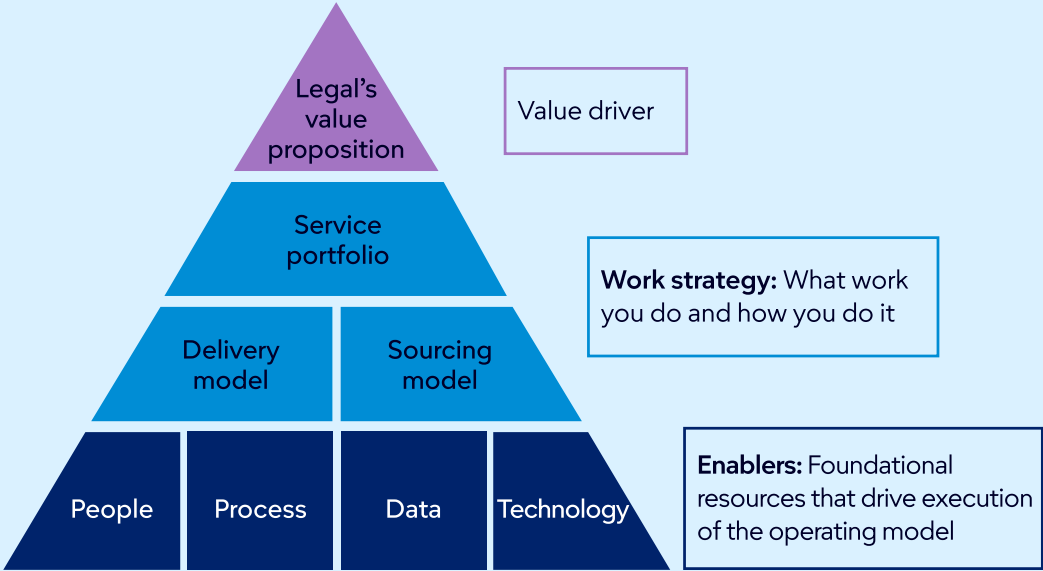
- **Executive education** — Educate the CEO and other executives on trends affecting your business with material implications for oversight and performance.
- **Risk identification and assessment** — Use environmental trends to pinpoint rising risk exposures and inform legal risk assessments.
- **Legal strategic planning** — Use the near-term opportunities for Legal and operating shifts to drive team discussions and shape multiyear strategic plans for Legal.



Legal’s operating model

To understand how the legal department can generate legal intelligence, GCs should attend to how each element of their operating model will need to shift.

Legal operating model definitions



Source: Gartner

Value proposition			
Strategic support legal provides the business to drive growth and/or offset risk			
Service portfolio: Essential services legal provides to the business			
Service offerings		Taxonomy	
Delivery model: How legal delivers services		Sourcing model: What resources legal uses to deliver legal services	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centralized or decentralized channels (personal assistance, self-service, automation, etc.) Standardization Customer experience 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build, buy or borrow decisions Decision criteria for sending work to the lowest cost provider, including in-house vs. external resourcing 	
Enablers: Resources that create opportunities for improving and/or which constrain execution of the operating model			
People: In-house skills and expertise, talent composition, culture (shared values, beliefs, norms, practices and behaviors), engagement, training and development	Process: Repeatable execution	Data: Performance tracking for improved decision making	Technology: Enables, not fixes, operating model components

8 shifts GCs must make to build legal intelligence by 2030

1 Legal’s value proposition	Current state: Expert functional partner	Future state: Legal intelligence architect
2 Service portfolio	Core legal domains	Business insight generation
3 Delivery model	On-demand legal advice	AI-embedded intake and self-service
4 Sourcing model	Law-firm-centric provider network	Legal as general contractor
5 People	SME-based talent strategy	Tech-forward legal team
6 Process	Bespoke legal guidance	Dynamic workflows to scale tech
7 Technology	Market-leading point tools	Integrated tech portfolio
8 Data	Centralization-focused strategy	Enterprise-connected data governance

Source: Gartner

Shift 1

Value proposition



Challenges



- Making timely investments in digital readiness, necessary to unlock legal's intelligence potential in the face of ongoing budget pressures.
- Building buy-in from enterprise leadership and the legal team for the new vision for legal.
- Growing the data capabilities necessary to extract data from legal assets and interpret it to generate strategic insights.

