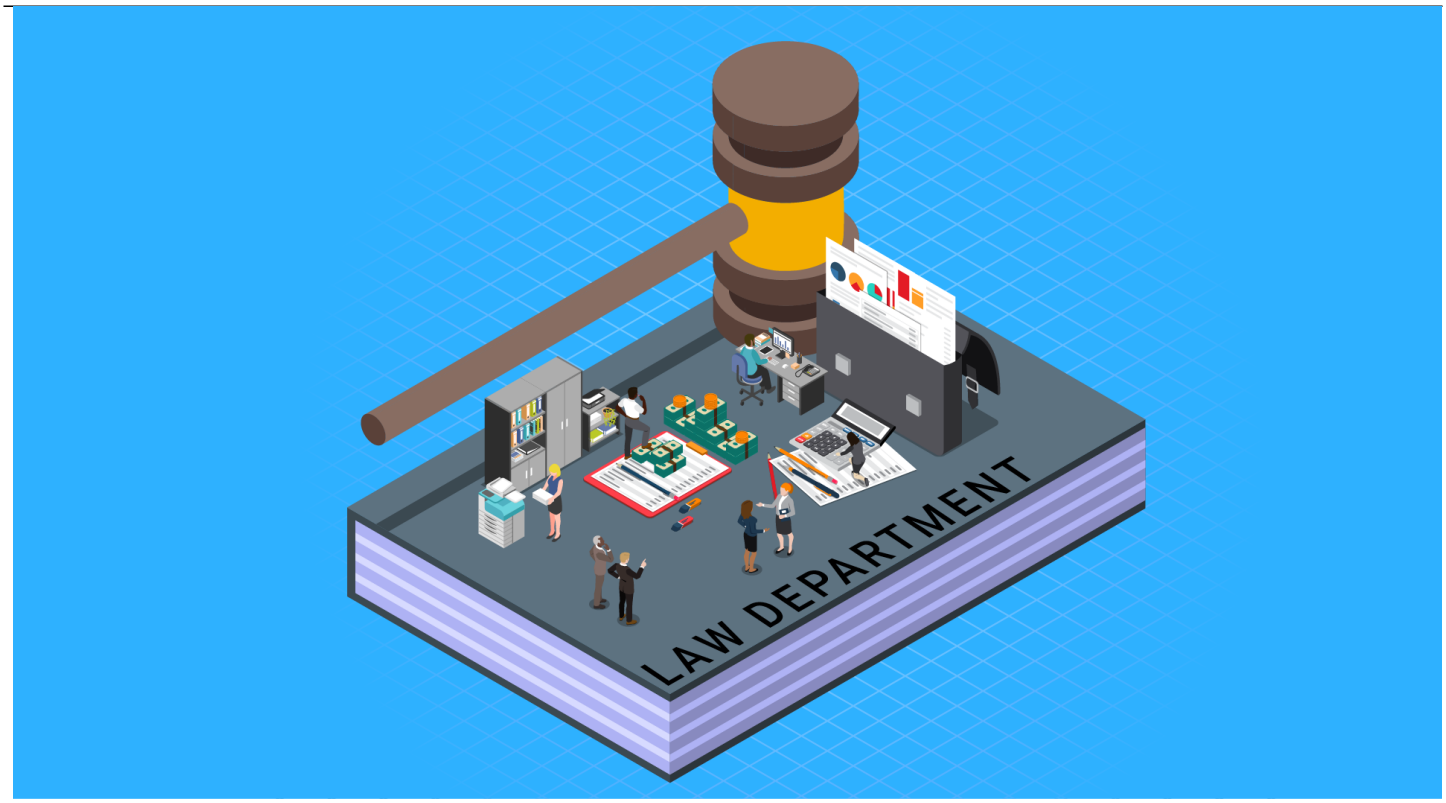


Legal Operations Infrastructure: Foundational Elements that Drive Resource Optimization

Law Department Management

Career Development

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce



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In corporate law departments, it's not just about managing legal risk. Compliance, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness are equally important. Forward-thinking leaders in legal departments understand these operational principles and give as much attention to these tenets as they do to the practice of law.

But it's not the shiny new technologies or process improvements that guarantee success in achieving these objectives. It's the people — the individuals within the legal department and throughout the organization — who truly make the difference.

In this two-part series, we'll discuss the importance of prioritizing individuals within organizations, establishing a solid infrastructure to support their efforts, and measuring meaningful and quantifiable data points to account for success. We won't just discuss theory; we'll provide real-life examples and point out emerging trends that can optimize your team's performance. This likewise highlights the need for an operational function, preferably a devoted legal operations team, equipped and empowered to lead and manage your operational roadmap.

Register now for ACC's 2025 Legal Ops Con (April 9-11, Chicago, Illinois, USA)!

Leading a people-centered operational function

Why should people be the top priority? Legal department leaders who prioritize humans as the foundation of their operations will find it easier to manage change and demonstrate the business value to company leadership. By empowering people to use processes and existing technologies,

they can build a strong infrastructure.

A legal team interacts with every aspect of a business. In some respects, they are the infrastructure that connects all areas of a business. They need to have a clear view of the organization's legal requirements and develop processes to address new requests. They must also strategically align with broader business objectives, efficiently manage costs, support the legal team, and mitigate risks.

