



Legal Ops Brief: Working in Legal Ops Without Being in Legal Ops

Law Department Management



Have you ever asked yourself: Am I performing legal operations even though my organization doesn't have a formal legal ops group?

The answer is most likely, yes.

The [ACC Legal Operations Maturity Model](#) outlines several areas of focus where work being done is considered legal operations, without specifically being within a legal operations specific group. In fact, many practicing attorneys, non-lawyer professionals working in law, and technology/IT support professionals work within what is considered legal operations, according to the ACC Legal Operation Maturity Model.

Law departments and IT organizations that do not specifically have a dedicated legal operations group usually have individuals performing tasks or managing programs that are based in legal operations and have outcomes that support the overall structure of the business of law operations (i.e., risk mitigation, governance of information, contract management, or billing). While some organizations are at various stages of maturity and size, the operational work remains.

I have had the opportunity to speak with professionals within different corporate legal departments and IT groups. I asked what their function or projects were and how it related to legal operations.

All those I spoke with had a consolidated answer: "My company's legal department does not have a legal operations group, but I am in a role where I am doing operations work, not practicing law or handling cases."

The context of the positions were law department lawyers placed in a position to manage their spend on legal cases, manage large volumes of legacy and incoming information, and figuring out how to manage and maintain volumes of contracts the company produces or accepts. Lawyers managing tasks and processes like these (and not limited to) are performing legal operations.

Other colleagues sat within an organization's IT group and were performing support of business processes with technology or performing operations on behalf of the law department. These individuals sat in a specific role where business partnership was key to support the law department and perform tasks related to how legal operations worked within the organizations.

1. The information management situation

A colleague, who is a practicing attorney, was tasked with implementing an information management strategy for the company's archives of contracts and expenditures.

The company had over 20 years of contract documents as well as legacy electronic archived documents. The company's IT department wanted to archive or retire the data from the servers, with no attention paid to the risk of data loss or its value within the legal environment. The legal colleague wanted to halt the wholesome retirement of data. Instead, they wanted to identify the risk and initiate a data project involving legal discovery and information management services.

At the end of the project, the colleague performed functions typically done within the scope of legal operations.

2. The trademark platform situation

A trademark attorney was tasked to implement a new process and technology platform for a large-scale trademark platform. The opportunity was provided to the attorney based on their knowledge in the trademark world and expertise in leading the ITS/project management team.

In this project, they implemented the change management, worked with outside counsel to ensure process changes are recognized, and built Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the organization to record. The trademark attorney was reassigned from practicing law to managing legal operations initiatives without having legal operations experience or performing within a legal operations area of experience.

3. The IT professional situation

An IT professional supporting legal technology and process for a law department was tasked with organizing support for the law department without knowing specific business processes or risk potential.

The scenarios are examples of how adaptive those in legal can be when stepping into operational tasks for their legal departments and organizations. Based on the evolution of how businesses are implementing changes, it is important to expand on how lawyers and non-lawyers address processes and support their organizations.

As organizations adapt to be lean and agile, a new question emerges: Does legal operations need a department? The answer is yes. Legal operations is a specific model that is adaptable and can be

consolidated for any organization.

With resource challenges and the need for buy-in, tools such as the ACC Legal Operations Maturity Model, which benchmark processes and areas of focus, can be useful when justifying what legal operations is to your organization.

[Jack Thompson](#)



Assistant Director - Global eDiscovery & Legal Operations

Sanofi

Jack Thompson is assistant director of global eDiscovery and legal operations for Sanofi, a global biopharmaceutical company.