

AI Counsel: Foundation Before Tools — A Conversation with Manuel Morasch

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce



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Manuel Morasch, VP Legal - Legal & Integrity Transformation Program Leader, ABB

This series explores how senior legal professionals are navigating artificial intelligence adoption across a large global enterprise, offering practical perspectives for in-house teams of any size.

Manuel Morasch is VP Legal and leader of ABB's Legal & Integrity Transformation Program, helping shape a human-led, technology-enabled future for more than 450 lawyers.

His pragmatic framework begins with data, adds governance, and scales toward an "AI first, Legal always" operating model.

Where to start

Spiwe L. Jefferson: You spend a great deal of time evaluating the legal AI market. What's your overall assessment of where it stands today?

Manuel Morasch: Legal artificial intelligence has moved into a meaningful adoption phase. Major law firms and corporate legal departments are deploying solutions, and organizations that build capability now may be better positioned as the market develops.

Q: With hundreds of vendors competing, how do you make sense of all the options?

Morasch: The market remains broad and fragmented. No single vendor yet provides an end-to-endsolution, so many legal teams combine specialized tools for contracting, research, litigation, and data management. Some work out of the box; others require investment in templates and playbooks but may offer greater long-term flexibility.

Q: If you had to identify the single most important prerequisite for effective AI deployment, what would it be?

Morasch: Data quality, without question. Centralized, well-managed contract repositories provide a critical foundation. When contracts are scattered, inconsistently named, or lack metadata, reliable output becomes much harder to achieve.

Centralized, well-managed contract repositories provide a critical foundation.

Q: That sounds like a significant undertaking for a global legal function. Where do you start?

Morasch: A practical starting point is a cross-divisional contract data source. Prioritize high-value contracts, standardize key metadata such as governing law and assignment rights, apply version control, and remove duplicates before migration. The aim is simple: bring what the organization knows into one dependable place.

Governance and data-security guardrails

Q: Once the data foundation is in place, what comes next?

Morasch: Governance. Clear data boundaries and vendor data-use policies can help legal, compliance, security, and risk teams align before deployment. One safeguard remains firm: vendor models should not train on ABB data without explicit consent. We use closed models and clear contractual controls.

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Q: Is that a realistic demand to make of vendors?

Morasch: Yes. For enterprise legal work, a clear non-training commitment is an important condition of trust and a practical test of vendor suitability.

Centralized core, decentralized execution

Q: How does ABB's organizational structure shape your AI strategy?

Morasch: "The ABB Way" combines decentralized businesses and embedded legal teams with a central core. Our strategy reflects that balance through three group-level pillars:

1. **Contract repository**: a single, cross-divisional source of contract data that supports M&A diligence, counterparty management, and consistent analysis.

2. **Shared risk and playbook framework**: unified risk thresholds and decision frameworks ensuring consistent legal standards across all divisions.

3. **AI governance policy**: clear policies on data boundaries, vendor relationships, and model-training restrictions.

Divisions and their respective commercial legal groups retain autonomy in tool deployment but operate within these guardrails.

The phased roadmap from foundation to continuous improvement

Q: Can you walk us through how you sequence this work?

Morasch: We think about it in four phases.

1. **Foundation.** Establish the contract repository, clean the data, and define governance. Investing here can make later deployment more reliable.

2. **Pilot programs.** Test low-stakes, high-frequency uses such as routine agreements, transcription, and research, with human review and integration in mind.

3. **Scale and optimize.** Add divisional legal-technology owners, a lightweight group council, consistent vendor terms, and broader deployment where pilots demonstrate value.

4. **Continuous improvement.** Build verification practices, safe testing environments, leadership support, and clear ownership for each tool.

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Spiwe Jefferson leads global legal and integrity functions across international operations for ABB's Electrification Service division. A sought-after speaker and thought leader on AI enterprise adoption, she has achieved over 710 hours (18 weeks) of AI-driven efficiency gains on one platform alone. Spiwe authors the *Mindful in 5* book series and podcast, providing leaders with actionable strategies for resilience and growth.