Processes and technologies play important, but secondary, roles in the legal team's operations. We so often forget that the key component of any process or technological success is the people supporting it. Having your people clearly articulate and document department-wide processes can help uncover workflow efficiencies, establish best practices, and develop automation opportunities. Importantly, having those same people weigh in on what is working well and what could be improved also enhances job satisfaction for individuals — which has the potential to yield more significant ROI than process improvement without this input.

ACC Members: Download the new toolkit, Navigating Your Legal Operations Career Path.

From a technological perspective, it's crucial to ensure that people are proficient in fundamental tech stacks like the Office suite of products (e.g., those offered by Microsoft and Google) before moving on to more sophisticated applications. But it's not just about the basics — organizations should explore robust and innovative uses of existing technologies to increase adoption and reduce additional costs. Of course, it's equally important to familiarize everyone with these technologies and inspire them to use them creatively.

To illustrate how people, processes, and technology converge in your infrastructure, integrating legal operations into your hiring and new hire standard operating procedures (SOPs) is a fantastic way to establish a culture of innovation. During interviews, probe for experience with process improvement methodologies, technology implementations, and change management initiatives to gauge operational mindsets. Critically, assess for a growth mindset and eagerness to continuously learn and adapt — having this mentality embedded into how candidates approach their work is key to an operationally excellent culture. It's vital to hire individuals with an innate drive for continuous improvement. A growth mindset, comfort with change, and desire to consistently upskill are pivotal traits for legal operations professionals. Candidates demonstrating intellectual humility, curiosity, and a willingness to evolve will help proliferate an innovative, operationally mature environment.

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In addition, establishing a consistent schedule of hands-on, process — and technology-centered training sessions tailored to your department's staff — can significantly impact the department's operational success. Set the goal of having your colleagues feel competent and confident while understanding how they contribute to larger, holistic organizational goals.

Constructing a strategically aligned operational infrastructure

At the center of an optimized operational infrastructure is investing in your legal team's growth while tightly aligning operations with broader organizational objectives. ACC's Legal Operations Center is an excellent resource for upskilling personnel and implementing best practices tailored for legal departments. However, it's critical that these operational enhancements ladder up to and facilitate the execution of your company's overarching strategic vision.

Just as functions like finance, HR, and IT are integrated into the leadership team's decision-making processes, legal operations must operate in lockstep with the executive suite. Build cross-functional partnerships and socialize operational initiatives early to ensure they support top priorities like revenue growth, product roadmaps, geographic expansion plans, and more. Legal leaders should have a seat at the strategy table.

With this top-down synergy in place, construct your human-centric operational infrastructure from the bottom up via working groups and user research. Formalize career paths focused on building transferable skills like project management, data fluency, and process excellence methodologies. Leverage ACC resources for substantive training opportunities.

Encourage continuous learning by covering costs for team members to attend conferences, earn certifications, and pursue memberships in organizations like ACC. Facilitate lunch-and-learn sessions for sharing new competencies and thought leadership. Incentivize ideas that move the needle on operational efficiency and technological adoption.



Most critically, embed a human-centered design thinking approach into your infrastructure. Before launching a new technology or process, build user personas, journey maps, and prototypes based on input from impacted team members. Rapidly iterate and adjust based on their feedback to optimize human experiences.

An empowered, engaged legal team unified around operational excellence is a potent force multiplier for achieving business objectives. World-class legal operations fuse this human-centric foundation with strategic alignment across the organization.

Building your legal team's brand and measuring impact

To ensure the legal team's success in creating this operational infrastructure, you need support from stakeholders and company leaders. This can be achieved by cultivating the team's internal brand. Proactively engage champions across the organization who can advocate for your vision. Dedicate time to addressing concerns from skeptics — demonstrate tangible benefits and how enhancing

processes ultimately alleviates burdens rather than displacing roles. This balanced approach fosters top-down executive support as well as grassroots adoption.

Effective communication is paramount for securing this backing. Develop clear business use cases that resonate with leadership's priorities, such as cost savings, risk mitigation, and revenue creation. Storytelling with data visualization can vividly illustrate the human and financial impacts.

It's also crucial to set proper expectations around the journey of operational transformation. Productivity and morale often follow a J-curve trajectory: an initial spike followed by a lengthy "valley of despair" before ultimately realizing sustained gains and ROI. Many promising initiatives falter during this valley phase when stakeholders lose patience.

Proactively socialize this J-curve model to maintain confidence during the dip. Provide transparency into required investments, forecasted ROI timelines, and leading indicators of future success. Most critically, consistently reiterate how improvements enhance human experiences and strategically align with company objectives.

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Navigating this phase requires an upfront understanding of its impacts on people and processes. Communication with leadership about investment, expected outcomes and return on investment, and stakeholder engagement is vital. Even if adjustments are required, the process offers invaluable insights for evolving your approach and building more compelling business cases. This cycle of continuous improvement enhances your brand as a strategic partner. Stay tuned for part two of our series, where we will explore strategies for measuring returns on investment and key performance indicators. We'll give actionable examples to improve your legal team's operations and explore emerging trends that every legal team should consider.

Join ACC for guidance on legal operations, law department management, and more!

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