



Wisdom of the Crowd: CLOs on AI Governance, Leadership Through Crisis, and the Modern GC

Corporate, Securities, and Governance

Law Department Management

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce



Banner artwork by Pressmaster / Shutterstock.com

Geopolitical volatility. Accelerating AI adoption. Rising board expectations. Expanding regulatory complexity.

For today's chief legal officers, these forces are not abstract trends; they are daily operational realities reshaping the legal function and redefining enterprise leadership.

Against this backdrop, a select group of CLOs convened for a candid, peer-driven roundtable discussion on enterprise risk integration, AI governance, crisis leadership, and the evolving role of the general counsel. The conversation was practical, strategic, and forward-looking, reflecting both the scale of the organizations represented and the complexity of the moment.

Below are key insights shared during the discussion, presented anonymously to allow participants to speak freely.

1. The GC leading through crisis and managing risk

A central theme was how CLOs decide what rises to the board level and when. Participants discussed the need for formal escalation rubrics that are aligned with the board, particularly around cyber incidents, regulatory risk, geopolitical volatility, reputational exposure, and AI-related risks.

Several leaders described proactively developing shared frameworks with audit chairs, lead independent directors, and governance committees to help avoid ambiguity during a crisis, particularly when affecting the highest levels of the organization.

Key principles included the following:

- Focus on enterprise-level risk rather than operational noise.
- Over-communicating with the board; the “no surprises” rule is essential.
- Clarify materiality standards and escalation triggers in advance.
- Ensure alignment with the CEO before board engagement, except in a unique situation (e.g., the CEO/CLO is the subject of the matter).
- Treat crisis preparedness as a relationship-building opportunity with directors.

There was significant discussion of crisis as a defining leadership moment for the GC. The group explored how Legal should lead the process while enabling the board to make decisions. Emergency succession planning, governance oversight during recessionary environments, and private equity versus public company dynamics were also examined.

The GC’s role was described as both architect and integrator in crisis, e.g., designing process, protecting privilege, engaging help, providing oversight, and providing a calm, strategic framing amid uncertainty.

2. AI governance: Structure, oversight, and board visibility

AI governance was a major topic. Many organizations have established AI councils or steering committees, often driven by Legal and integrated into broader governance or audit structures rather than creating standalone AI committees. The consensus was that AI must be embedded within enterprise strategy, not siloed.

Key considerations included the following:

- Whether board oversight of AI should sit with audit, governance, or sustainability committees.
- The importance of licensing enterprise-wide AI tools to manage data protection and privilege.
- Preserving attorney-client privilege in AI workflows.
- Establishing internal guardrails while avoiding paralysis.
- Clarifying ownership: who is building, deploying, and accountable?

Participants emphasized the speed of AI development and the need for Legal to remain at the design table, helping the business “design, build, and ship” responsibly. Several noted that one of Legal’s key deliverables is its capacity to synthesize and integrate massive amounts of information, assess risk and determine the next appropriate step, but we must be careful to avoid taking on too much and doing the business’s job, even when asked.

[Visit the ACC AI Center of Excellence for In-house Counsel for guidance on how to support your enterprise on its AI journey.](#)

3. AI tools in use across legal departments

The group shared concrete examples of tools that they have currently deployed in their legal teams, including mentions of using the following AI tools:

- GC AI
- Harvey
- ChatGPT Enterprise
- Microsoft Copilot (enterprise-wide deployments)
- Gemini Pro
- CoCounsel
- Practical Law AI integrations
- Internal AI pilots that have been created by/for the business and are tailored to company workflows

Use cases shared included using AI to draft board materials and create agent-style workflows to anticipate directors' questions and areas of interest, generating meaningful time savings. Contract lifecycle management systems and AI-assisted drafting were common areas of investment, with some organizations reporting immediate ROI in the form of increased productivity and output, justifying to the CFO the investment made in AI.

There was broad agreement that licensing enterprise versions, rather than relying on individual experimentation, reduces fragmentation, protects the organization and privilege and enhances governance.

4. Change management and AI adoption within Legal

Technology adoption inside Legal remains uneven across organizations. A major discussion theme was how to move lawyers from curiosity to capability and then fluency in AI.

Challenges include:

- Cultural resistance and fear of job displacement.
- Lack of clarity about appropriate use cases.
- Tendency toward risk aversion.

Successful strategies discussed:

- Structured training and "AI literacy" programs for legal teams.
- Clear guidance on "what to use for what."
- Encouraging experimentation within defined guardrails.
- Framing AI as an enhancer of higher-level work rather than a headcount threat.
- Counter-training and peer learning to normalize usage.

Participants emphasized that credibility and trust must be built before Legal attempts to steer AI usage and strategy for the business. Legal leaders are now inviting business teams into meetings, partnering early with product and engineering, and positioning Legal as a solutions partner rather

than an obstacle.

[Learn about ACC's **Seat at the Table** initiative.](#)

5. Future orientation and scenario planning

The group discussed “seeing around corners”, i.e., looking two to five years out. Scenario planning around possible recession, geopolitical conflict, workforce shifts, and automation was viewed as essential. Some leaders raised provocative possibilities, including reduced white-collar footprints and offshore AI-enabled work models.

The GC's role in these discussions is not merely compliance-oriented but strategic, helping to shape workforce design, governance models, and risk appetite.

6. The modern GC: Architect, convener, and stabilizer

Across discussions, the GC emerged as:

- A governance architect
- A crisis stabilizer
- An AI strategy driver
- A cultural change agent
- A trusted board partner

Participants stressed that routine governance discipline enables agility during crisis. Building relationships with lead independent directors, audit chairs, and CEOs before issues arise is critical. Engaging directors directly, encouraging management exposure, and strengthening onboarding and retreats were also cited as best practices.

Conclusion

The roundtable demonstrated the power of peer exchange at the highest levels of the in-house profession. The openness of discussion across crisis management, AI deployment, governance design, and leadership philosophy reflected deep trust among participants.

Every CLO contributed to the discussion, and the collective insights underscored a shared reality: The modern GC operates at the center of enterprise strategy, where technology acceleration, board expectations, and global volatility converge.

[Join ACC for more legal leadership insights!](#)

Disclaimer: The information in any resource in this website should not be construed as legal advice or as a legal opinion on specific facts, and should not be considered representing the views of its authors, its authors' employers, its sponsors, and/or ACC. These resources are not intended as a definitive statement on the subject addressed. Rather, they are intended to serve as a tool providing practical guidance and references for the busy in-house practitioner and other readers.

This article was produced with the assistance of Generative AI.

[Association of Corporate Counsel](#)



