

Who Would Notice if Legal Disappeared Tomorrow

Community



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Reflections from the ACC Europe roundtable at Legal Geek Conference 2026

Legal Geek 2026 brought together legal professionals, from in-house and private practice lawyers and legal engineers, reflecting on the future of the profession and exchanging best practices in our current context of rapid innovation. The ACC Europe roundtable was no exception to this. The tables filled to capacity and welcomed a wide range of experience and perspectives, including some private practice colleagues keen to understand more about the priorities of in-house legal teams.

Our starting question was simple: who would notice if legal disappeared tomorrow? It prompted a broader discussion about how legal teams create value, how that value is recognized and how we can focus on impact rather than activity.

The value is bigger than the advice

When participants described what a business would miss, the answer went further than just legal advice. They spoke about legal as a safety net and an enabler; as a sounding board for matters that cover not only legal queries but also practical commercial advice that organizations need to carry on their business. Legal was frequently described as a horizontal function that connects teams and sees across the organization, with the in-house counsel position being recognized as one of the roles in a company providing visibility of the bigger picture.

This was a useful way to think about impact. The contribution from legal may be a clearer scoping of the decision, the ability to surface a challenge early, the identification of a workable route through uncertainty or, simply, making the connection between people who need to solve an issue together. Attendees also agreed that counting the hours required to solve an issue is not an effective way to measure impact. The challenge is to make the value of legal measurable without losing sight of the importance of judgement and relationships that often act as catalysts of legal’s contribution to the business.

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A requirement or an expectation that surfaced is that the business needs legal counsel to provide advice fast. When we break this down, it means that: (1) legal needs to understand the drivers of the business (which takes time) so working with the relevant parts of the business to enable legal to quickly form the essential commercial picture is key (2) have sufficient capacity to deal with an incoming request and (3) speak "business" so the advice is relevant and easy for business to digest and use immediately. The response to this is to demystify what legal can do within a short timeframe or, as someone put it, *separating expectations from reality.*

On how to measure the value that legal brings to the organization, building up "good governance" came in first place. This materializes in multiple ways, from providing key templates to the business for recurrent agreements to setting up the right escalation triggers for legal risk. Other colleagues also mentioned contributing to the resilience of the business and providing secure and safe procedures for crisis management. These approaches were seen as better indicators than merely tracking "risk prevented" or "money saved" due to the difficulty of applying these to legal work.

Trust starts with understanding the business

A recurring theme was the importance of earning an early seat at the table. Participants connected that directly to trust. "Commercial awareness" needs to mean more than knowing the language of business: it means understanding the product, how the company makes money, what drives its profitability and how its risk appetite shapes decisions. Legal expertise remains essential, but it has greater practical value when paired with a genuine understanding of the business.

It is also important to truly know the teams you support, such as what drives the business objectives of key internal stakeholders and senior management, as these will shape matter prioritization and the approach to the main challenges. Participants agreed that a substantial part of the role of legal is about building trust, which can be achieved by being approachable, visible and "not being in your ivory tower." Interestingly, the room concurred that a big part of legal's value is intrinsically linked to "being human," i.e., forging the relationships and entrusting your stakeholders with evaluating risk, after equipping them with the knowledge required to make informed decisions. It's not about sitting in every meeting, but about having the right information to be able to see 2-3 steps ahead of the challenges facing the business.

Early involvement also changes the role legal can play. When we are brought in at the beginning, we can help shape options, identify risks and build workable solutions. When we are brought in late, the conversation can narrow to whether something is permitted. The earlier conversation gives legal a better chance to help the business reach an informed decision.

Be part of the business

The discussion also recognized that early involvement depends on the maturity and habits of the organization. Do colleagues know what the legal team does, when to involve it and why? Can they describe the function's contribution? In-house lawyers can help answer those questions by spending time with stakeholders, learning how their teams operate and being present in the everyday conversations where plans take shape.

It is about visibility and being able to *speak business,* challenging the idea that legal and "the business" are separate groups. We work for the same organization. Legal brings specialist knowledge of the legal and risk framework; the rest of the business brings expertise in customers,

products and delivery. Strong partnering must combine both.



Developing judgement in the age of AI

Participants were also clear that junior lawyers need continued support to build critical thinking. One idea was to use AI in a way that asks a junior to record their initial view before a tool generates an answer. They can then compare, test and verify the output, as well as exploring their own reasoning in more depth. That approach could help make AI a very effective learning tool. It will be interesting to see how legal technology providers respond, and what in-house teams may choose to develop for themselves.

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AI may prove to be an unprecedented opportunity for junior colleagues to learn fast about the factual aspects of the business, given that they can work with a "thinking partner" in every task they do. One group also noted that junior colleagues are best placed to develop these tools and should be given time and resources to develop these new AI tools being developed for legal work.

A more useful question

The roundtable included people from legal teams of very different sizes, but a common view emerged: legal creates value well beyond the delivery of advice. Teams are increasingly asked for practical, legal-adjacent input and a thoughtful sounding board. That is not a reason to claim that legal can eliminate risk. It is a reminder that our role is to help the business understand its choices, assess risk in context and provide balanced advice to the business.

So, who would notice if legal disappeared tomorrow? From sales and procurement to corporate development and the board, the answers pointed to those who rely on legal to connect the dots, make complexity manageable and help them move forward with confidence. The opportunity for in-house teams is to keep earning that trust: by understanding the business, getting involved early and making our contribution visible in the decisions that matter.

About ACC and Legal Geek

For ACC Europe, the largest chapter of the global association for in-house counsel and a recognized leader in advancing the profession, it was a privilege to be invited by Legal Geek to host this discussion and contribute to the broader conversation on the future of legal. The enthusiasm and engagement in the room demonstrated the value of bringing together diverse perspectives to explore

how legal teams can continue to create meaningful business impact.

ACC (Association of Corporate Counsel) is the world's largest professional organization serving in-house counsel, supporting legal professionals through education, networking, advocacy and thought leadership.

Legal Geek is a leading legal innovation community that connects lawyers, technologists and legal operations professionals through events, content and collaboration focused on the future of legal services. Over 5,500 legal professionals, speakers and vendors joined the 2026 event in London.

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