Action steps



- Map legal documents and data sources to identify opportunities to grow insights relevant to the business and business strategy.
- Use insight opportunities to build a multiyear transformation roadmap for legal intelligence and make the business case for ongoing investment in technology, data, capacity, headcount and skills.
- Identify enterprise partners that will be critical to transformation success and establish working relationships with them.

Current state: Expert functional partner



Future state: Legal intelligence architect

AI technologies offer to unlock new insights buried in legal documents. Legal intelligence refers to the process of opening up legal assets (including legal documents), and leveraging this broader "dataset" to drive competitive advantage through:

- **Enhanced strategic insight** — predictive analytics capabilities alongside better understanding the legal drivers of enterprise value for proactive business guidance
- **Integrated service delivery** — more precise risk management and legal guidance delivered closer to the point of need for more cost-effective allocation of enterprise resources
- **Adaptive risk appetite** — using real-time insights to enable more proactive, strategic enterprise risk taking

Legal teams have the legal expertise, business acumen, and organizational knowledge needed to design and guide development of a new legal intelligence that will boost business outcomes. GC who can successfully make the eight shifts outlined here by 2030 are poised to unlock this data-informed legal intelligence.

Shift 2

Service portfolio



Challenges



- Articulating and demonstrating the strategic advantage of legal's involvement in cross-functional areas, while building buy-in and trust from business partners who may see legal as a barrier.
- Upskilling legal talent to operate effectively in strategic advisory and solutions-oriented roles beyond traditional legal practice.

Action steps



- Meet with business partners to develop clear parameters for where increased legal involvement adds value, focusing on mutual benefits and ensuring legal accelerates, not impedes, business goals.
- Define criteria for nonlegal areas where legal can expand its influence.
- Incentivize legal staff to identify unconventional opportunities where legal's input can shape business outcomes.

Current state: Core legal domains

Future state: Business insight generation

As legal shifts its focus to data-backed intelligence, its service portfolio will expand beyond traditional advice and review. Legal's work will increasingly center on delivering business insights informed by legal intelligence, adding value not only to clear-cut legal matters but also to business decisions where it has unique perspective.

Examples of legal's evolving role include:

- Enabling AI progress and responsible innovation
- Framing risk-informed strategic options in high-stakes, urgent developments
- Addressing novel ethical or societal questions beyond conventional legal risk
- Driving continuous improvement in legal service delivery

Delivering these insights requires deeper integration with business workflows (see delivery model), giving legal greater visibility into projects, transactions, and emerging risks. This enables legal to provide input earlier, in areas previously overlooked, and to better contextualize its guidance to the business context.

Shift 3

Delivery model



Challenges



- Navigating privacy and information retention requirements associated with an embedded intake system.
- Building sufficient guidance, tools and AI governance processes to route the majority of reviews to AI-enabled self-service.
- Leverage AI-enablement to build more dynamic (rather than static) self-service tools that can adapt to a more flexible risk appetite.

Action steps



- Explore intake and triage platforms and legal front door options with AI-enablement and integration capabilities.
- Collaborate with IT to plug legal intake mechanisms into business workflows.
- Encourage your team to experiment with DIY enterprise tech to build self-service point solutions where possible to support scaling self-service.

Current state: On-demand legal advice

Future state: AI-embedded intake and self-service

By redefining how legal work is done, emerging AI technologies can revolutionize how risk is managed across the enterprise.

GCs should embed AI-driven legal intake and self-service directly into business workflows and decision making, to rapidly identify and deliver support at the point of need. Today, legal teams must train the business on risk and then rely on business partners to escalate matters appropriately. But legal-calibrated risk criteria would automatically flag activity for legal review, direct majority of reviews to AI-enabled self-service and escalate others to the legal team. This new approach would:

- Provide a seamless client experience, enabling near-real-time delivery of legal services at scale (especially for high-frequency/low-risk issues)
- Produce high-impact data to better predict enterprise risk exposure and strategically advise the business
- Increase the business's ability to implement a more flexible, adaptive risk tolerance
- Support better calibration of legal resourcing to business need

Shift 4

Sourcing model



Challenges



- Addressing lawyer bias toward top or preferred firms.
- Acquiring data to support procurement and ongoing trade-offs between buying legal expertise, managed services support, tech solutions or bringing work in-house.
- Communicating options available to lawyers and helping them understand how to match work to supplier.

