

How Legal Operations Learns Its Way Forward

Career Development

Law Department Management



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In 1999, I wanted a better way to track contract expiration dates, so I built a Microsoft Access database from scratch. It was my first real toe-dip into what we'd now call a contract lifecycle management (CLM) system, though I didn't use that term at the time.

In an era when email was only beginning to take hold, this was considered fairly high tech. It also drew a few raised eyebrows from colleagues who thought it unnecessary. To me, though, it was simple common sense: If a process could prevent last-minute panic, why not put one in place?

Only later did I realize that this was the essence of legal operations: seeing the system, not just the task, and learning our way toward better processes. I just wanted to make things work better, and the experience left a lasting impression.

It taught me that the most meaningful education in legal operations comes from applying what you know, refining it through practice, and continuing to learn as the work itself matures.

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The work has evolved, so learning must evolve with it

When I moved into legal operations full time, the field didn't have a clear definition. I spent almost as much time explaining my job as I did performing it.

Today, legal operations is a core pillar of legal departments. Many organizations now have chiefs of staff or operational COOs, directors responsible for technology and process, and specialists focused on data, billing, vendor management, and analytics.

In parallel, a few years ago, process mapping was the capability I prioritized on my team. Today, I look for professionals who can connect processes with data fluency, systems thinking, and business context.

Roles that once relied on expertise in documentation and workflow now require the ability to evaluate tools, interpret analytics, assess risk, and anticipate organizational impact. The field has evolved and the skill sets have evolved, but the education that supports this field has not.

The way future legal professionals are educated must change.

Law school: where the gap is most visible

Nowhere is this more evident than how some law schools are approaching training in operations and AI fluency.

A recent Bloomberg Law article emphasized how a lack of AI training fails future legal professionals. The piece highlighted a case in which a judge issued an opinion containing a citational mistake. When confronted by the US Senate Judiciary Committee, the judge blamed the law school intern who wrote the opinion, saying that the error resulted from ChatGPT use. He also said the intern's law school shared that the use of ChatGPT violated the school policy against the use of AI in internships.

The law school's response misses the point. Restriction does not build competence, just as simply ignoring a problem doesn't make it go away. Education, on the other hand, does build competence.

There are encouraging signs that some are acting on this. Legora recently launched its Legal AI Scholars Program in partnership with nine law schools — including Stanford, Cornell, Northwestern, and the University of Chicago — with a curriculum built around applying AI to real legal tasks, understanding its limitations, and developing the judgment required to use it responsibly. It's exactly the kind of initiative the field needs: not restriction, but preparation.

Even if future lawyers never hold a legal operations title, they will work in environments driven by data, technology, and cross-functional decision-making. They must be proactively taught to understand the systems within which they operate, and how to interpret and use the data and the tech in decision making.

Lawyers are being asked to be more than just legal services providers today; they are expected to be business partners. They deserve an education that reflects that reality.

This isn’t just a law school problem. It’s an industry-wide one.

The pace of change outruns traditional training

We talk about technology as the catalyst for change in legal work, but it’s really the relationship between process and technology that drives improvement.

I’ve watched teams race to implement platforms without first understanding the workflows underneath. Without solid foundations, the tools don’t solve the problems — they amplify them. Understanding the need for those foundations, for clean data, updated policy databases, cohesive repositories, is critical.

Architecting a legal ecosystem is akin to building a house and the people and the process are the foundation. Technology is the roof that sits on top, and should that foundation not be solid, the whole thing collapses.

I’ve rewritten my own multi-year technology roadmap more times than I can count — not because of mistakes, but because the environment keeps shifting. In a landscape this dynamic, education cannot be static. We cannot rely on one-time skill acquisition. The work requires ongoing learning, reevaluation, and recalibration.

Letting go to move forward

Some capabilities that were once core to legal operations are evolving. Knowledge management is a clear example. It used to be centered on storing and organizing information. But now, with the rise of AI, real value lies in knowing how to connect information, apply it, and evaluate its reliability. While the work doesn’t disappear, the skills required to do it well change.

This is maturity. And it isn’t unique to Legal.

Every operational discipline at some point evolves from defining the work to optimizing the work to reimagining the work. Legal operations is now in the reimagining work phase. For my team, that means evaluating not just which tools we deploy, but how we fundamentally think about the work itself.

When I built that database in 1999, I wasn’t trying to challenge the legal profession. I was trying to make the work better. That instinct, commitment to continual learning and evolving, is still what drives legal operations today.

Legal operations has come a long way, from something undefined to a discipline reshaping how legal services function. But the mindset remains the same: progress happens when we stay curious enough to keep learning as the work evolves.

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Stacy Lettie



Chief of Staff to the General Counsel and Director of Strategic Planning

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Stacy Lettie spent almost 23 years practicing law as an in-house attorney, and now claims she is now fully in recovery as a Legal Operations Professional. She currently serves as the Chief of Staff to the General Counsel of Organon, heading up Strategic Planning and Legal Operations.

Prior to joining Organon, Lettie spent the last 15 years developing the skills to become a Legal Operations specialist with deep experience in department analytics, process mapping and

improvement, workflow automation, operational efficiency, cost control, vendor and budget management and legal tech implementation. Skilled in driving and building operational efficiencies to improve business performance, she has worked in Fortune 500, Global Corporations in the Banking, Entertainment and Education industries as well as with Global Startups building Legal Operations Teams.

Lettie is passionate about using data to drive decision making and reduce risk, working closely with top executives to develop strategic plans that align with corporate objectives and implementing creative solutions to complex operational issues. She did her undergraduate work at Lehigh University and holds a JD from Rutgers University. In addition, she currently serves on the CLOC Executive Board, serves on the National Faculty of the Cowen Group, is a member of CHIEF and sits on the Priori and Wolters Kluwer Advisory Boards.