Action steps



- As AI improves routine work quality and efficiency, shift most transactional tasks in-house with automation and human oversight.
- Adopt a capability-based supplier strategy aligned with business needs:
 - Reserve top-tier firms for critical, high-stakes work at premium rates.
 - Route nonautomated transactional work to low-cost ALSPs or managed services.
 - Use tech vendors and managed services to drive legal scale and efficiency.
 - Apply relationship-based models when the impact and outcomes warrant the investment.

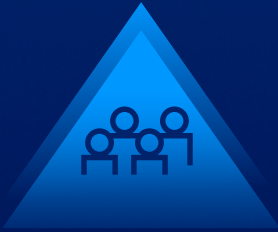
Current state: Law-firm-centric provider network

Future state: Legal as general contractor

Market fragmentation and redistribution is transforming the legal market landscape. As the changing provider market suggests, cutting-edge tech solutions and service delivery improvements are becoming increasingly important, gradually displacing the traditional emphasis on premium legal guidance from top firms. Persistent budget pressures and changes in how legal work is done require that legal must leverage a diverse mix of providers to generate the highest impact payoff for the enterprise.

In this new environment, legal must operate as a **general contractor**, coordinating across a broad network of law firm and non-law-firm providers and tech vendors, each with their own capabilities and comparative advantages. To effectively maximize supplier value, legal must build up competencies for making trade-offs between investing in legal advice or service delivery while also assessing, managing, budgeting and working with providers individually and as part of this broader legal supplier ecosystem.

Shift 5 People



Challenges



- Identifying the right mix of skills needed to support the business.
- Competing effectively for talent.
- Defending headcount and making the business case for investment in critical talent and skills in the face of reduction pressures.

Action steps



- Coordinate regular touchpoints with HR to implement processes for and review outputs to determine whether to build, buy or borrow skills as needs evolve.
- Leverage GC voice, change goals and design incentives to motivate legal staff to build important new skills by changing goals and incentives.
- Upskill existing lawyers on AI, analytics and information governance and require AI certification or experience for future hires.

Current state: SME-based talent strategy

Future state: Tech-forward legal team

Evolving AI capabilities, enterprise mandates to invest in technology and the need to do more with less are transforming skill needs, pushing legal to prioritize service delivery improvement.

To effectively capitalize on investments in technology, GCs must build a tech-forward department culture dedicated to continuous learning, innovation and collaboration to improve the scale and quality of legal work at the speed of business by:

- Training lawyers to be change-adaptive, tech-savvy, influential business leaders who regularly use and experiment with enterprise tech
- Upskilling legal teams to be solutions-oriented with high business acumen
- Shifting hiring strategies to grow technical expertise
- Building adherence to protocols and tech adoption requirements through incentives and hard controls

Though the legal team's composition and how services are delivered must change, the function must be grounded in an agile core team of legal experts adept at quickly flexing to new, high-impact risk areas as the risk environment and coverage needs evolve.

Shift 6 Process



Challenges



- Rapidly scaling complex process management and design capabilities in the face of budgetary constraints.
- Ensuring standardized guidance and processes can adapt rapidly to the company's evolving risk posture.
- Disaggregating matters into tasks for AI- or tech-enablement demands technical skills not typically required of lawyers.

Action steps



- Identify core legal workflows, prioritized by risk and volume, for process standardization, optimization and disaggregation.
- Incorporate workflow standardization and modular design skill requirements into legal tech and operations job descriptions.
- Coordinate with IT to leverage enterprise-based process technology and SMEs who can support legal's digitization journey.
- Integrate accountability mechanisms into legal workflows to ensure compliance with legal's requirements.

Current state: Bespoke legal guidance

Future state: Dynamic workflows to scale tech

Lags in process investments will decelerate legal's use of AI. As legal's delivery model shifts from delivering tailored advice to supporting high-impact legal outcomes, processes must drive non-lawyer execution. And if legal hopes to soon leverage AI agents, those technologies should be guided by the best possible decision criteria, playbooks and workflows.

Rapid standardization of key workflows, and codification of high-priority positions and guidance are essential to:

- Expanding and evolving automated/AI-based self-service for high-volume work
- Designing hybrid (AI agent/human) resource utilization for more complex, high-value work
- Building cross-functional enterprise processes that reduce duplicative work, break down silos, maximize resources and improve data collection
- Finding new AI use cases and identifying pain points in legal workflows

GCs must leverage advanced enterprise process technology and expertise to facilitate **fit-for-purpose process standardization and improvement**. Legal must also ensure workflow standardization and process improvement are core skill sets in legal tech and operations roles.

Shift 7

Technology



Challenges



- Overcoming reluctance and switchover costs associated with retiring familiar legacy tools.
- Navigating a legal tech market with overlapping solutions and unclear vendor claims.
- Driving widespread adoption and embedding new tools into daily legal routines.
- Maintaining strict governance, data security and human oversight over DIY tool development and “vibe coding.”¹

Action steps



- Map and document key legal workflows (e.g., high priority or high volume) to identify opportunities to integrate enterprise AI, agentic AI or DIY tools.
- Require proof-of-concept pilots and short-term contracts to ensure flexibility and avoid vendor lock-in.
- Create controlled sandboxes² and structured opportunities for developing prototypes with “vibe coding.”

Current state: Market-leading point tools

Future state: Integrated tech portfolio

By 2030, legal teams must move beyond today’s fragmented, costly patchwork of point solutions and toward a technology portfolio balancing essential legal-specific applications and workflow tools, enterprise AI, in-house DIY tools and AI agents. This facilitates legal intelligence by enabling simpler system integrations and making data less siloed.

Though some specialized legal tech will still be needed, growth in enterprise AI, DIY tools and agentic AI will allow legal teams to reduce their reliance on expensive, siloed systems. Orchestrated agentic AI workflows will become a key pillar, as multiagent applications automate complex, multistep legal processes such as contract review and litigation support. Leading teams will also develop lightweight tools in-house, experimenting with “vibe coding” to prototype solutions for discrete, low-risk tasks.

Although AI tools offer significant efficiency gains, their success depends on a strong data foundation, codified legal positions and processes, and in-house tech talent to build, manage and optimize solutions. To drive adoption, legal leaders must model desired behaviors and integrate new tools into daily routines, making their use intuitive and unavoidable.

¹ An AI-assisted approach to software development where developers use voice commands or simple text prompts to quickly create prototypes. Instead of writing or reviewing code line by line, developers focus on guiding the AI to deliver results and fix issues in real time. This method is designed for rapid exploration of ideas, not for building final products.

² A logically separate, nonproduction workspace that enables teams to develop, test and experiment without impacting the live production environment.

Shift 8 Data



Challenges



- Integrating legacy systems and varied formats while enforcing governance standards.
- Sustaining data stewardship, quality, lineage and ownership accountability.
- Managing retention, deletion and privilege requirements.
- Isolating sensitive data and contextualizing legal information for business stakeholders.

Action steps



- Partner with D&A teams to align legal data strategy with enterprise best practices.
- Embed standardized data capture into daily workflows using common formats and protocols.
- Use simple tools and AI for targeted data extraction and analysis.
- Manage agent access to datasets according to the principle of least privilege.

Current state: Centralization-focused strategy	Future state: Enterprise-connected data governance
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A reliable data foundation is critical to both the success of legal's AI investments and delivering legal intelligence. However, legal's current approach — data centralization — is increasingly hard to scale as the volume of data grows and increasingly unnecessary as AI extraction technology advances.

Going forward, legal must shift its approach toward data governance: establishing standards for how legal data is valued, created, used and controlled. This ensures legal can sustain and scale a base of information for AI tools, and that legal assets (including legal documents) are structured to be accessible across the enterprise.

Achieving this requires partnering with data and analytics teams to set common data standards, ensure compatibility between legal and enterprise resources, support secure and appropriate access for all stakeholders, and embed metadata capture into daily workflows. Legal teams should also have practical tools for extracting and managing key data, while maintaining records of decentralized data locations and ownership. Over time, these practices will position legal to scale its use of data and tap into broader enterprise sources.

Actionable, objective insights

Position your function for success. Explore these additional complimentary resources and tools:

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